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The Nature of Modernity

MACHIAVELLI THE CHIRON

Few writers as blunt as Niccolo Machiavelli have spawned so rich a debate over their teaching. Should one understand him as an Italian patriot devoted to reviving the glory of Rome or as an ardent republican? Was he a pagan who considered Christianity an effeminate religion that sapped the creative energy of the Italian people? Did his patriotism so overwhelm him that he advocated immoral methods to achieve the "good" of a strong and united Italy? Was he the first "scientific" political thinker and hence the founder of political science? To these general interpretive questions concerning his teaching one must add other questions that deal with the intertextual structure of his corpus and how that structure may relate to his audience. How important is the Prince in identifying Machiavelli's teaching? What is the relationship between the Prince and the Discourses? Should one read the former in the context of the latter? To what degree ought one take into account the identified audience in making a judgment as to the messages of these two works and their relationship to Machiavelli's genuine thought? How do these manifestly "political" works relate to his works of fiction and history?

Leo Strauss's examination of "modern" philosophers began with Machiavelli. Strauss saw in Machiavelli's teaching the origin of modernity, and in his exegesis of Machiavelli, one glimpses the difference between classical philosophy and modern philosophy with a clarity unmatched from any other vantage point. Here one witnesses the mature thinking of Strauss as he moved from a sense of disorder to a search for order (the classical solution) to his accounting for the fateful shift. Strauss's examination of the first modem came only after the categories modem and classical had developed some preci-
sion in his mind. Only after he understood what modernity meant could he find its origin. Also, the nature of Strauss’s work on Machiavelli provides an excellent entree to Strauss’s famed hermeneutic.

Strauss’s most penetrating study of any modern thinker bears the modest title *Thoughts on Machiavelli*. Rarely has a title promised so little, and a book delivered so much. Read it once and get lost in the confusing levels of analysis, the shifting from Machiavellian texts to the works of Livy and other historians. Read it twice and witness its architectonic genius, its subtly crafted structure, its logical steps. Read it a third time with the care of a detective, following the carefully placed clues, identifying the many blind alleys, and putting the pieces together into a single, unified picture. Just do not read it a fourth time, when the sly and systematic Machiavelli that Strauss constructed begins to look too sturdy beside the untidy and intellectually disheveled Machiavelli one remembers reading. Nonetheless, a careful reader notes the loving care with which Strauss engaged the thought of this "fallen angel." Machiavelli did not serve as a foil for Strauss’s larger story. Indeed, his fidelity to Machiavelli’s texts and the genuine respect Strauss displayed for Machiavelli’s greatness make this book a remarkable engagement between two philosophers. I do not mean to suggest anything about the veracity of Strauss’s interpretation, just that his study of Machiavelli displays a special care, dedication, and a strange sort of beauty.

Strauss’s text is compelling and elusive because of his famous and controversial claim that great philosophers write in such a way as to present an exoteric exterior protecting an esoteric core. In other words, there are two messages: one for the superficial reader who reads to confirm his conventional beliefs, another for the careful "young" reader who dedicates his life to the intransigent search for truth. Great philosophers serve both readers, protecting the political order, which is grounded on conventional beliefs, while "teaching" untold generations the politically dangerous truths that undermine beliefs. If one accepts Strauss’s contention that great philosophers write esoterically because their teachings threaten the political order and thereby their own safety, then Strauss’s own career poses some very perplexing problems. In the first place, if Strauss believed that philosophers write in this fashion and that such a political deception is necessary or desirable, then his discussion of esoteric
writing along with his careful exegesis of the great philosopher's
texts make him an evil man unless he, too, presented his teaching
within an esoteric structure that is inaccessible to the superficial
reader. Not only has he called to the reader's attention the fact that
philosophers hide dangerous truths from the rest of us, but he has
taken great pains to expose the very teachings that most threaten our
political order. Moreover, one might be excused for asking that even
if Strauss were correct in a general way, does not Machiavelli offer a
strange example of a philosopher who wrote in such a fashion as to
cloak his true teaching? Ought one not be surprised that Strauss ap-
plied this principle even to the first modern whose works do not ap-
ppear at first glance to be hiding anything?

Still more perplexing is the problem these conditions pose for in-
terpreting Strauss's own works. Despite his exposure of esoteric
writing in others, might his "modern" style be the protective coating
for his own teaching? Since he often and clearly expressed his
agreement with the "classical" assumption that a philosopher's re-
lationship to the contemporary political and social order is always
precarious, one must assume he wrote esoterically. Nonetheless, one
wonders what persecution Strauss faced in such a liberal and toler-
ant society. For a Jew who came of age during the Weimar regime in
Germany, a liberal political order might not appear especially stable.
Although Strauss emphasized that persecution comes in many
forms, the political and intellectual climate does not explain his eva-
siveness. Two other factors played more important roles in his deci-
sion. First, philosophers have an obligation to prevent widespread
skepticism, which is inimical to political society. Second, philoso-
phers should protect people who are unsuited for the skeptical life of
philosophy from having their beliefs undermined while providing
the means for the natural philosophers to learn. I believe this last
reason for writing esoterically influenced Strauss the most. Philosoph-
ers are not just born, they are trained, and hiding one's message
through sophisticated textual clues forces the reader to think
through matters with much greater care and to challenge all the as-
sertions made in the book. Reading a book of philosophy should re-
semble a discussion.

No matter the reasons, Strauss's method of writing complicates
matters considerably, and this complication provides ample oppor-
tunity for sloppy or hostile scholars to read virtually any message
into Strauss's works. Some scholars unmask Strauss by using his esotericism as a shield to ward off competing interpretations as though writing esoterically effectively hides one's real teaching from everyone. The difficulties facing one who seeks to unravel this Straussian web present special dangers, but they do not preclude understanding. An extended discussion of these matters is impractical in this book, but *Thoughts on Machiavelli* provides an entree to Strauss's special hermeneutic. One learns through an examination of this book not only his method but its fruit, and one clarifies much about Strauss's critique of modernity along the way.

The problems with interpreting Strauss fade away, however, if Strauss did not think of himself as a philosopher. A historian of philosophy has no teaching to hide, and Strauss made numerous claims to this more humble role. But since he argued that only a philosopher can understand fully, i.e., understand the thinker as he understood himself, then Strauss would be a purveyor of vulgar doctrines if he did not consider himself a philosopher. Given his own understanding of the position required for someone to speak on a subject, he must have considered himself a philosopher capable of understanding those about whom he wrote. One ought, moreover, apply to Strauss his comments about the Arabic philosopher Farabi: "Farabi avails himself then of the specific immunity of the commentator or of the historian of order to speak his mind concerning grave matters in his 'historical' works, rather than in the works in which he speaks in his own name." 

But one need not resort to that sort of evidence alone to support the claim that Strauss considered himself a philosopher and his commentaries as means of teaching. In his study of Machiavelli, for instance, Strauss articulated the theme that governed his entire philosophical career and expresses the substance of both his critique of modernity and his attempt to recover the classical tradition. "Our critical study of Machiavelli's teaching can ultimately have no other purpose than to contribute towards the recovery of the permanent problems." 5 Moderns since Machiavelli have lost sight of the permanent problems, the insoluble connections and conflicts between faith and reason, political life and the philosophical life, theory and practice. By exposing the changes Machiavelli made in the goals of philosophy—that is, the goals of philosophers qua philosophers—Strauss recovered the original enterprise. Reading *Thoughts on Ma-
requires that one grapple with two philosophers, or rather the use one makes of the works of another.

Since both Strauss's commentary on Machiavelli's work and Strauss's own teaching are bound up in his hermeneutic, one has to begin with the art of writing esoterically and the meaning Strauss invested in that activity. Strauss's critics, and some of his followers, think of his method as a sort of decoder that one might use inflexibly. This idea puts one in mind of spies who write notes with invisible ink, or in code, to communicate with other spies. Perhaps a more accurate image is of a cryptic map uncovered by a young treasure hunter who is thus confronted with at least two exciting prospects: the joy of deciphering the map and the expectation of enormous treasure. This second image, however, is different in important respects from the first. A spy needs an instrument; a chemical to expose the ink or the code to decipher the message. In other words, this image represents the critical assessment of Strauss's reading, that it is a magical code, a sort of hermeneutical chemical that exposes the message written between the lines (and "between the lines" is exactly where Strauss said one finds the message). The second image better reflects Strauss's method. A cryptic map does not come with a code book but with curious clues that one must puzzle through. One will almost assuredly not unravel the mystery with the first try, and one will find that solving a puzzle one way only leaves the relationship with other symbols on the map more problematic. One tries again, and again, each time eliminating some answers while seeking new ways to make sense of the relationships on the map. The excitement of the discovery, of finding some great treasure that has been hidden away for years and protected by countless snares, gives Strauss's hermeneutic its power and is also the source of the most hostile criticism of him and his followers. The Straussians form a rather snobbish and closed cadre, the critics contend. They believe they have discovered what everyone else has missed; they think they are the real philosophers and that those who read the great books without seeing the hidden message expose themselves as being nonphilosophers (by "nature" incapable of being philosophers), unworthy as intellectual partners. If this critique does justice in describing some of Strauss's followers, it considerably distorts Strauss's own attitude toward the community of scholars in which he participated.
In theory, the method of following the clues left behind by the great philosophers will take the discoverer down different paths. In theory, Strauss's method is very particularized, adapting to the widely varying ways of communicating a hidden message. In practice, the philosophers Strauss studied followed very similar strategies. Machiavelli, though his message may have been very different, taught in the same manner as Plato. Yet one might expect this similarity since Strauss assumed that superficial readers read one way and careful readers another. Certain clues should always alert the one and pass by the other. These clues, Strauss argued, appear on the "surface," and the careful reader of a book written by a great thinker (an essential qualification) ought to account for everything in the work. An interpreter of a great book has not the freedom to omit problematic passages or to seek hidden meanings without accounting for textual contradictions to those teachings. In other words, Strauss demanded a rigorous empiricism with regard to texts. "Reading between the lines" means that one finds one's answer on the "surface." "There is no surer protection against the understanding of anything than taking for granted or otherwise despising the obvious and the surface. The problem inherent in the surface of things, and only in the surface of things, is the heart of things. The writer leaves all the clues in the open, on the surface, and writes nothing without a purpose. The key to understanding then lies, not just on the surface, but in the "problem inherent in the surface of things." One has no justification for thinking that a writer wishes to communicate two different messages if one fails to detect a "problem" in the surface of the text.7

By problems Strauss meant anomalies; places in the text that strike one as odd or out of character with the general flow of the argument. They act as stumbling blocks, forcing the careful reader to stop and discover why one stumbles at that point. Machiavelli arrested Strauss's attention with his discussion of manifest blunders in the Discourses (bk. 3, chap. 48), making the universal claim that for every error an enemy makes "there will always be a fraud beneath it." After offering this universal rule, Machiavelli presented an example that undermined its universality: that enemies may make obvious blunders because of some weakness on their part, whether panic or cowardice. Why did Machiavelli choose an example that undermined his universal claim? According to Strauss:
"What is important is the fact that Machiavelli, in the act of speaking of manifest blunders, himself commits a manifest blunder. He does what, as he says, enemies sometimes do. His action ceases to be absurd if he himself is an enemy, a clever enemy." The example that contradicts the rule—which was the central example among many—supplies a clue to understanding Machiavelli’s work. But this finding does not solve all the problems or give one access to the fullness of his teaching, for it is but one clue. Once one recalls that Machiavelli advocated "new modes and orders," then his odd example—his blunder in the context of the discussion about the meaning of blunders—informs the reader of an important strategy of criticizing the old modes and orders (as well as advocating the new).

Contradictions, whether in the form of small "blunders" or more obvious self-contradictions, provide the richest single source for hints concerning an author’s intention. Machiavelli’s works are full of incompatible statements, but how does one decide which of two contradictory statements to believe? Few general rules dictate an answer. If one assumes that the author knew the contradictions existed, then the act must have been purposeful. The interpreter must follow the logic of the particular case, and Strauss’s works overflow with these exercises. Nonetheless, because the author assumes the necessity of concealing his message, the interpreter must assume that strong statements repeating or affirming common and popular beliefs must be ironic if they are contradicted by more or less oblique statements. In its simplest form the construction looks like a = b - a+b. In many cases an author will offer views with much greater direction, such as a = b - b = c - (a = c) - a+c - (a+b), with the brackets signifying arguments not specifically made but entailed in the argument. In such a construction one must assume that the author meant to communicate that "a" does not equal "b." These two examples only begin to suggest the numerous ways a writer might contradict himself without appearing to do so.

Strauss detected a pattern in Machiavelli’s work. Machiavelli presented his message in stages by supplying "first statements," which represented acceptable positions, followed by "second statements of a different character," and according to the assumption one makes about the relationship of the two stages the message will vary. "If one does not realize the difference of 'purpose' between 'first statements' and 'second statements,' one may read the 'second state-
ments' in light of the 'first statements' and thus blunt the edges of his teaching." Machiavelli will appear quite conventional if one makes this mistake and thereby fail to 'grasp the magnitude or enormity of Machiavelli's enterprise.'

The best way to read a great book is to learn from the author how one ought to read it, and one clue is to examine the way the author reads the works of other thinkers. Because Machiavelli's *Discourses* is a commentary on the books of Livy, Strauss had access to Machiavelli's method of reading others and found that Machiavelli argued from the silence of Livy as well as from his explicit statements. Concerning the common assumption that money is the sinews of war, Machiavelli, relying upon the authority of Livy, noted that when discussing this subject Livy remained silent regarding money. Machiavelli argued that Livy taught through his silence, and as Strauss put the matter regarding Machiavelli's strategy: "If a wise man is silent about a fact that is commonly held to be important for the subject he discusses, he gives us to understand that the fact is unimportant. The silence of a wise man is always meaningful." If Machiavelli used this method when explaining the work of another, Strauss assumed that the same technique applied to Machiavelli's own works. To understand how much Strauss relied upon this method of reading Machiavelli, a lengthy quote is necessary.

In the *Prince* he fails to mention the conscience, the common good, the distinction between kings and tyrants, and heaven. We are reluctant to say that he forgot to mention these things, or that he did not mention them because there was no need to mention them since their importance is a matter of course or known to the meanest capacities. For if this reasoning is sound, why did he mention them in the *Discourses*? We suggest that he failed to mention them in the *Prince* because he regarded them unimportant in the context of the *Prince*. There are, however, certain subjects which he fails to mention, not only in the *Prince* but in the *Discourses* as well, whereas he does mention them in his other works. He does not in either book mention the distinction between this world and the next, or between this life and the next; while he frequently mentions God or gods, he never mentions the devil; while he frequently mentions heaven and once paradise, he never mentions hell; above all, he never
mentions the soul. He suggests by this silence that these subjects are unimportant for politics. But since each of the two books contains everything he knows, he suggests by this silence that these subjects are unimportant simply, or that the common opinion according to which these subjects are most important, is wrong.... He expresses his disapproval of common opinion most effectively by silence. 

The argument from silence assumes a rather large place in Strauss's overall strategy of interpreting Machiavelli (justified by the example of Machiavelli's interpretive strategy applied to Livy). Silence on matters generally considered integral to the subject under examination (in this case the political order), especially in a book in which the author claims to have written everything he knows about the subject, led Strauss to believe that Machiavelli taught by his silence that conventional beliefs were untrue.

Strauss dutifully attended to Machiavelli's arguments concerning Livy's texts. What examples from Livy's books did he choose? What significance do those choices have? How accurately did Machiavelli characterize Livy's arguments? Strauss found a pattern of misuse of Livy that could not have been accidental, and Strauss also found other strategies of encoding a secret message in such things as digressions and ambiguous terms, especially virtue.

The most notorious and controversial Straussian method was his numerology. Strauss counted just about everything: books, chapters, paragraphs. Operating on the assumption that superficial readers pay greater attention at the beginning and the end, Strauss expected to find the most controversial teachings at the center of a book (or, sometimes, at the center of chapters or a series of chapters that compose a section). If a book contained thirteen chapters, for instance, Strauss presumed that chapter seven contained the most important clues to the purpose of the book. This idea is only the beginning of his fascination with numbers. One especially challengeable exercise in numerology exposes the lengths to which Strauss went.

The _Prince_ consists of 26 chapters. Twenty-six is the numerical value of the letters of the sacred name of God in Hebrew, of the Tetragrammaton. But did Machiavelli know this? I do not know. Twenty-six equals 2 times 13. Thirteen is now and for quite
sometime has been considered an unlucky number, but in former times it was also and even primarily considered a lucky number. So "twice 13" might mean both good luck and bad luck, and hence altogether: luck, fortuna. 16

That exercise represents only a portion of Strauss's analysis of the number twenty-six in both the Discourses and the Prince, but it is sufficient to expose what most critics find as Straussian excess. It remains to be emphasized that the most important part of Strauss's interest in this subject was his constant attempt to locate the "center" of an argument. A careful reader of Strauss's works diligently counts paragraphs. 11

This hermeneutic and the many assumptions that go with it play so central a role in the thinking and teaching of Leo Strauss that no meaningful discussion about his beliefs is possible without some understanding of this matter. The significance of his reading for esoteric messages extends well beyond his intriguing and usually profound interpretations of the great books to the complexities of reading and interpreting Strauss himself and even to the heart of his revolt against modernity. But this subject, like so much with Strauss, must wait until we better understand the details of his project.

With an overview of Strauss's theory of esoteric writing and his methods of reading a book, we are better prepared to examine his critique of Machiavelli. The reader learns that Strauss intended to transcend the particular topic in order to recover the origins of modernity, and any extended study of one of Strauss's books requires an examination of the way he structured or organized his argument. Strauss divided Thoughts on Machiavelli into five parts, consisting of an Introduction and four chapters. The Introduction informs the reader that Strauss intended to revive an old-fashioned understanding of Machiavelli as a teacher of "evil," and the reader also learns that he had a purpose that transcended the particular topic: Strauss intended to recover the "permanent problems."

The relationship between these two objectives emerges out of a complicated dialectic. Chapter 1, "The Two-fold Character of Machiavelli's Teaching," establishes the esoteric nature of Machiavelli's works. In Chapters 2 and 3, Strauss did much of his textual spadework on Machiavelli's Prince and the Discourses, respectively. In
the final and longest chapter, "Machiavelli's Teaching," Strauss brought together his discoveries from all of Machiavelli's works—but especially from his two political works—to establish Machiavelli's political and philosophical goals, i.e., his teaching. Excluding the Introduction, Strauss's book develops from an argument regarding Machiavelli's method, through a textual analysis of the two central books, to the final unmasking of the real Machiavelli. Despite Strauss's admission in the Introduction that he had come to a well-established and therefore not surprising interpretation of his subject, the book bears a strong resemblance to a mystery story with clues emerging slowly from painstaking work, some of which turn out to be misleading until placed in a larger context, until finally the reader comes to discover Machiavelli's true identity. One should not be surprised if by the end of the story one learns that Strauss's introductory characterizations of his conclusions are misleading.

The damnable characteristic about Machiavelli, from Strauss's point of view, was the newness of his teaching. Machiavelli broke from the great tradition of philosophers, and this break led to a new constellation of beliefs about control of humans over nature, and hence their own destiny; about the proper goals and objectives of political society; and about the philosophical pursuit for a change in belief regarding the highest human aspiration. Strauss warned the reader that the very success of Machiavelli's teaching, the degree to which moderns have accepted his teachings as truistic, makes moderns unable to see the master for the innovator he was. Machiavelli so corrupted moderns that to them his work has lost the vivid color of a creative if demonic genius—they see only pallor and no evil. Looking back with the provincialism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, readers have lost the "surprise" of Machiavelli. Strauss examined Machiavelli from the perspective of the premodern so that his creativity in the context of his inherited biblical and classical heritage would show more clearly. This context includes Machiavelli's intellectual and political horizon, both of which shaped what he taught and the method of his instruction.

Strauss characterized Machiavelli as a "fallen angel," referring to the heritage he perverted. He mastered the classics. He knew well the tradition against which he rebelled. He took the evil doctrines advocated long before "as old as political society itself"! through the medium of characters, like Plato's Thrasymachus, and advocated
them in his own name. From the very start the reader gets mixed signals. Was Machiavelli’s evil his "open" advocacy of the beliefs hidden by those Strauss admired, like Plato? If so, then why would Machiavelli write in such a manner as to hide his real message? Or should the reader assume that the classical philosophers not only did not advocate "Machiavellian" beliefs but expressed those beliefs through characters for the purpose of disproving them? Machiavelli advocated those once discredited beliefs and sought to persuade others (though not everyone). Strauss’s book, and his larger assault on modernity, makes sense only if he believed that Machiavelli had changed classical teaching.

In the first chapter Strauss sought to establish that Machiavelli wrote in such a way as to present different messages to two audiences. Beyond discussing the various methods Machiavelli employed to convey his two messages, Strauss argued for the basic unity and agreement between the two books. They do not differ with regard to subject matter but present the same teaching from two points of view. The twofold character of his teaching, therefore, does not refer to contrasting teachings in the two works but to a twofoldness in each book. Each book speaks to the old and the young reader, each hearing a different message. The reader learns that Machiavelli aimed the real teaching at the young (a point that will be discussed in greater detail later).

In Chapter 2, Strauss pointed out that the revolutionary part of the *Prince* is not Machiavelli’s particular advice but his claims to universal truth. The work, Strauss argued, has the characteristics of a tract for the times and of a treatise concerning truth for all times. Since Machiavelli addressed the work to a particular prince the reader might not note that Machiavelli’s real audience was not the prince (or not just the prince) but an indefinite multitude, the young. He sought to begin a complete revolution through the young—a revolution that entailed "new modes and orders," which resulted from a revolution in one’s understanding of right and wrong. Italy needed liberation, not from barbarians, but from "a bad tradition," by which Machiavelli meant a Christian tradition (or at least a certain kind of Christian tradition). Brought up with the Christian religion, the young of Italy had become too confident of human goodness, if not of the goodness of creation, and hence too gentle and effeminate. A revolution of such proportions requires a
complete turning over of beliefs (new modes and orders) and a founder for the new order. The times required a new Moses, one of Machiavelli’s favorite historical examples.

The precise content of Machiavelli’s revolutionary message remains unclear in this chapter, though Strauss exposed most of the important themes in their nascent form. Especially important are the relative roles of *fortuna* and virtue and of the common good and self-interest, as well as the relative importance of patriotism in explaining Machiavelli’s advice. The issue of *fortuna* and virtue is especially complicated because it involves Machiavelli’s confusing statements about religion. In Machiavelli’s *Prince*, Strauss found that chance plays some role in human life but also that leaders must learn to control *fortuna* and must never depend upon her. Unlike the *Discourses*, Machiavelli avoided mentioning "the common good" in the *Prince* until Chapter 26, in which he justified his immoral policies on the grounds of a moral goal. Once Strauss exposed Machiavelli’s language of the common good as a cover for his arguments concerning the nature of political and social life, Machiavelli’s patriotism appeared similarly feigned, or at least secondary. "The core of his being," wrote Strauss, "was his thought about men, about the conditions of man and about human affairs." Machiavelli’s goals extended well beyond the moment or the particular to the creation of new modes and orders.

Strauss intimated in this same chapter that Machiavelli thought himself a founder. The *Prince* was about foundings and the requirements for a leader to establish a new political society. The "center" of the book, Strauss argued, is Chapter 19 (which is the center of what Strauss called the third division), in which Machiavelli exposed the truth about founders who acted most unjustly and ruthlessly to accomplish their tasks. The civil and political order is grounded upon injustice, and since one can hope for justice only within the context of an established political order, justice depends upon prior acts of injustice.

Strauss’s discussion of the *Prince* ended with two problems that he would not resolve until the final chapter: one, how did Machiavelli account for the victory of Christianity in view of his belief regarding its effeminate character? and two, if all unarmed prophets fail, what was he but an unarmed prophet? The subsequent chapter addresses, in rich detail, the arguments made in the *Discourses.*
Strauss identified the purpose of this chapter in paragraph thirty-seven (out of fifty-nine). Having already established in an earlier chapter that all founders are frauds—which is to say they found their society upon a fraud—Strauss noted that Machiavelli believed it acceptable for some writers to expose this fraud, "under certain conditions. . . . To reveal those conditions may be said to be the chief purpose of our chapter." An odd purpose, perhaps, but it leads to one very important question: To what end or purpose did Machiavelli write?

Machiavelli developed a contrast between "modern" (by which he meant Christian) and "ancient." Playing upon the existing prejudice in favor of antiquity—especially concerning Rome—Machiavelli encouraged his readers to accept the authority and superiority of ancient modes and orders to modern Christian examples. The pagan Romans appeared strong, well-armed, and focused upon glory; Christianity encourages weakness and denigrates glory in favor of some future felicity. Having discredited modern and Christian modes and orders by contrasting them with ancient examples, he then exposed Roman modes and orders as being similarly defective. Ancient examples lost their charm and authority. The success of Rome and other ancient examples depended upon chance (fortuna). The Romans "discovered their modes and orders absent-mindedly or by accident," and just as moderns accept the vicissitudes of this life, so also were the ancients limited by fate. One who accepted the teachings of Plato and Aristotle would expect that such is necessarily the case, because the good society, to the degree humans can realize it, depends upon circumstances beyond human control. Machiavelli understood the classical teaching and rejected it. "Machiavelli," wrote Strauss, "achieves for the first time the anatomy of the Roman republic, and thus understands thoroughly the virtues and the vices of the republic. Therefore he can teach his readers how a polity similar to the Roman and better than the Roman can be deliberately constructed." The Machiavelli of Thoughts on Machiavelli presented a new normative order based upon human conditions and possibilities.

Near the middle of the Chapter 3 (paragraph thirty-two out of fifty-nine), Strauss made the odd claim that the central theme of the Discourses is an analysis of the Bible. To make sense of this interpretation the reader must remember three things. First, Machiavelli
wrote with two audiences in mind—the old and the young. Second, for the prime audience (the young) he wished to expose the fallacy of the existing and all past orders, and third, Machiavelli was but an unarmed prophet. Since the modern order is Christian, Machiavelli must appear to accept current religious and moral beliefs while undermining their legitimacy. In the final chapter Strauss examined in great detail Machiavelli's rejection of Christianity and all religions. For the present the relevant fact is that Machiavelli sought to disabuse his youthful audience of beliefs that clouded their reasoning and made them intellectually compliant to authority. In a passage both clear and confusing Strauss emphasized Machiavelli's audience and agenda as well as the results of his teaching.

Machiavelli addresses his passionate and muted call to the young—to men whose prudence has not enfeebled their youthful vigor of mind, quickness, militancy, impetuosity and audacity. Reason and youth and modernity rise up against authority, old age, and antiquity. In studying the Discourses we become the witnesses, and we cannot help becoming the moved witnesses, of the birth of that greatest of all youth movements: modern philosophy, a phenomenon which we know through seeing, as distinguished from reading, only in its decay, its state of depravation and its dotage.

The first two sentences identify the reasons for Machiavelli's choice of audience as well as the scope of the break Machiavelli's teaching initiated. Some youths might be saved from blind acceptance of authority and learn to employ reason, and these pupils, however distant in time, become Machiavelli's soldiers. The unarmed prophet became a founder—and like all founders he resorted to fraud to hide the true basis of the new order. In the confusing second part of the quote Strauss gave Machiavelli his due as a founder.

The purpose of Strauss's chapter on the Discourses, one should remember, is to understand the conditions under which a writer (as opposed to a prince) might reveal the fraud upon which all society rests. The imperatives under which Machiavelli operated, Strauss argued, were the manifest failings of the contemporary modes and orders and the truth he had discovered about the nature of all order. Strauss intimated that a genuine concern for the common good mo-
tivated Machiavelli to initiate a new order based upon reason. "Machiavelli therefore needs readers who are discerning enough to understand not only the new modes and orders but their ultimate ground as well. He needs readers who could act as mediators between him and the people by becoming princes. Machiavelli exposed the fraud so that others would realize the intimate relationship between good and evil, justice and injustice, and thereby understand the need to use evil means prudently to accomplish the common good. Machiavelli claimed a new knowledge that allowed humans control over their destiny by conquering fortuna.

The final chapter of Strauss's book is the most important. "Machiavelli's Teaching" refers to his universalizing philosophy (which Strauss identified as the revolutionary part of his work) in contrast to particular advice. The long chapter comes in two equal parts: the first deals with Machiavelli's teaching regarding religion; the second, his teaching about morality. Thus one is reminded of the Introduction where Strauss contended that "Machiavelli's teaching is immoral and irreligious."

Of all of Strauss's brilliant and imaginative textual analysis of Machiavelli, the most intriguing and debatable is his reconstruction of the Florentine's religious beliefs. No other subject requires that Strauss rest so much of his argument upon Machiavelli's silence. Similarly, Strauss's position requires that Machiavelli shift the meaning of key words two or even three times. In other words, if Machiavelli actually hid his teaching, then we must assume from the evidence that his views concerning religion in general and Christianity in particular he deemed in special need of protective cover. Strauss followed the trail of Machiavelli's elusive beliefs concerning religion from the particular, Christianity, to the most general-fortuna, chance, providence.

Machiavelli's praise of pagan religions have led some scholars (including Eric Voegelin) to insist that Machiavelli was a neopagan, but Strauss characterized his views as neither Christian nor pagan but Averroist. Christianity interested Machiavelli because of its capacity as a political force. Because Christianity lowered esteem for this world and for glory while accepting humility and abjectness as highest goods-attitudes that demonstrate "contempt for things human". Machiavelli considered Christianity inferior to pagan religions. Nonetheless, his was a Christian society and, he had to
operate in such a way as to not appear excessively heterodox. For this reason he taught in silence, leaving unsaid what logically should be part of a given discussion and thereby demonstrating his disagreement with conventional views. But he expects the young readers whom he has trained to read to "read the Bible 'judiciously'; he limits himself to giving a few indications." Strauss emphasized the example of the exodus from Egypt led by Moses. The judicious reader should catch the willingness of a people, led by a great leader, to leave enslavement and conquer their own land. Moses viewed from this perspective possessed the same defining characteristics of other founders like Cyrus and Romulus.

Christi...
haps not identical, become nearly so in Machiavelli's thinking. As the mysterious comprehensive order, one must always deal with and react to *fortuna*. One never conquers her, but the wise man knows her real character, and this knowledge gives him his special dignity and independence. More important, the conflation Strauss found in Machiavelli's use of words like "chance" and "nature" identifies an altogether new understanding of nature. He "has abandoned the teleological understanding of nature and natural necessity for the alternative understanding. He speaks very frequently of 'accidents' but never of 'substances.' " According to Strauss, then, Machiavelli not only loosed human behavior from the coercive dictates of a god or gods but undermined the classical belief in the teleology of nature, replacing both with a world in which humans must live with "chance understood as a non-teleological necessity which leaves room for choice and prudence and therefore for chance understood as the cause of simply unforeseeable accidents."41

Machiavelli's new modes and orders threatened not only Christianity but also classical political philosophy,41 and Strauss's attention turned to the latter tradition as his analysis moved from religion to morality. Since the classical science of political philosophy "took its bearings by how one ought to live or what one ought to do," classical thinkers worked from paradigms rather than from what is. By contrast, Machiavelli spurned principalities or republics that "exist only in speech" in favor of concrete lessons he could draw from empirical evidence about how people live (Machiavelli devalued theory). In this sense Machiavelli reduced the goal of political philosophy from the goals posited from nature, as understood by Plato and Aristotle, to the goals a reasonable man could expect to achieve given the "nature" of humans discerned from examples of human behavior. Machiavelli argued from particular knowledge to general or theoretical knowledge, thus supplying a normative order attainable by humans.43

Operating from a nonteleological cosmology, Machiavelli redefined virtue to fit an open-ended universe. No longer relative to a fixed moral compass, virtue represents a prudent course one selects to achieve desired ends. In contrast to the Aristotelian construction of virtue as the mean between two excesses, Machiavelli posited a mean between virtue and vice as they are understood conventionally. "Unqualified virtue and unqualified vice are faulty extremes. 
The true way is the way which imitates nature. But nature is variable, and not stable like virtue. The true way consists therefore in the alteration between virtue and vice. The true way consists of knowing when to use cruelty (and other useful vices) and when to act in full accord with conventional canons of goodness and justice. Founders must rely heavily on vice to instill fear, which serves to make people "good," and since founders operate outside a stable social and political structure, which normally provides the necessary means of making people good (laws, punishment, i.e., "justice"), they must act as tyrants to establish the requisite terror. This is vice used prudently. The leader(s) of a well-established political society with highly structured codes of behavior must lean more heavily toward "virtue." In the end Machiavelli dissolved the difference between tyrants and well-run republics since both operate because terror forces selfish people to act in the interest of the "common good," which Machiavelli understood to mean collective selfishness.

Even the self-interest of tyrants is salutary because they experience an attraction to glory, especially immortal glory. Tyrants blessed with "virtue" (i.e., the prudent use of vice and virtue) seek the glory reserved for effective rulers (the highest glory goes to founders). Such tyrants strike a desirable balance (in the context of the common good understood as collective selfishness) between immediate satisfaction of pleasure—which unchecked would make them imprudent—and the pursuit of immortal glory that comes from leading a state well. In acting selfishly the tyrant behaves the same way all humans do. If one understands selfishness to be coequal with evil, then humans are naturally bad. Consequently, "the only natural good is the private good. Since this is so, it is absurd to call men bad with a view to the fact that they are selfish."

Beyond the private good, Machiavelli found it useless to discuss good in any unqualified sense. The common good, which serves the private good of the citizens (though not all of the citizens), requires knowledge about humans (i.e., knowledge about how they are rather than how they ought to be). The person who acquires this knowledge holds the key to the greatest achievement of the common good and in this sense may be understood as a virtuous and good person. Machiavelli, driven by his desire for immortal glory, considered himself the greatest of founders because he knew the truth about human
political and social affairs and so was not a captive of chance in the same way as other founders. Since Strauss credited Machiavelli with inaugurating modernity (new modes and orders), he agreed that Machiavelli was a great founder. We have now the answer to one of the puzzling questions Strauss raised: How could Machiavelli expect to succeed as an unarmed prophet? As a teacher of the truth about human affairs, he established "new modes and orders" through the young readers who learned from him. He secured his glory as the founder, in a way similar to Jesus. The crucial difference lies in Machiavelli's claim to have found a way to free humans from the control of fortuna—and so Machiavelli's glory outshone all others.

The modernity of Strauss's Machiavelli emerges on two uneven fronts: Machiavelli's assaults on religion and on classical philosophy. Movement on both fronts tends toward the same objective, the contraction of the political horizon. Machiavelli would un hinge the political and social order from any suprapolitical context that once shaped and directed earthly concerns. The most disturbing and dangerous front from Strauss's perspective was the threat Machiavelli's teaching posed to the classical philosophical tradition reaching back to Plato. This tradition posited fixed ends (nature) for humans and assumed the more humble position that the good political order depended upon chance, not virtue in the sense that Machiavelli used the word. Moreover, the ancients presumed a natural rift separating the political order from the philosophers. Philosophers must seek an accommodation with the dominant political order, but they must never give up their higher pursuit of truth, which makes them the best of people (the most excellent relative to their natural end, i.e., the "idea" of humans). They must never allow their philosophy to become politicized.

"Machiavelli's philosophizing," wrote Strauss, "remains on the whole within the limits set by the city qua closed to philosophy. Accepting the ends of the demos as beyond appeal, he seeks for the best means conducive to those ends." Philosophy under this paradigm (which includes "science") loses its autonomy and its special dignity as the unencumbered search for excellence and truth. In its new shape science (i.e., philosophy) works on behalf of the political order, unquestioningly serving its ends. Since this new model of human nature unleashes humans from fixed ends, science serves to reshape human nature according to desires expressed through the
political order. The lowering of human aspirations from the excel-
lences of nature has the paradoxical effect of making gods of humans
who posit their own goals and goods. The transformation Strauss ex-
plained in this fashion: "The brain which can transform the politi-
cal matter soon learns to think of the transformation of every matter
of the conquest of nature. The charm of competence bewitches com-
pletely first a few great men and then whole nations and indeed as it
were the whole human race." 46
The connections Strauss made between Machiavelli and the mod-
ers who swallowed him whole emerge with rarely matched Straus-
sian clarity in the concluding pages of Thoughts on Machiavelli.
Humans moved out of a universe of necessity into a realm of godlike
freedom, with their desires positing ends and their evolving science
employed in the discovery or creation of means appropriate to those
ends. In due course Hitler posited the ends, ratified by the support of
the German population, and science and philosophy supplied the
means. What was "the final solution" but a rational method of
achieving a political goal? I go well beyond the claims made by
Strauss in this book, but only to anticipate the larger flow of his ar-
gument as expressed in the totality of his work. Nonetheless, in the
context of his commentary on Machiavelli, the careful reader dis-
covers a message that goes beyond or deeper than (though is not in-
compatible with) Strauss's closing comments.
The matter of the substance of Strauss's teaching requires a
lengthy textual analysis extending not only into Thoughts on Ma-
chiavelli but through the works of Machiavelli, Livy, and a host of
authors with whom Strauss dealt in the footnotes. The careful reader
can nonetheless harbor few doubts that Strauss placed stumbling
blocks designed to force the reader to ask questions about the au-
thor's intention and meaning. One cannot help noting the odd and
elliptical sentences, the lengthy diversions, and the unique combi-
nation of subjects. A few examples relevant to our larger inquiry will
suffice.
One is hard pressed to account for Strauss's glaring cases of impre-
cision. In other contexts he wrote about historicism, positivism,
and other isms with only the barest hint as to the content of these
words. Other scholars similarly employ broad labels as though defi-
nitions are unnecessary. However, few thinkers of Strauss's ability,
much less those possessing his concern for the meanings of words,
write so glibly. Reading *Thoughts on Machiavelli* requires constant attention to the subtle and shifting meanings of words like virtue, vice, God, *fortuna*, chance. By contrast, Strauss wrote of the "classical tradition" as though political philosophy was dormant between Plato and Machiavelli. The complexity and enormous heterogeneity of philosophy in the West before Machiavelli makes Strauss's constant and simplistic use of a premodern paradigm absurd. In this case one cannot dismiss the issue on the grounds of Strauss's ignorance or his sloppiness, for he knew full well the violence he was doing to the tradition. Consequently, Strauss's characterization of Machiavelli's teaching as new and shocking takes on a more problematic character. In the Introduction, we recall, Strauss referred to Machiavelli as a "fallen angel," meaning that Machiavelli perverted the classical tradition and therefore in some sense was derivative. More to the point, Strauss stated that Machiavelli's 'opinions" were not only not new but as "old as political society itself." Strauss resolved this problem (i.e., the newness of opinions as old as society) by emphasizing that Machiavelli expressed these views in his own name rather than through the use of characters. The unsatisfying nature of this explanation leads one to wonder how wide is the chasm that separates Machiavelli from the tradition he ostensibly rejected.

I suspect that Strauss employed the classical-modern dualism in such striking relief for pedagogical reasons and that he found in Machiavelli much greater ambiguity as well as much more confluence with important classical thinkers. Whatever verdict might emerge from a study of this question, one cannot doubt that much of Strauss's concern revolved around the growing inability of more recent moderns to read and understand the great philosophers. The importance of this characterization for understanding Strauss's intentions becomes evident in a very interesting paragraph at the very center of the final and most important chapter (paragraph forty-three out eighty-five). After exploring Machiavelli's teachings with regard to religion and before turning to the issue of morality, Strauss offered a lengthy observation about the string of thinkers subsequent to Machiavelli and the difficulty of understanding them because of the contemporary ideological climate. Concerning Machiavelli and his successors Strauss wrote: "We no longer understand that in spite of great disagreements among those thinkers, they were united by
the fact that they all fought one and the same power—the kingdom of darkness, as Hobbes called it; that fight was more important to them than any merely political issue.48

Strauss emphasized the modern loss of understanding, which reminds one of the primary sin Machiavelli committed, the sin of constricting the horizon. As heirs of that constricted horizon, contemporary moderns have not the proper perspective to understand what Machiavelli knew. Machiavelli could not have been a modern in the same sense that Strauss's contemporaries were, because he had before him the full horizon that he had inherited from the great tradition.49 Strauss introduced a new factor near the end of paragraph forty-three: "The conditions of political thought were radically changed by the French Revolution. To begin with, we cannot help reading earlier thinkers in the light afforded by the changed condition or the novel situation of political thought."50 Hence, the French Revolution produced a historical watershed, one that, as he continued to argue, created a philosophical parochialism that made understanding pre-nineteenth-century thinkers much more difficult. This blade cut two ways for Strauss. On the one hand, modern parochialism blinds thinkers to the genetic link connecting Machiavelli with those who followed him. They follow in his footsteps but do not know it. On the other hand, these thinkers cannot understand fully the thinkers who served as their intellectual ancestors because their own dependence upon Machiavelli prevents them from understanding him. Moderns may be Machiavellian more than disciples of Machiavelli.

The final words of Strauss's book remind the reader that for all the analytical rigor and textual care displayed in his commentary, it was more than a work on Machiavelli. "It would seem that the notion of the beneficence of nature or of the primacy of the Good must be restored by being rethought through a return to the fundamental experiences from which it is derived. For while 'philosophy must beware of wishing to be edifying,' it is of necessity edifying."51 Strauss did not prepare the reader for the first of these sentences, but clearly Strauss believed with Husserl and Heidegger that moderns have lost access to "fundamental experiences." A fuller explication of this subject must wait, but in the second sentence the reader is reminded of the Introduction, in which Strauss announced that the larger purpose of his book was to recover the "permanent problems" that are
coeval with philosophy. To grasp the content of Strauss's teaching one must understand his use of the word "problems" as well as comprehend the relationship between the science of permanent problems (philosophy) and political affairs.

Strauss's interest in problems emerged early in his book. In the Preface he thanked the Walgreen Foundation for the "opportunity to present my observations and reflections on the problem of Machiavelli," and in the Introduction he shifted to "Machiavelli's problem." Nowhere in his book, so far as I can tell, did Strauss ever clarify what he meant by Machiavelli's problem, an odd omission given that Strauss devoted this examination to answering this "problem" and considering that the larger philosophical goal justifying the enterprise was the recovery of permanent problems. One must work from oblique clues.

Strauss established the context for the discussion of Machiavelli's problem by referring to the United States, the only country "founded in explicit opposition to Machiavellian principles." To justify this claim Strauss drew upon the words of Thomas Paine, though not without qualification. Unlike European nations, which owe their foundings to evil doings and their maintenance to tyranny and conquest, the founders of the United States grounded the new nation, to quote Paine, upon "a moral theory, on a system of universal peace, on the indefeasible hereditary Rights of Man." By contrast, Strauss wrote, "contemporary tyranny has its roots in Machiavelli's thought." The next sentence provides an important clue: "At least to the extent that the American reality is inseparable from the American aspiration, one cannot understand Americanism without understanding Machiavellianism which is its opposite." The connection between reality and aspiration illuminates the difference between the United States and "contemporary tyranny." The meaning of the United States, or its idea, stands in sharp contrast to other nations. Machiavellians are not motivated or even responsive to aspirations that posit universal justice, a social, political, and individual good. These serve but to obfuscate the real issues about power and collective self-interest.

Strauss then pointed out in the next paragraph that were Machiavelli to examine the United States, he would expose the dirty deeds behind American success. "He would not hesitate to suggest a mischievous interpretation of the Louisiana Purchase and of the fate of the Red Indians. He would conclude that facts like these are an additional proof for
his contention that there cannot be a great and glorious society without the equivalent of the murder of Remus by his brother Romulus." But for Strauss the germane fact was, not that the United States failed to live up to its aspirations in its official dealings, but that Americans seek always to reaffirm the idea or ideals of their society against a backdrop of practical failure and disappointment. The relationship between political society, with its ever-shifting contingencies, and a society's ideals, only realized fully in speech, remains problematic. But a society with clear ideals reflects a continual attention to theory and therefore escapes the restrictions caused by substituting instrumental reason (e.g., method-driven science) for theoretical questions about the good and the just. In the United States, techne (technique or instrumental reason) had not entirely overtaken theory.

The contrast between Strauss's permanent problems and Machiavelli's problem (or the problem of Machiavelli) becomes reasonably clear. Machiavelli's problem was to define the matter in such a way as to eliminate the permanent tensions-his constriction of the horizon. The permanent problems concern the irremovable tensions between politics and philosophy, between practical matters and theory, between is and ought. By placing philosophy in service to politics and by eliminating theory and the universal good from the political equation, Machiavelli solved a problem at the expense of ignorance concerning the highest excellence open to humans as individuals and as part of a political order. If the line of thinking inaugurated by Machiavelli made gods of humans because they could posit their own direction according to their own lights, it also made them animals because they lost sight of the noble, the excellent, the good.

In the midst of the many confusing arguments between moderns and ancients, we should recall that Strauss used the United States as the example of a non-Machiavellian order. The philosophical foundations of the United States were sufficiently premodern to maintain a tradition of justice and freedom, but in praise Strauss issued an ominous warning.

HEGEL AND THE EGOPHANIC REVOLT

Reading Hegel once provides few comforts but one important reward; the knowledge of having read Hegel-a prerequisite for joining
the ranks of serious pretenders. