Abstract

In his paper "On Debate and Existence"¹ Eric Voegelin considers the difficulty of debate with an ideologue. The problem, as he states it, is that the ideologue has a "profoundly different attitude to all fundamental questions of human existence". Although Voegelin does not explicitly state it in this paper, persons whose position is an intellectual adjunct of the natural sciences, a scientism,² are equally to be viewed as ideologues. This paper recalls the problem of debate as treated by Voegelin, and briefly applies his conclusion to scientism. This conclusion is that debate must now "assume the forms of careful analysis of the noetic structure of existence and an analysis of Second Realities, with regard to both the constructs and the motivating structure of existence in untruth"³. This paper also observes that what makes such debate with ideologues possible is that they do not change their own reality by their constructs. So, debate always has a common ground whether or not the ideologue will care to admit it.

Some Preliminary Personal History

I discovered Eric Voegelin's works in about 1967. The first work that I came across was "The New Science of Politics", followed shortly thereafter by "Science, Politics and Gnosticism".

Recall the situation in 1967. Half the world was tinkering with Marxist, Socialist and Communist ideas. There were multiple Marxist-Leninist clubs on campus. The Vietnam War was underway. The Cold War was at full tilt; Cuba and a dozen South American nations were officially Communist; Indonesia and half of Europe elected or toyed with communist governments; the most populous China was "Red". In Canada, where I was, American draft dodgers filled the campuses. At the same time, Quebec's "quiet revolution" had blossomed with a decisively Marxist tinge. On the less political cultural front, Existentialism of one sort or another was predominant. Nietzsche's "Death of God" had made the headlines. Sartre and Heidegger were the mysteries of the universe that everyone wanted to solve, as if wisdom might be found by doing so.

And there I was as a young Ph.D. candidate, trying to play the role of Political Philosophy educator. Some of the students belonged to one or another of the activist movements and stood ready to pounce on the slightest criticism of their masters. And then, there were the typical students, some who partially sympathised with the activists, but all of whom wanted to hear a reasonable analysis and evaluation of the thinkers who were affecting their world. And, lurking ever in the background was the student of science who disdained all of this philosophical talk as a throwback to outdated medieval times. This was not an ivory tower situation.
In addition to my early studies in Physics and Mathematics, what I could bring to class was a "liberal education" with an emphasis on Philosophy. This had exposed me to Phenomenology, Existentialism, Analytic Philosophy, Thomism, American Thought, Marxism, German Philosophy and the history of ideas together with some of the offerings of the English, Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology and Political Science Departments.

But all of this failed to allow me to believe that I understood modern ideologues. Oh, I knew the sources extremely well, sources like the works of Marx, Lenin, Engels, if by "extremely well" is understood "being able to regurgitate their words". However, I could not grasp the motivation of modern thinkers. Perhaps I was too hard on myself. Somehow, I had come to believe you really do not understand someone until you can put yourself in that person's shoes. I could easily grasp what the moderns had to say, and I could easily disagree with them. However, I could not grasp why they would want to say what they said.

By then I had read Henri de Lubac's "Drama of Atheistic Humanism", Albert Camus's "L'Homme Revolt�", Cornelio Fabro's "Atheism" and scores of other interpretive works. I had tied into the American conservative movement and was exposed to thinkers like Russell Kirk, Mario Pio, William F. Buckley, Richard Weaver, Karl L� with and their prescribed readings; like Evelyn Waugh, Chesterton, and Edmund Burke, to name only a few. In addition, I was exposed to various flavours of Thomist thought, from Jacques Maritain to Etienne Gilson and others of a local variety. All of these provided a degree of solace by allowing me to see that I was not the first to have the difficulty; however, they did not provide the understanding that I sought.

What I had unknowingly come up against was what I would later discover Voegelin to describe as a "profoundly different attitude to all fundamental questions of human existence"4. But, with the world as it was students wanted to know about such things. At issue for me was whether I could be an educator or not. If Marx was wrong, then was there not an onus on me as educator to show not just that he was wrong but to show the very thinking process that led him to his conclusions?

