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From Philosophy to Positivism

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world

W B Yeats

Henry Adams worshiped the dynamo but yearned for the Virgin. The tension between cherished traditions, beliefs, and ideals and the promise of a brighter future built with the help of new knowledge traps every American generation. Change, or the prospect of certain kinds of change, cannot help but engender excitement over new possibilities chastened by the fear that the old ways will be lost. New ways of living rest on the graves of older, often-cherished forms. The election of 1828, for instance, presented the nation with new possibilities and new fears. Did not the later populists propose change in order to protect a threatened way of life? The Southern Agrarians fought a losing battle to stop the changes transforming the American South. In one sense or another, all of these people fought against changes we associate with modernity; the United States has always had a vigorous antimodern impulse. Conservatives in the mid twentieth century continued a version of this impulse, reaching back to John Adams and developing through Henry Adams, the New Humanists, and Southern Agrarians. Yet they were also greatly influenced by Europeans who placed the American experience in a larger context. As participants in a larger Western culture, some Americans wondered if Europeans had not seen the future—or at least a potential future. And so the conservative critique of American liberal ideals and institutions advanced as part of the more European-rooted critique of modernity. The philosophical debates that occupied Continental thinkers during the nineteenth and early twentieth centu-
ries did much to form the temper of the antimodernism that emerged in the United States in this era.

If life in Hobbes's England was nasty, brutish, and short, life for the first European generation born to the twentieth century was uncertain, irrational, and violent—above all, violent. The catalogue of atrocities of this era is as familiar as it is long, but though not distant in time, these events are not particularly fresh in the imaginations of the people who will shape the twenty-first century. The intellectual uncertainties of this earlier generation afflict the current generation like a thorn in the side, but as with most chronic difficulties one finds ways of ignoring or cloaking it, of seeking distractions that hide intellectual realities. Perhaps the enormous human cost of the recent past robs many of us of our courage, maybe even our concern, but in central Europe during the early decades of this most bloody century, young and agile minds felt the attraction of the intense self-conscious doubting, questioning, and searching that made the half century prior to World War II so intellectually rich, so heady and exciting.

The towering figures of Nietzsche, Weber, Marx, Husserl, and behind them the more imposing figures of Kant and Hegel dominated the intellectual landscape into which Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin were born. These major figures formed the primary landmarks of their intellectual horizons, providing the initial boundaries and orientation of their thought. Eventually both Strauss and Voegelin sought to expand their horizons, to see over those mountains, but they could do so only by surmounting the heights that restricted their vision. In ways not always evident, much of Strauss's and Voegelin's work reads like one side of a discussion with their intellectual ancestors. Neither man really left his intellectual home, for their challenges were always to understand and reply to the work of the dominating thinkers they had confronted in their youth.

This philosophical context was clearly post-Enlightenment. In contrast to the optimistic project of Enlightenment thinkers to cast the light of reason into the dark comers of human experience, the philosophers of the nineteenth century (1790-1920) labored to salvage reason and to secure some epistemological territory. As the ontological base of the Enlightenment project crumbled—that is, the assumptions about God, creation, and above all cosmic purpose—post-Enlightenment thinkers struggled to supply new and sturdier
verities and to dispel the anxiety of uncertainty by regaining certitude or by learning to live in an open-ended universe. The crisis of modernity, which dates at least as far back as Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) inspired many attempts to save modernity by securing an epistemological ground. The modern project would no longer rest upon a discredited Semitic cosmology but upon the methods of science. The great metaphysical questions would fade away like the unreal phantoms of a dream. In the end, some people believed they could salvage the Promethean goal of employing knowledge to master human destiny. To others, the epistemological ground consisted of shifting sand. These thinkers gave up on the modern project and sought ways to accommodate themselves to this new and uncertain environment. The philosophical conversation from Kant to Husserl was complex, with the various interlocutors struggling with the same essential problems—the problems that most challenged Vögelein and Strauss.

