What was Eric Voegelin's contribution to political science? I want to suggest that it was a reformulation of natural right. Voegelinian political science, if I may denominate it so, is a reworking of Aristotelian political science according to an essentially Christian insight into the dynamic character of human existence. Voegelin's specifically political contribution is to show that the constants of right order commonly identified with Aristotelian natural right derive from constants of movement, that there are constants in the way order comes to be.

In the *New Science of Politics*, Voegelin is explicit that his "method" as a political scientist is "substantially the Aristotelian procedure," which he describes there as a process of "critical clarification" of the symbols by which a society tries to make sense of its existence. He explains: "When Aristotle wrote his *Ethics* and *Politics*, when he constructed his concepts of the polis, of the constitution, the citizen, the various forms of government, of justice, of happiness, etc., he did not invent these terms and endow them with arbitrary meanings; he took rather the symbols that he found in his social environment, surveyed with care the variety of meanings that they had in common parlance, and ordered and clarified these meanings by the criteria of his theory."

Voegelin obviously retained this basic approach in later years, and seems to have had Aristotle's writings chiefly in mind as he reformulated his theory of politics a decade later in the pivotal essays of *Anamnesis*. The most important of these essays "Right by Nature," "What is Nature?" and "What is Political Reality?" are devoted mostly to a critical analysis of Aristotelian terminology.

In "Right by Nature," Voegelin examines the key passage on natural right in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book V (1134b18 ff). In that place, Aristotle says, "What is just [right] in the political sense can be subdivided into what is just by nature and what is just by convention. What is by nature just [*physei dikaion*] has the same force everywhere and does not depend on what we regard or do not regard as just. In what is just by convention, on the other hand, it makes originally no difference whether it is fixed one way or another, but it does make a
difference once it is fixed." This latter case involves essentially arbitrary measures peculiar to particular communities traffic regulations and the like. Aristotle continues: "some people think that everything just exists only by convention," pointing to the fact that "notions of what is just change." "But this is not the correct view," according to Aristotle, "although it has an element of truth." In what sense is it not correct, and in what sense is there an element of truth in it? It is incorrect in that "among us there are [in fact] things naturally just," but the view is true in this, that "all things human" are "changeable." But how can some things "among us" be right by nature when natural right "has the same force everywhere" but "all things human" are "changeable"? Voegelin thinks Aristotle gives a clue to the answer in a part of the last sentence I left out. The full sentence after Aristotle's statement that "everything just exists only by convention" is "not the correct view," but "has an element of truth," reads as follows: "Among the gods, to be sure, it is probably not true at all, but among us there are things which, though naturally just, are nevertheless changeable, as are all things human." "Among the gods it is probably not true at all" that right by nature is changeable. All things human are changeable, yet among us there are things naturally just. For Voegelin, this suggests that human beings, though changeable, have access to the unchangeable natural right of the gods; though human things are constantly changing, human beings can take their bearings from the rock-steady justice of the gods. He concludes that Aristotle's "physei dikaion is what is right by nature in its tension between the immutable divine substance and the existentially conditioned human mutability."

The passage from which Voegelin draws this conclusion is regrettably rather murky, and it is not by itself enough to come to any definite conclusions about the nature of the relationship of humanity and natural right, but it seems reasonable at least for him to interpret natural right as a divine phenomenon.

The meaning of natural right, of physei dikaion, begins to come clearer in Aristotle's exposition of phronesis, or practical wisdom. Practically speaking, phronesis is knowing the right thing to do in a given circumstance. Aristotle describes it in Book VI of the Ethics (1140a25-28) as "the capacity of deliberating well about what is good and advantageous for oneself," not merely "in a partial sense," but in the larger sense of "what sort of thing contributes to the good life in general." It is not, in other words, merely "cleverness," a knack for knowing how to capture the objects of one's desires, whatever they may happen to be, but rather a sense of
how a particular choice will lead to the kind of life worth desiring. This distinction is critical, because it goes to the heart of how natural right is actualized in human affairs. What specific actions are right by nature to take are those that contribute to the good life. The good life is a distinctive kind of life, and right actions are those that facilitate it. For the gods the right and the good are one and the same, because the gods already enjoy the best kind of life, but for men, who do not fully have such a life, the right is what directs to the good. Because the good life is a certain kind of life and compatible only with certain kinds of choices and activities, choices and acts can be recognized objectively as right or wrong. Phronesis thus, Aristotle says, "issues commands: its end is to tell us what we ought to do and what we ought not to do" (1143a7-8). It is thus something closely akin to what we call "conscience."