Eric Voegelin's works were the first to help me out of my dilemma. His interpretation of modern thinkers showed why they think as they do by quoting their own words. This is no mean feat. The students found this as well. Even the self-proclaimed Marxists had difficulty contending with Voegelin's interpretation of Marx. They could find no reasonable basis for disagreement. If they were to continue with their Marxism, then they must at least accept that there are some difficulties with their master's writings concerning the very views that he promoted.

Eric Voegelin's observations are more poignant than they at first appear. They not only isolate the significant statements that best serve to reveal what various thinkers believe; but they also supply the reader with a sufficient understanding to draw conclusions. For example, Voegelin's noting of Marx's prohibition against questions for socialist man5 cuts through to the core that permits the free creation of activist constructs. But, it incidentally makes it clear that Marx must be against the very followers that he seeks. He must admonish their very looking to Marx for answers. The only followers that he wants are those who will act on his statements without thinking.
Voegelin reveals a Marx that is very difficult for a student. Knowing that your master does not want questions is emasculating. It attacks the very reason for being a student. A student must be a questioner. Marx does not want that; he wants soldiers who follow orders without question. But, Marx cannot change the reality of what students are to suit his needs. Students, Marxist and otherwise, continue to seek answers. A master who counters this drive has in many ways lost the debate in the beginning.

**Cosmological Views and Philosophy**

However, the issue of philosophical debate has a deeper side, which Voegelin seeks to unravel in his paper, "On Debate and Existence". He begins with an analysis of St. Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Aquinas had considered the problem of how to go about defending the truth of Christianity against Pagans. Voegelin observes that Aquinas is raising the issue at a time when rational debate with an opponent was still possible. However, it was an age of intellectual turmoil, not unlike our own, that was the result, primarily, of contacts with Islam and Aristotelian philosophy.

Aquinas believed that it is the role of a philosopher to meditate on truth, to communicate it to others and to oppose falsehood. Voegelin states that the discovery of this truth begins as a struggle with "pre-analytical notions of existence that are shared by all". Debate, struggle, is thus an essential dimension of seeking truth. It is a process of disengaging truth from error; a process that begins in the seemingly inexhaustible world of opinion. Analogically, the situation corresponds to that of myself, all of us, as educator seeking to disengage possible value from modern thought.

Voegelin modernises Aquinas by stating that the problem for a philosopher is one of finding the "truth of existence". This is not how Aquinas would have expressed the problem. Voegelin points out that Aquinas, following Aristotle, would say that it is the task of the philosopher to consider the highest causes. Quoting Aristotle, Aquinas noted that

"first philosophy is the science of truth, but of that truth which is the origin of all truth, namely, which belongs to the first principle whereby all things are. The truth belonging to such a principle is, **clearly**, the source of all truth; for things have the same disposition to truth."⁶

Voegelin correctly points out that Aquinas's language is not easily understood by the modern mind. For, what does Aquinas mean when he says, "such a principle is, **clearly**, the source of all truth"? Why is it **clear**? Voegelin's answer is that a principle was **clear** to Aristotle and Aquinas because they accepted that they existed in a cosmos moved with all its content by a prime mover, with a chain of movers extending from the prime mover down to the most lowly beings. Voegelin notes that modern physics has replaced this view of the cosmos. This modern world is one of conflicting forces, of volcanoes and black holes. Nietzsche describes it this way:

"And do you know what "the world" is to me? ஃ This world: a monster of energyஃ a firm, iron magnitude of forceஃ that does not expend itself but only transforms itselfஃ enclosed by "nothingness" as a boundaryஃ a play of forces.LAZY most turbulent, most self-contradictory槠 self-creating槠 self-destroying槠."⁷
Clearly, Nietzsche is correct. And, here I am using the word "clearly" just as Aristotle and Aquinas used it; that is, as an appeal to a commonly held view of the cosmos. All of us will recognise in Nietzsche's description an accurate view of the world painted for us by modern Physics, Astronomy, and Geology. There is no prime mover and no chain of causes; it is a world of interacting-forces and fields that constantly consumes and regurgitates energy and matter in compliance only with the laws of conservation and entropy. There are formulae, frameworks, within which the forces operate, but they do not operate out of a longing to share, punish, or reward. They are value free. Nietzsche correctly dismissed the more mechanistic scientisms of Newton, Galileo, Descartes, Hegel, and Kant, that implied a super watch maker, to replace them with this more scientifically accurate scientism of his own.