The intellectual environment in the 1920s, when Strauss and Vögelein became philosophically aware, had the distinct smell of decay as modernity moved into senescence. As the two men began their careers in the sort of nether world below philosophy called social science, the residual project of decaying modernity struck each as a hollow, deracinated enterprise. Although philosophers still went about their work, intellectual life in Europe and the United States became increasingly the province of social scientists. With metaphysics in disrepute, the modern project of accumulating knowledge and control fell to those who employed the most respected methods (science) in search of knowledge in those areas of human life still believed by most people to be knowable (the physical and, perhaps, the social world). In the hands of mere practitioners (to catch the spirit of Strauss’s and Vögelein’s complaint), the subtle and rich tensions that the thinkers of late modernity tried so hard to understand and resolve were reduced to simplistic methods and unquestioned assumptions, all wrapped in the prestigious garb of science.

Strauss, and to a lesser degree Vögelein, derided the self-contradictory and sophistic thinking that dominated contemporary scholarship. They labeled this trend "positivism," a catch-all word to indicate a blind attachment to the methods of the physical sciences, a naive belief in the "value-free" nature of the social scientific enter-
prise, and the often-subterranean belief in progress (but the essence of the word is the tendency to allow a privileged method of inquiry to define the scope of the knowable and thus to limit the scope of inquiry). The broadside against positivism damaged Voegelin and Strauss as much as their target, which is so elusive that one wonders at times if they were not attacking abstractions. Who were these social scientific positivists? For the most part we know them only by the label. Presumably numerous enough to pose a threat to clear thinking, few individual positivists warranted specific mention by Strauss or Voegelin. Positivists were the largely unreflective heirs to a tired philosophical tradition reaching back to the Enlightenment, a tradition that eventually dispensed with philosophy altogether.

To dismiss as sloppy Voegelin's and Strauss's critique of positivists, to ask for names and specifics, or to play ceaseless word games in search of a semantic particularity is to miss their point entirely. Indeed, they mischaracterize their largely bloodless opponents on numerous occasions. The point, however, is that they understood the issue in the context of a complex construction of contemporary Western thought and therefore characterized a tendency expressive of the "idea" of modern Western thought. In large part the social scientists to whom they pointed were not self-conscious positivists but simply loyal practitioners of their guild. For Voegelin and Strauss, the problem lay, not so much with the individual scientists-who often conceived of their work as a distinct and separate part of their lives-but with the logic immanent in the guild. The canons of the profession, in other words, were infected by the largely outdated beliefs of the modern project.

The critiques Voegelin and Strauss launched against positivists become intelligible when we understand the typically German emphasis they placed on theory, which they contrasted to empiricism. Their analysis slipped naturally, then, to the hard theoretical core that anchored social science, even if few or none of the practitioners thought about or recognized that core. Strauss was especially keen to expose the nihilist heart beating beneath the benign exterior. Thus Voegelin and Strauss could examine a cluster of beliefs and assumptions, reify them into positivism, and have "it" thinking and acting. Even if positivists were innocent of the theoretical core of their scholarly labors, the trajectory, the consequences of their work, would nonetheless be unchanged by their ignorance.
Other factors help account for the reaction of these two philosophers to the dominance of social science (of an allegedly positivistic persuasion) in intellectual circles. The circumstances of their intellectual environment forced Strauss and Voegelin to grapple with positivism early in their careers. After the positivistic moment in mid and late nineteenth century Germany, the general trend among Germanic philosophers had been an attempt to overcome the deadening logic of positivism (and here I refer to a philosophical school bearing the label) without recourse to the now-discredited metaphysics. Weber was an especially important figure in the attempt to sail between the Scylla of positivism and the Charybdis of the still-pervasive idealism. Despite the general trend, numerous and competing philosophical camps occupied the intellectual field.