Phronesis is related to but distinguishable from nous. Nous is that element of reason that can apprehend "fundamental principles" (1141a7-8), which in Aristotle's philosophical lexicon denote ultimate bases or grounds of things. Nous enables man to see what will fundamentally constitute the good life, and phronesis enables him to see what particular steps he must take in order to have that life. Unfortunately Aristotle does not give very clear suggestions either about what the ground or grounds of the good life are, or about the specific nature of the relationship between nous and phronesis. Aristotle seems to suggest that phronesis sees what the good life looks like and realizes what to do to get there, while nous recognizes the deeper sources of the good life, what makes the good life good and what enables one to move toward it. But he gives no clear indication in the Ethics of what precisely these deeper sources of the good life are. Not, at any rate, in the Nichomachean Ethics. In the Eudemian Ethics, as Voegelin points out, Aristotle suggests the source of the good life is divine being. In the latter work (1248a27 ff), speaking of those spiritual men who act rightly without needing to deliberate, Aristotle raises the question: "shall we say that there is a certain starting-point [arche] outside which there is no other, and that this, merely owing to its being of such and such a nature, can produce a result of such and such a nature? But this is what we are investigating--what is the starting-point of motion in the spirit? The answer then is clear: as in the universe, so there, everything is moved by God; for in a manner the divine element in us is the cause of all our motions. And the starting-point of reason is not reason but something superior to reason. What, then, could be superior even to knowledge and to intellect, except God?" Striking as this passage is, however, it relates
directly not to *phronesis*, which involves deliberation, but to *tyche* ♦ luck or fortune ♦ which does not. Voegelin interprets Aristotle as positing a divine ground of right action, sometimes mediated by *phronesis*, sometimes unmediated, as in *tyche*. This is a plausible interpretation, but one wonders why, if Aristotle thought noetic knowledge of the divine ground of action was important for right living, as Voegelin believes, he did not make the point more obvious in the *Nicomachean Ethics* when he wrote of the respective roles of *nous* and *phronesis* in actualizing natural right.

Voegelin seems to have been pondering this question himself when he was writing the *Anamnesis* essays. He ultimately decided that Aristotle's formulation of natural right obscured an insight of Plato into the meaning of right order. Aristotle, being in the school of Plato, had attempted to spell out in the *Ethics* and the *Politics* the personal and political implications of Plato's basic understanding regarding justice, regarding the right ordering of soul and society. But in his effort to bring personal and political order into sharper focus, he tended to obscure the transcending experiences by which right order first becomes apparent and by which it is actualized. In Books VII and VIII of Plato's *Republic*, the relation between right order and the experience of transcendence is quite clear, and the divine character of the transcendent reality experienced is evident. That order is derived from experiences of divine reality is far from clear in Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*, however. Voegelin is convinced that Aristotle is in essential agreement with Plato about the divine source of order, and attributes his vagueness about this divine grounding to "a passionate will to focus attention so thoroughly on a particular problem that the wider range of the order of being is lost from sight." There is another possibility, of course ♦ that Aristotle in fact disagreed with Plato on this point, that in Aristotle's mind experiences of the divine do not have much, if anything, to do with human order; that to him recognition of divinely established order in the cosmos is sufficient for men to order their lives rightly; that God may well be a distant first mover, but his activity typically does not bear directly on human action. He did, after all, criticize Plato for claiming that there is only one good ♦ the divine ♦ and that all other things are good only by participation in it, and he did hold that Plato was wrong in thinking that only the philosopher, who ascends knowingly to the divine Good, can be sufficiently attuned to right order to rule justly. Whatever the case, whether Aristotle failed to make the divine formation of right human order sufficiently clear or simply
did not find divine activity directly relevant to the question, Voegelin thinks his account of natural right and its significance for human affairs inadequate.