But, Voegelin does not throw out Aristotle and Aquinas. He admits, the earlier imagery of the cosmos is no longer ours and argues that "a large part of the symbolism has become obsolete, but there is a solid core of truth that can be, must be, salvaged by means of surgery." Voegelin observes that "the experience of human existence is independent of the cosmos" and that "a universe that contains intelligent beings cannot originate with a prima causa that is less than intelligent". In other words, even if we no longer have a view of the cosmos that corresponds to our experience of ourselves as intelligent beings, the experience of our own existence as intelligent is none the less still valid.

One must be careful here to avoid taking this as evidence that Voegelin is a neo-Cartesian or a neo-Kantian. Voegelin is careful to note that our primary experience is not of thought interpreting reality but, rather, of a reality that is not us. "Phoenix man discovers himself as being not a world unto himself, but an existent among others" but "it is a reality illuminated from within by Intellect or Nous."

Voegelin next observes that it is possible to go even further in this analysis. The solid core of truth that Aristotle and Aquinas had found to be so conveniently packaged for them in the then prevalent view of the cosmos extended to a prime mover. If one is stripped of the cosmology, then what is the experience that had given rise to this construct? This is an interesting turn of reasoning. Voegelin is saying that the construct must have been created for a reason. It is not the case that early physical observations could account for the earlier views of the cosmos. They were insufficient to develop a cosmological theory. Rather, we must assume that the theories were motivated. And, we must assume that the motivation somehow remained as an underlying experience because the construct stood the test of time for a very long time, even though an explicit description of this underlying experience may have disappeared from public consciousness.

Voegelin observes that these originating experiences are not hard to find. They are obvious, so obvious that Voegelin feels that he must apologise for their insignificance. They are none other than the experiences of

"finiteness and creatureliness in our existence, of being creatures for a day as the poets call man, of being born and bound to die, of dissatisfaction with a state experienced as imperfect, of apprehension of a perfection that is not of this world but is a privilege of the gods, of possible fulfilment in a state beyond this world, the Platonic epekeina, and so forth."
Philosophy emerges from this immediate experience of existence, as "an attempt to illuminate existence". In this process of illumination philosophy is at once "the practice of dying, the Eros for the transcendent, and the love of the Wisdom that is only God's".

But cosmology is not philosophy. The very myths motivated by the fundamental and immediate experience of existence cannot serve as answers to the questions that motivated them. The myths are analogous to the fundamental experience in that they tell of a cosmos ordered to a something that made it to be. However, at the more fundamental level the primary experience alone is what we discover about existence and what we might conclude about the cosmos is a secondary construct.

I would suggest that this remains true of the new Physics and the picture that it conveniently provides to Nietzsche and others. The macro theories of time and the universe are an extrapolation from the micro-findings of the individual sciences. The motivation for the extrapolation is what must be discovered. This motivation will be an understanding of self that can be presented to find support in the new cosmogonies.

The Essence of Debate

So, to resolve the philosophical significance of cosmological views, Voegelin pointed us in the direction of primary experience. The fact that he can do this, and that we can do it as well, implies that "existence is not opaque to itself"\(^{11}\), as already indicated. In addition to asking questions, we are aware that we are doing it. And, this is the philosopher's primary experience as philosopher. Our means for evaluating a thinker will therefore revolve around how well he plays out this primary role of illuminating primary experience and of drawing conclusions from it.