The university training and early intellectual influences of both thinkers help us understand their later responses to positivistic social science. Voegelin's academic career was especially unusual in that he took his doctorate under the direction of Hans Kelsen and Othmar Spann, two mentors with apparently incompatible philosophies. Kelsen became famous for his Pure Theory of Law, and during his career in Austria and the United States he became noteworthy as the purest of legal positivists. Spann, on the other hand, was very much in the idealist, universalist tradition that had dominated much of German intellectual life during the nineteenth century. Voegelin worked more closely with Kelsen and developed an enduring respect for his work. He especially respected Kelsen's precision and analytical rigor, which he tried to imitate in his own scholarly pursuits. But to whatever degree Voegelin might have been a positivist in the early and mid 1920s, he decisively rejected the "theoretical" implications of positivism. In many interesting ways Voegelin's intellectual style demonstrated the persistent influences of his two very different mentors. Voegelin always appreciated and very much required for his own work the careful analytical work of social scientists. Their careful distinctions and qualifications became his; even few legal scholars, he believed, surpassed the erudition and rigor of Kelsen. But all of this work merely contributed to Voegelin's much more sweeping analysis that one can only call metaphysical. Voegelin was a grand theoretician blessed with the analytical rigor of a positivist.

Strauss, like Voegelin, became very familiar with the various ver-
sions of positivism during his university education. His doctoral di-
rector was Ernst Cassirer, the famous neo-Kantian who himself
struggled to find some accommodation with positivism. Although
one detects an enduring debt to Strauss's neo-Kantian training, he
found Cassirer's attempt to form a new modern system of philoso-
phy evasive. Cassirer had "silently dropped" ethics and therefore
"had not faced the problem," so the overly positivistic Cassirer in-
fluenced Strauss less than "the most outstanding German philoso-
pher" of the time, Edmund Husserl. Husserl's attempt to save phi-
losophy by returning to the life-world (prescientific world) of
humans is a pervasive Straussian theme and the primary position
from which he denounced the positivists. Nonetheless, the great
Husserl, however important, ranks behind his student, Martin
Heidegger, as an influence on Strauss. Strauss's fifty-year career may
be reduced to a struggle with the problems Heidegger presented to
this Jewish philosopher. Strauss's deep admiration for and hatred of
Heidegger lie behind every significant thing he wrote, and almost ev-
ery reference Strauss made to Heidegger displays the tension. In one
revealing comment-really an aside-in a brief letter to Alexandre
Kojeve, Strauss wrote: "Have you seen Heidegger's *Holzwegel Most
interesting, much that is outstanding and on the whole bad: the
most extreme historicism." To understand Heidegger's influence
on the young Strauss it is worth quoting an unusually revealing pas-
sage:

I remember the impression [Heidegger] made on me when I
heard him first as a young Ph.D., in 1922. Up to that time I had
been particularly impressed as many of my contemporaries in
Germany were, by Max Weber: by his intransigent devotion to
intellectual honesty, by his passionate devotion to the idea of
science-a devotion that was combined with a profound uneasi-
ness regarding the meaning of science. On my way north from
Freiburg, where Heidegger then taught, I saw, in Frankfurt-am-
Main, Franz Rosenzweig . . . and I told him of Heidegger. I said
to him that in comparison with Heidegger, Weber appeared to
me as an "orphan child" in regard to precision and probing and
competence. I had never seen before such seriousness, profun-
dity, and concentration in the interpretation of philosophic
texts. I had heard Heidegger's interpretation of certain sections
in Aristotle, and some time later I heard Werner Jaeger in Berlin interpret the same texts. Charity compels me to limit my comparison to the remark that there was no comparison. Gradually the breadth of the revolution of thought which Heidegger was preparing dawned upon me and my generation. We saw with our own eyes that there had been no such phenomenon in the world since Hegel. He succeeded in a very short time in dethroning the established schools of philosophy in Germany.

The deep psychological—even spiritual—involvement of Strauss with the problems and personalities of modernity makes him the greatest conservative critic of modernity, his work springing from some hidden personal dialectic. As a consequence Strauss's analysis becomes rich and textured, with layers of meaning often hiding others. Voegelin proceeded, by contrast, in a much more traditional manner, so I will use his analysis to open the matter of positivism before attempting to understand Strauss.