Exactly where Aristotle went wrong, to Voegelin's thinking, begins to come clear in "What is Nature?" Voegelin notes at the outset of the essay that Aristotle's "right by nature" (physei dikaios) "must remain void of meaning unless we know what nature is." "The contexts in which 'right by nature' is used" by Aristotle, Voegelin says, "indicate that nature refers to constant structures in the movement of being, comprising gods and men, organic and inorganic matter--in other words, to something like a constitution of being." But the way Aristotle develops his concept of nature, Voegelin suggests, accentuates these structures in being so strongly that the movement of being almost disappears from view. In Metaphysics Delta, Aristotle defines nature in terms of matter, form, and unity of form and matter in a thing. But this definition, applied to man and society, fails in Voegelin's view to capture the full essence of human existence personally and socially. What it fails to account for, specifically, is the fact that man and society can be transformed into higher and lower orders of being without changing their basic substance. A hedonist who becomes a philosopher, though improved, is still the same individual; the city that descends into tyranny, though worse, is the same group of people as before. Furthermore, in transition from one form to another, man and society retain their essentially human character. What this suggests is that essential human being consists of more than form and matter; just as essential to human existence is movement.

Voegelin wants to call attention here to the "flow" of being, as he calls it, to being's becoming. Reality obviously consists of more than forms: the forms have content, and this content is a moving content. One way of affirming and appropriating the benefits of the real is to say that the forms are more real than the moving content; this is what Aristotle seems to be trying to do in Metaphysics Delta when he attempts to counteract Empedocles' exaggeration of the changeableness of being. But while Aristotle is right to insist that certain structures are constant in the flux of reality, he leaves the impression that these structures are the only part of reality that counts, that there is nothing of lasting import in the movement. The problem with this is that much of what is palpably most meaningful in human life is found in the movement, in the activity, of life. More pointedly, the structures are nothing without the movement: a body without life in it is an empty shell; a social constitution without human activity is dead. The
movement is the living, and the living is at least as essential to what it means to exist as the structure. Moreover, existing as man is not just a living "being there" with a structure, like a plant, but structured being going somewhere. Even the good life to which one hopes to move is not purely a matter of good order but also of relating to reality in a good way, and this relational aspect of the good life is fluid, and active.

Voegelin does not wish to challenge the validity or discount the importance of Aristotle's structures, his constitutions of soul and society far from it. He wants rather to show that consideration of these forms apart from their experiential context and content deprives them of their full meaning. He presents the central issue this way: "If we mean by nature the constants of the order of being, the nature of man and society obviously comprises much more than a complex determined by the form-matter schema. If, however, we pattern our concept of metaphysics on the classical model of Aristotle, a tradition valid to this day, then only the form and not the constants of movement can be conceived metaphysically as the nature of being."

What is missing in Aristotle's account of the nature of man and society is a clear exposition of these "constants of movement." What are they? They seem to be constants in the way man and society move from worse to better. What is this way? Voegelin finds the way in the experience of divine reality, in the movement of divine being in and through the individuals who open themselves up to it. The constants of movement of which Voegelin speaks are constants in the direction of divine being in its movement among men, revealed to the attentive mind by the experience of the movement. The movement of human being is essential and substantial, and not merely incidental to form, in so far as it is a collaboration with the movement of divine being.

Voegelin's insight is that, yes, there are constants of form (what Voegelin calls "order"), but there are also constants of movement (what he essentially means by "history"), and to forget about one or the other is to lose contact with something essential to the fullness of being.

Voegelin is sometimes mistaken as a historicist for failure to realize his emphasis on constants of movement. It is not any kind of activity that counts as "history" for Voegelin, only activities of permanent significance. His criterion of significance in human activity what makes any human action really worth remembering and emulating is its participation in divine reality, and the nature of this participation, however limited or extensive it may be, however compact or differentiated its expression in language, is constant. The constants of movement
with which Voegelin is concerned are constants in this experience of participation in divine being elements of this experience that appear again and again in the course of human events, and sometimes in the course of a single human life. The constants of order described with such precision by Aristotle in the *Ethics* and *Politics* are in fact, Voegelin wants to show, effects of these constants of movement. Openness to divine activity involves a priority of reason—which desires to possess in understanding the divine object of its love—and a subordination of the lower appetites in ways most conducive to this enterprise, resulting in a distinctive order of soul; closure to divine being in preference for one of the lower appetites reverses the order in equally recognizable ways. Apart from the existential dimension of the direction of desire and the corresponding openness or closure, there is no order. The order of society as well as of soul depends on this existential dimension, not in that society possesses any kind of collective consciousness, but that communities naturally coalesce around certain common desiderata. This is Voegelin's understanding of order, as it is, of course, Plato's understanding as expressed in Books VII and VIII of the *Republic*. Aristotle adopts the same general understanding, making the order of the soul the product of a habitual directing of the self to what will contribute to the good life, and the order of society of the *homonoia* or likemindedness about what is good, and therefore about what is right. But because Aristotle does not recognize or does not make clear the dependence of right order on participation in the divine substance, the full meaning of right order is lost to his readers.