This primary experience, which Voegelin has isolated, must also be the court of last resort to which we can refer to resolve a dispute with someone with whom we have a profound philosophical disagreement. To make this point Voegelin makes reference to Summa Contra Gentiles where Aquinas states,

"Thus, against the Jews we are able to argue by means of the Old Testament, while against heretics we are able to argue by means of the New Testament. But the Mohammedans and Pagans accept neither the one nor the other. We must, therefore, have recourse to natural reason, to which all men are forced to give their assent."\(^{12}\)

For Voegelin this observation has profound implications for us in our own time.

"Aquinas tacitly assumes that the reasoning of the Gentiles [or pagans] will operate within the same noetic structure as his own \(\heartsuit\) a quite justified assumption in view of the fact that the Mohammedan thinkers were the very transmitters of Aristotle to the Westerners.\(^{13}\)

Voegelin's reasoning here is quite tight. He refers us back to the problem of debate that started the inquiry. He has taken us through a journey that begins with a pondering about the source of Aristotle's and Aquinas's ability to assume that some things are "clear". He then asks for the source of this certainty and finds it not in the cosmological stories that appear to be the
referenced authorities when "clarity" is appealed to. The source of the certainty is based in a fundamental shared attitude towards existence that acts as the motivation for the cosmological tales. It is because of this underlying view that the tales can be used in debate as indisputable premises to which all participants in the debate adhere.

This brings us back to our problem, the problem of debate with ideologues. The first question that we must ask is "What is it that we can agree on?" That is, is there a fundamental experience that can be used as the indisputable premise to which all participants in the debate adhere? Voegelin next goes searching for this.

Heidegger

For the purpose of the exercise Voegelin takes two formulae from Leibniz as two modern formulations that are questions from the fundamental immediate experience of existence, the same experience behind Aristotle's and Aquinas' cosmology. These two formulae arise from the experience of not-being self-created. They are "(1) Why is there something, why not nothing? And (2) Why is there something as it is, and not different?" Voegelin stresses that "These two questions are at the core of true experience which motivates constructions of the Aristotelian and Thomist type."

The answers given to these questions by an ideologue like Heidegger will resolve the question as to whether debate is possible. If Heidegger were to admit that these questions are valid, then he must also hold that the experience that gives rise to them is primary. However, Voegelin finds that Heidegger stresses very strongly the first of Leibniz' questions but neglects the second. Voegelin concludes "Even at this initial stage our analysis of existence shows already its importance as an instrument for classifying Second Realities and their various techniques of construction, one of them being the omission of parts of the experience of existence."

Heidegger does not begin with a complete analysis of the structure of initial experience. Again, Voegelin describes this structure as follows.

"In the initial experience of existence man discovers himself as illuminated by Intellect as an instrument of self-interpretation. ... By virtue of the noetic structure of his existence man discovers himself as being not a world unto himself, but an existent among others; he experiences a field of existents of which he is a part. Moreover, he discovers himself as not being the maker of this field of existents."16

Someone who knows Heidegger might find this analysis surprising. So much of Heidegger's work is a meditation on the value of form and structure. Why would he not admit to structure at this most fundamental level? Was it an oversight? This matter need not concern us here. It is sufficient to note that Heidegger's starting point is incomplete. We cannot debate with him. It can even be said that we must dismiss him as a Philosopher for failure to properly analyse Aristotle, and Plato, concerning where Philosophy must begin.

Aitia and Scientism
There will be thinkers like Heidegger who do not acknowledge in their writings that the fundamental structure of human existence is as Voegelin describes it. Regardless, and assuming that Voegelin is correct in his analysis of initial experience, Heidegger, in as much as he was a man, would still act as if his experience of existence was as Voegelin thinks it to be, and not as he, Heidegger, described it. As Voegelin puts it

"� the problems of transcendence, the questions of origin and end, and the postulate of the limit, are inherent to the noetic structure of existence; they are not doctrines or propositions of this or that metaphysical speculation, but precede all metaphysics; and these problems of existence cannot be abolished by discarding this or that speculation�."\textsuperscript{17}