Voegelin thought of his scholarship as contributing to a burgeoning new age of philosophical pursuit. Modernity was largely a spent enterprise for intellectual luminaries, though it had left behind a theoretical (philosophical) wasteland. From this intellectual disorder the search for order was well under way. William James, Max Weber, Henri Bergson, to name a few, had begun the restoration of a science of order; Voegelin and his generation were building on their foundations. Voegelin cast his work, therefore, in a generally optimistic mode, and for this reason he did not devote an extraordinary amount of space (in terms of his published materials) to examining the contemporary manifestations of a nearly dead modern project. Still, his first American book—the work that gave this obscure Louisiana State professor exposure—was a declaration of a "new science of politics." The title (The New Science of Politics) played on several themes, the most important being Voegelin's rejection of positivistic social science in favor of a "new" science that would deal more comprehensively with human experience. Positivism was the proximate cause for the book as the author sought to "retheorize" political science.

Voegelin never diminished the value of positivist scholarship. Done well, the restrictive methods employed by positivists can isolate and illuminate important areas of human experience, but Voeg-
lin meant something more sweeping, more pernicious by his use of the label in this book. Because positivists had accepted as an axiom "that only propositions concerning facts of the phenomenal world [are] 'objective,' while judgments concerning the right order of the soul and society [are] 'subjective,'" they have restricted the range of permissible questions. Political scientists may ask questions to which the methods of the physical sciences can provide reliable and persuasive answers—but it is these questions alone that the positivist will allow the political scientist to consider. The issues were two for Voegelin: one, that positivists allow their method to define the subject and, two, and very closely related, that the most important political and social questions get tossed aside because a crucial component of human experience is effectively devalued as "subjective." One must remember that Voegelin did not direct his critique solely at self-conscious positivists but also to the pervasive positivism (albeit in a decayed form) in social science. He advocated, by contrast, a more empirical science that followed more closely human experience no matter how elusive or how difficult to understand.

This appeal struck an especially important chord at mid century. In a time of great ideological strife and with World War II (an ideological war) just over, Voegelin insisted that political scientists must pursue the truly important and most basic political questions concerning justice, freedom, order—the most value-laden issues. In orderly times with no important ideological clashes, relativism (for Voegelin a logical result of positivism) might be an excusable luxury, especially for academics. But in the most ideological and violent century in human history, it appeared to be a luxury moderns could ill-afford.

The New Science of Politics, and especially the introduction where this discussion occurs, is strangely axiomatic. Much of what Voegelin said took the form of assertion rather than argument, so one must place this introduction in the context of his larger project. The book invited misinterpretations. Even Hans Kelsen, Voegelin's old mentor, wrote a lengthy response that he sent to Voegelin. In this fascinating document (fascinating because of the close attention he paid to the book, the defensive tone, and the psychological dynamic), Kelsen defended positivism. He noted what anyone should note, that Voegelin's use of the label was hopelessly loose and vague. Voegelin wished to look beyond the rather narrow band of
scholars called positivists to identify the larger trends at work in the West of which the positivists represented the logical conclusion. As a result, as Kelsen noted, Voegelin defined this group by virtue of a shared negative. Kelsen put it this way: "The decisive trend in his fight against positivism can be only the reaction against the anti-metaphysical attitude prevailing in modern social philosophy and science."

The accuracy of Kelsen's characterization depends upon the meaning he gave to "metaphysical," and Kelsen provided plenty of clues. He meant any appeal outside those accepted by the methods of positivism, especially theology. Voegelin did not write a theological response to positivism; instead, he appealed to the philosophical "sciences" of anthropology and ontology. This would always be the point of tension for Voegelin and other conservatives and his philosophical opponents—do these disciplines supply socially and politically useful "knowledge?"

The late modern turn away from anthropology and ontology, Voegelin thought, represented a failure of modern methods to address the most important human questions: What does it mean to be human? What is one's place in the totality of reality? When the delimited methods of inquiry could uncover no subject behind these traditional philosophical categories, moderns denied the legitimacy of the existential tensions that had produced the quest. This position places us very near the heart of Voegelin's critique and exposes the unbridgeable chasm separating his understanding and Kelsen's. The privileging of certain methods meant that one must ignore or cast aside larger regions of human experience as "meaningless" or "subjective." The objectifying (abstracting) of reality artificially externalized "it" from consciousness, making intelligible only those areas amenable to objectification. The distortion of human participation in reality into a mistake to allow the spatial imagery of "in reality" to distort the truth of the participant being a coordinate of reality into a false object/subject dualism sharply delimited the knowable region to the realm of science. As a consequence, the whole was lost as a subject for theoretical examination and this eclipsed "pregiven" perceptions of reality in favor of an ideological system.