One of the reasons, perhaps, Voegelin thinks Aristotle does recognize it, even if he does not express it clearly, is that Aristotle, in the *Metaphysics*, describes the activity of *nous* in terms of participation in the divine and then in the *Nichomachean Ethics* makes the activity of *nous* essential to the good life. Voegelin is impressed with Aristotle's account in *Metaphysics* 1072b20 ff. of *metalepsis*, the mutual participation in each other of divine and human *nous*. The problem with Aristotle, for Voegelin, is ultimately that while his formulations of right by nature, of practical wisdom, and of metaleptic participation are impressive in their formal definition, they are too static and disconnected: his definitions and categorizations obscure the continuity between divine and human activity, and in man, between intellectual and moral activity, and his emphasis on order (in the form of natural right) obscures the dependence of this order on movement specifically on *metalepsis*. The critical insight of political science, which Aristotle
either does not fully understand or does not make sufficiently clear, is that right order socially as well as personally is an outgrowth of this divine-human activity. Even when Aristotle takes up the matter of causation directly and points to a connection between the divine unmoved mover and human action, he can easily be understood, or misunderstood, to say that the divine is only the first link in a long chain ending in human action but not directly relevant.

I said at the outset that Voegelinian political science is a reformulation of Aristotelian political science according to an essentially Christian insight about the dynamism of human existence. I said that because, while Plato in Voegelin's view adequately expresses the dependence of right order on divine reality, the dynamic quality of the ordering movement Voegelin wants to emphasize is rather clearer in the writings of the Christians. When Voegelin stresses the importance in "What is Nature?" of the fact that human things can change form without losing their essential substance, that they can be transformed, he draws his inspiration from the writings of the saints. There "We hear talk of changes, conversions, renewals, and rebirths, of a new creature, and of the great transformation that replaces with a new man the old one who has died. The shape, the morphe, is subject to metamorphosis, and the forma to the reformatio. The rhetorical exuberance of Saint Augustine never tires of amassing ever-new linguistic terms expressing the experience of a being that is transformed, turning away from the temporal dimension and toward eternity: de forma in formam mutamur de forma obscura in formam lucidam a deformi forma in formam formosam and, finally, de forma fidei in formam speciei." (159). In Christianity inward transformation emerges clearly as the basis for right order, personally and socially, and the transforming activity emerges clearly as the work of a living, divine personality in those who make themselves permeable to his moving presence, yielding to his purposes.

What Voegelin wants to do as political scientist, it seems to me, is to employ the Aristotelian method of critically clarifying political symbols, but to penetrate more deeply than Aristotle did into the moving experiences that generate the symbolizations and the social orders corresponding to them. What political science most wants to "get at," Voegelin suggests, is the "ground" or source of the good life, of the best kinds of activity and the order that grows out of and facilitates them. To really understand political reality, one must penetrate to fundamentals, to principles, which in the Aristotelian language of Voegelin's theory means causes. The most
fundamental cause of human social organization, Voegelin finds, is an effort to assert and preserve certain interpretations of what makes life meaningful. The resulting symbolizations of political reality and the related political orders can be ranked according to their degree of truth, the degree to which they reflect the order of being, of reality as a whole, but reality in its fullness is not discernable apart from experiences of divine reality, according to which alone the relative value of other dimensions of human experience can be measured. The objective ranking of regimes of soul and society is seen and remembered in light of the discovery of the source of all good, the "divine ground of being." Voegelin wants to draw greater attention than Aristotle did to the moving process of this discovery and the ordering movement that follows from it, to the activity of divine being central to both, and to the revolt against this activity resulting in the varieties of disorder. The moving process of discovery he finds perhaps most adequately symbolized in Anselm's *fides quaerens intellectum*, the ordering movement in Augustine's language of transformation, and the development of social order in Augustine's concept of the progress of the two cities--in Christian formulations, in short, which more adequately than Aristotle's convey the spiritual dynamism in the formation of order. Aristotle gave us the technical terminology of natural right. The Christian mystic theologians gave us in their more energetic symbolizations a sharper sense of how God's activity and men's response to it shape human existence. Voegelin's political science gives us a coherent scientific theory of natural right that combines Aristotle's precision about the constants of order with Christianity's clarity about the ordering movement that constitutes their meaning.