Voegelin calls this noetic structure of existence "the truth of existence", to be distinguished from the "untruth of existence", as "a revolt against the condicio humana and the attempt to overlay its reality by the construction of a Second Reality."\textsuperscript{18}

Bound up, compacted, in our fundamental experience, in the "truth of existence", are realities that may first find expression only in allegory, as in the cosmological myths. But some of them have also been differentiated and delineated in classical philosophy. One such reality is rationality as a property of all things. Aristotle points out that "� a man who has reason (noun \textit{echon}) will only act for the sake of a limit-end."\textsuperscript{19} This is to say that a goal is known when action is undertaken. This goal serves as the cause (\textit{aitia}) of action, and even if there is a series of steps necessary to reach the goal, this final goal, this limit-end of an action must exist for the action to be rational. To be rational in questioning, therefore, requires that we grasp the goal of our seeking at least in compacted fashion within the truth of existence. Without this, we could not question. At first we may only be able to express this goal of questioning as the "reason why" but still, somehow, its presence is known. So, it follows that existence is not just known to be rational but it is necessarily presumed to be so; or else questioning about it could not begin.

Bound up in the idea of \textit{aitia} of fundamental questioning is necessarily that of final \textit{aitia}, the \textit{cause of all causes} of which Aristotle and Aquinas spoke. Traditionally, Philosophers have been very slow to describe this \textit{aitia}. Aquinas classified the techniques for doing so as \textit{via negativa}, \textit{via remotiva} and \textit{analogia entis}. In all of these the approach is to reason to what might be true about the \textit{aitia} by looking to what has already been caused. It follows that the truth about the final \textit{aitia} can only be as adequate as one's understanding of what has already come to be.

It can be surmised therefore that it was because early thinkers found their existence to be good, desirable, social and rational that they could conclude that the \textit{aitia} must be the ultimate source of these attributes. However, even though the attributes of the \textit{aitia} must be reasoned to, the fundamental awareness of \textit{aitia} as cause, as creator, is not concluded; it is inherent in the initial fundamental truth of existence that everyone experiences.

The idea of \textit{aitia} exists as well in Modern Philosophy; for example, in the thought of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Heidegger. It has to be there because rational thought depends on it. Modern thinkers have not forsaken their rationality; however much some of them would want us to believe. They reason very tightly to present their positions. However, they typically categorise their \textit{aitia} as a thoughtless insurmountable force that acts without judgement. For Hegel it is the
Geist, the spirit that is postulated as the driver of history. For Marx it is a similar Geist, but one that is socially oriented. For Nietzsche, it is Will-To-Power, a force that creates and consumes just because that is the way it is. For Heidegger, it is a thrower, who throws beings as thrown, geworf en, into being, dasein, in time and on the way to non-being.

This then finally brings us to scientism. Voegelin describes it in his "The Origins of Scientism" as "an intellectual movement of which the beginnings could be discerned as early as the second half of the sixteenth century. They began in a fascination with the new science to the point of underrating and neglecting the concern for experiences of the spirit; they developed into the assumption that the new science could create a world view that would substitute for the religious order of the soul. The prohibition of metaphysical questions was pronounced by Comte in 1830."

I believe that this definition still holds. However, for clarification it may be necessary to point out that the word "scientism" has extended to mean things like those in this by no means exhaustive list:

1. The intellectual position of being dedicated to the natural sciences. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition #1)
2. It is used pejoratively by various authors of left wing or socialist perspective to mean the same thing, but as if such scientism was the cause of racism and international inequality. (Howard Zinn, A People's History of the United States, New York, Harper Perennial, 1980, p. 184)
3. The position of thinkers who toy with the idea that natural science might be able to restore philosophical or religious thinking, such as with respect to proving the existence of a soul
4. The position of "Philosophers of Science" who in one way or another adopt the natural sciences as an essential preoccupation of their thinking. This includes:
   1. Thinkers like Kant who found science, particularly Newtonian science, to be the natural way of thinking about the universe
   2. Thinkers like Newton who felt a need to add traditional beliefs on top of science, like the assumption that absolute space is the sensorium of God.
   3. The positivists, empiricists and various methodologists who view the workings of the scientific mind as the model for all thinking. This would include Analytic philosophers and the followers of Hume.
   4. Thinkers like the early Russell and Whitehead who see that it is the function of philosophers to think through the logic of science on behalf of science.
5. The position of various Psychics, New Age proponents, "Scientific" Churches, Nutritionists, Thanatologists and Mystic Religions.
6. The position of some social scientists, psychologists, political scientists, economists, educational psychologists, environmental scientists, scientific ethicists, linguists and socio-biologists that their studies can provide meaning for humanity and ultimate political and social order.
7. The thinking of a few somewhat popular scientists who extend their thinking to traditionally philosophical issues; including, Carl Sagan, Isaac Asimov, Stephen Jay Gould
8. The views of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and numerous popular thinkers who point to the picture of existence painted by science as a supporting argument for their position.

9. The state of mind of those overtaken by the fictional catharsis provided by wonder, exhilaration and desire for imagined magical solutions and personal power that science can be hoped to provide.

None of these are in the philosophical tradition of Plato and Aristotle. They also tend to be cool to traditional religions. Typically, none of them will be aware of the positions of the earlier thinkers whom they are inclined to quote; thinkers like Galileo, Kepler, and Giordano Bruno. Their assessment of the significance of these thinkers could be limited to the belief that the Church was bad, as if that were enough.

In general, then, a scientism is something in addition to science, an adjunct to science. Its motive appears to be on the surface, as Voegelin pointed out, an attempt to exploit human awe at the findings of science by making the scientism appear to be somehow derived from science. Still, despite this dubious feature, scientisms appear to own the day. Billions of dollars are somehow justified to fund their research. Popular journalistic culture and fiction-literature reflects their opinions. However, from traditional philosophical perspective Voegelin's definition still holds; the motive has little to do with science.

Following Comte, modern scientisms typically disavow the validity of philosophical questions; or, they are unknowingly silent about philosophy for lack of exposure. This often makes it exceedingly difficult to debate with a person of scientistic persuasion; when the other party to the debate dismisses philosophical discussion forthright as amusing drivel. Still, debate with such a person must, can only, proceed as with a follower of Heidegger. In order to debate, a philosopher must come to the debate armed with a preliminary analysis of the structure of existence. Secondly, it is necessary to have a detailed analysis of the scientism at issue with particular attention paid to the substitute \aitia that the thinker adopts. In virtually every scientism the motivation is a blind progressivism acquired from the dominant popular culture. The thinker will seldom have gone so far as to give the substance of an Hegelian Geist to his \aitia.

But, ultimately, whether the debate is with students or with ideologues, for the original problem that started my quest as educator, the simple given remains that whether or not the thinker will acknowledge it, he will still act in accordance with the truth of existence. He will argue from an \aitia, because rationality demands it and regardless whether he denies such things. The philosopher, who knows of the truth of existence, as much as he has managed to glean it from philosophical tradition, much as Voegelin did, cannot be cornered. The ideologue can always be placed in an uncomfortable situation; he can be made to question the validity of his \aitia whether or not he wants to. Existence is such that questioning is never stopped by an answer that we as questioner can give.


2 The word scientism is also used to refer to the methods and attitudes typical of a scientist who studies an aspect of physical nature. The usage in this paper derives from Eric Vogelin's first treatment of the subject in his paper "The Origins of Scientism", CW, Vol. 10 page 136.

3 "On Debate and Existence", page 152.
4 Ibid., p. 143

5 "Science, Politics and Gnosticism", p. 45

6 "On Debate and Existence", p. 145

7 "Thus Spake Zarathustra".


9 Ibid., p. 149.

10 Ibid., p. 146.

11 Ibid., p. 147

12 Ibid., p. 151

13 Ibid., p. 152.

14 Ibid., p. 147

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., p. 149

17 Ibid., p. 150

18 Ibid., p. 151

19 Ibid., p. 148

20 "The Origins of Scientism", CW, Vol. 10