But how could this contraction of reality take place? Voegelin sought to answer this question by contextualizing the work of scien-
tists and by exploring the social and intellectual environment that shaped both the political and scientific world. Positivism, from this larger perspective, represented a resilient strain of a more generalized intellectual virus called scientism. The social success of ideologies like communism and National Socialism shared with positivism a similar spiritual deficiency and a common intellectual history reaching back to the sixteenth century. Thus, this combination of spiritual disorder and particular historical circumstances dictated the actual shape of the ideological revolt. By examining his argument concerning the development of scientism we understand better the peculiar danger of positivism (as the carrier of the scientistic virus most evident in liberal democracies), and we can adumbrate the structure of Voegelin's argument about modernity.

Voegelin's essay "The Origins of Scientism," which appeared in 1948, clarified the issue. The date is important because it places this essay in the crucial years when Voegelin was working through the problem (and definition) of modernity. Already, in his History of Political Ideas, Voegelin had focused on the sixteenth century as a crucial period. Equally important, Voegelin had begun to deepen his understanding of the experiential source of all ideas. Throughout the forties, but especially in the next decade, Voegelin looked behind (or underneath) the ideational structure of a thinker or an age to the experience of reality that engendered ideas. In this focused essay these themes played a central role.

Scientism is the closure to all nonphenomenal reality. Voegelin operated with an unclear dualism (though one with resonances going back to Plato) of the phenomenal realm and the realm of substance. The latter involved the underlying ground of being and stands for the realm of essences—the real rather than the merely existent. Scientism, as a theoretical issue, meant the treating of philosophical and spiritual matters (what today we might call human matters concerning social life) with the methods appropriate to the natural and physical sciences. But the more important historical question concerns the social effectiveness of this scientism. Why did it become paradigmatic in terms of epistemology and in defining proper human aspirations and social goals? Because Voegelin understood these shifts to be the results of an "antispiritual revolt," he had to find the answer in the human soul.

Two related existential ingredients have crucial roles in the story
Voegelin had to tell. One was the growing need or desire for certainty in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These were bloody years in Europe with violence on all scales spawned by the dissolution of the catholic church and the hardened doctrinal disputes that followed. Also, the new intellectual horizons opened by the rebirth of classical philosophy gave thinkers new and persuasive models of social and political order. These conditions created a great desire for certainty—a way to supersede doctrinal disputes and to find the truth capable of ordering European social and intellectual life. The search for certain truth was invested with a special importance as the means of preventing chaos. A society besieged by conflicting truths lacked the stamina required for an order grounded on faith. The uncertainty of faith gave way to apodictic knowledge—the only foundation sturdy enough to sustain order, or so moderns believed. The second existential ingredient was the hubristic grasp at power inspired by the technological success of the sciences. As the mysteries of the phenomenal realm gave way to human intervention and control, humans dreamed of godlike mastery.

To isolate the existential source in this historical process Voegelin focused on Newton's assumption of absolute space. The particulars of this fascinating story cannot detain us here, but the importance of this story rested with Newton's rejection of relative space and motion on religious grounds. His metaphysics could not tolerate a physics that included relative space and motion. Because Newton's scientific claims became paradigmatic, subsequent scientists accepted his scientific arguments without recourse to the religious motivations for the claims. Consequently, "the well-intentioned theory of absolute space resulted in precisely the disorder it had intended to avert."

But Newton the scientist did not occupy the intellectual field alone; Leibniz the philosopher addressed Newton's theories directly in his well-known correspondence with Newton's ally, Samuel Clarke. Leibniz attacked the theory upon grounds later developed by Kant and Einstein, and Voegelin emphasized that Leibniz, assessing the matter as a philosopher, anticipated the relativity theory that was widely embraced in the twentieth century. However, in scientific and social terms Leibniz lost. In response to Leibniz's argument, Clarke wrote that he did not understand. "This complaint," wrote Voegelin, "carries us beyond the theoretical discussion into
the human situation. The complaint was sincere: Clarke and Newton did not understand. As far as physicists are concerned, this ended the debate for the next century and a half." Leibniz understood that phenomena cannot be isolated and made into simple objects that have properties. The properties of any objects "must be conceived as part of a field of phenomenal relations." The social authority of Newton, however, protected his deficient understanding of space and motion from the theoretical analysis of a philosopher. The unacceptability of relativity—the threat, that is, it presented to the goal of certainty—meant that scientists would operate according to an untenable "cosmology" (as Voegelin labeled it). Even though the philosopher in this story won a "theoretical victory," the social victory went to the closed soul of the scientist.

The changes technology made in the ways humans lived reinforced the social effectiveness of "mathematizing science." Power and wealth became interrelated with science, and Voegelin emphasized the "interaction between science and environmental changes." The success and prestige of scientists encouraged the investment in more science (i.e., scientific investigation), which in turn increased the success and prestige of scientists who took on the role of high priests and whose machinations produced magical transformations. The utilitarian rationality of science was transplanted to the political and social process. Even though all societies, Voegelin emphasized, engage in utilitarian calculation, the growing prestige and authority of science made this virtue predominant and effectively eclipsed from view any values reached by other means. By the nineteenth century this process had led to "the belief that the dominion of man over man would ultimately be replaced by the dominion of man over nature, and that the government of man would be replaced by the administration of things." In this era humans could dream of a transformed world. By applying to the human realm the methods employed so successfully in the phenomenal realm, moderns believed they could gain mastery over social and political affairs— even human nature.

The results of this belief in scientific magic are socially debilitating. The belief that "human existence can be oriented in an absolute sense through the truth of science" leaves society ignorant about the most important issues of human existence (substantial rather than phenomenal matters), and the social institutions that once shaped
personalities toward substantial order do not survive in this environment. A social order so structured "creates an environment that favors the social success of the deficient human types" - creating "spiritual eunuchism." The biologizing of humans by making them objects of the natural sciences meant the loss of the human as "the spiritually creative center of society and history."

In this pessimistic essay Voegelin despaired about the future - "the insane have succeeded in locking the sane into the asylum." Scientism had become so pervasive that by the mid nineteenth century it dominated intellectual circles, and by the twentieth century it had demonstrated its resonance with the masses in Russia and Germany. The desire for certainty and control so overwhelmed people's experience of reality that they accepted the deformed reality of an ideology-and did monstrous things to fulfill the dream.

Voegelin's pessimism had largely evaporated a few years later when he published *The New Science of Politics* (the title itself suggests a new beginning). The effects of scientism had not disappeared suddenly, as Americans by and large still believed that technological advancement harbingered real (substantial) progress-that the answer to the limits of science was more science (including a more rigorous application of scientific methods to social and political matters). Nonetheless, Voegelin found reason to hope. Positivism-the most obvious manifestation of scientism in the United States-no longer dominated intellectual circles. What is unclear is whether a new science of substance could prove socially effective in such an environment. This was the very live question that directed or spurred Voegelin's work during the following decade.

For Leo Strauss positivism was one of two primary intellectual disorders that motivated his own philosophical investigations. In virtually every work he had something to say about positivists and their more radical heirs, historicists. By drawing attention to these dominating intellectual trends, Strauss's works became alternatives to or bulwarks against these modern conceits. A careful examination of all of Strauss's comments on positivism exposes numerous evasions, a few apparent contradictions (does positivism lead to conformism and philistinism or nihilism?), and a plethora of exaggeration. One senses from reading Strauss that he found positivists threatening or dangerous because they (sometimes unconsciously) undermine beliefs necessary for political and social order. But to go no further
than this cynical reading trivializes what for Strauss (much like Voegelin) was a matter of grave importance. With Strauss the larger issue, of which positivism formed a part, concerned nothing less than the fate of Western civilization.

To understand Strauss's assault on the positivists one must recall that for Strauss, positivism cleared the intellectual space (much like a bulldozer clears a stand of trees) for a widespread and morally incapacitating nihilism. Whereas Voegelin believed that positivism represented the dying gasp of modernity, Strauss thought of it as the penultimate stage leading to historicism—or "existentialism," a term he used to suggest, among other things, an inward turning to the individual soul because no socially constructed meanings or purposes have any more purchase, a final and complete relativism. An extensive examination of this argument must be put aside until later, but we need to understand Strauss's views of the state of contemporary intellectual life. His concise and largely straightforward essay "Social Science and Humanism" (first published in 1956) supplies the essential components of his diagnosis.

Strauss's point of departure on the subject of political science (and the social sciences in general) was the unfitness of the "scientific spirit" for examining political and social matters. Often employing important but elusive terms like "commonsense" and "civic art," Strauss pointed to the real, value-laden world people experience, especially in their capacity as citizens or as social creatures. Science "is characterized by detachment and by the forcefulness which stems from simplicity or simplification."121 These characteristics are alien to politics and to the social world more generally. The scientist wants to take the rich, confusing, prerational life-world (to borrow from Husserl) experienced by ordinary people as a whole and divide it into digestible segments-parts of the whole that one can examine detached from the larger fabric which gives them meaning. The scientist hopes to understand the whole of the political and social order by understanding its parts. But, while the scientist holds out the hope of understanding the entire order by putting the abstracted parts back together, the "scientific spirit" works against any such reconstruction. Strauss wrote: "The sovereign rule of specialization means that the reconstruction cannot even be attempted.... The whole as primarily known is an object of common sense, but it is the essence of the scientific spirit, at least as this spirit shows itself
within the social sciences, to be distrustful of common sense or even to discard it altogether." By "commonsense" Strauss meant the world as we experience it nonabstractly—the prescientific experience of the world. The scientist can only deal with this experience by dividing it into parts and dealing abstractly with them. These parts, as they take shape (since they did not exist as parts before the scientist created them!), have relevance only for the scientists—the citizen has no use for them. Strauss identified the striking difference of relevance in this way:

The scientific social scientist is concerned with regularities of behavior; the citizen is concerned with good government. The relevances for the citizen are values, values believed in and cherished, nay, values which are experienced as real qualities of real things: of man, of actions and thoughts, of institutions, of measures. But the scientific social scientist draws a sharp line between values and facts: he regards himself as unable to pass any value judgment.

The foregoing characterization deals with a social science set loose entirely from the world of commonsense. For reasons not entirely clear, Strauss navigated around the word "positivism" in this essay and chose instead to write about the "scientific spirit." Strauss was, in fact, careful here to largely avoid code words and to employ labels carefully. Nonetheless, his argument was essentially the same in this essay as in the broadsides against positivism that he sprinkled liberally throughout his works. In reconstructing Strauss's more hard-hitting critiques, two issues stand out as paramount. First, the dichotomy between facts and values, which Strauss took to be the heart of the social scientific method, robbed positivistic social science of the crucial means of understanding the political and social world—a world constituted on values rather than facts. Second, these methods, in the hands of lesser practitioners (in contrast to Weber, for instance) engendered an unthinking relativism. Scientists who perform their labors in fealty to the god of a value-free science become unreflective about the assumptions that undergird their enterprise even as they begin to dismiss as unimportant phenomena not amenable to their method. Strauss came dangerously close on several occasions to claiming, incorrectly, that the ethical
neutrality of the scientific method entailed a philosophical relativ-
ism. However, his point was somewhat more complicated.

"The habit of looking at social or human phenomena without
making value judgments," Strauss wrote, "has a corroding influence
on any preferences. The more serious we are as social scientists, the
more completely we develop within ourselves a state of indifference
to any goal, or aimlessness and drifting, a state which may be called
nihilism." For Strauss the positivistic core of social science ("sci-
entific spirit") created several unavoidable (though not logically en-
tailed) conditions. The emphasis upon complete neutrality concern-
ing ultimate values spilled over into the thinking of the scientist qua
citizen. This, of course, is a difficult case to make. Even Strauss ar-
gued that despite their dedication to truth as their only value, all the
social scientists he had ever met were unqualified democrats (and
usually not reflective about democracy). However, Strauss's point
of emphasis was their unthinking acceptance of their values, and a
generalized belief among scientists that they posited their own val-
ues. These were subjective choices and therefore indefensible.
Strauss assumed that social scientists found the traditional dis-
course concerning moral and political matters illegitimate, and to
the degree that these beliefs gained currency, therefore, the very ele-
ments natural to political and social order were undermined. All
hope for social and political stability rests upon a widespread belief
in a moral or metaphysical core, beliefs one gains through "com-
monsense" or a prescientific apperception of the whole. Science ap-
plied uncritically to human affairs undermines commonsense, or
the very characteristics necessary to the society under investigation.

In "Social Science and Humanism," however, Strauss held out a
role for social science so long as the scientist's bearings are taken
from commonsense (the world as lived, not abstracted) and that in-
dividuals, in their capacity as scientists, be "ruled by the legitimate
queen of social sciences ... ethics." Strauss packed more into this
assertion than I have room to discuss, but the most obvious meaning
is the inherent valuative nature of human life. A science of human
things must, above all else, involve the human quality of evaluating,
creating hierarchies, and deciding upon the good. On almost all mat-
ters and on nearly all things, humans place a value. In a broader con-
text, Strauss meant that social scientists seek to understand human
things, therefore they must understand "the human knowledge of
what constitutes humanity, or, rather, of what makes man complete or whole, so that he is truly human."^{27}

Strauss called scientists to the philosophical pursuit of defining the human—the universal qualities that provide the grounds for talking about the species. He called them to do even more, to examine the human in terms of the whole. This demand requires that scientists account for humans in terms of ends or purposes, which is to say their place in an order not of their construction. Social science, then, "cannot be based on modern science, although it may judiciously use, in a strictly subordinate fashion, both methods and results of modern science. Social science must rather be taken to contribute to the true universal science into which modern science will have to be integrated eventually."^{28} In other words, Strauss argued for a social science of the sort practiced by Aristotle and Plato—social science properly used becomes philosophy.

We learn halfway through the essay that Strauss found social science in its modern manifestation a meaningless exercise. The social scientific objective of understanding human society requires controlling methods (as opposed to subordinate methods) unlike those of the physical sciences. In an especially clear summary Strauss wrote:

To treat social science in a humanistic spirit [i.e., to transform social science into philosophy! means to return from the abstractions or constructs of scientistic social science to social reality, to look at social phenomena primarily in the perspective of the citizen and the statesman, and then in the perspective of the citizen of the world, in the twofold meaning of "world": the whole human race and the all-embracing whole.^{19}

The positivism of social science formed one extreme position that threatened a proper understanding of human social and political life. The other extreme, historicism, which Strauss took to be the logical modem answer to conundrums created by positivism,^{30} he explored in the second part of the essay jsee Chapters for a discussion of this subject!. What is important for the present is that Strauss, like Voegelin, found insufferable an intellectual environment dominated by social science.

The "historicists," who became for Strauss the greatest expres-
sions of modernity (albeit modernity in the throes of self-destruc-
tion), were reacting to the same positivistic environment that
spurred Voegelin and Strauss to revolt against modernity. One is
even prone to think that for Strauss, historicism and an antimo-
dernism of the sort practiced by Voegelin and Strauss were the only
real alternatives for the modern world. At any rate, the historicist’s
answer to the positivists was to accept the final logic of modernity,
to look deeply into the abyss and to leap, gleefully or mournfully,
into its bottomless reaches. If they took this act to be the manly ac-
ceptance of truth, Strauss took it to be a nihilist rejection of respon-
sibility. If Strauss had any hope for a recovery of order he, and to a
lesser degree Voegelin, had to understand modernity-"its" charac-
ter and its constitution. Because this diagnosis, this search for the
fatal intellectual gene, was so essential to the process of recovery we
must better understand Strauss and Voegelin’s construction of the
problem. Then, and only then, will the deep involvement Strauss
had with the problem of historicism, or with Voegelin’s more gener-
alized though less-acute concern for the present age, become clear.
Eventually, of course, the problems of modernity must relate to
those people who live in stable democracies.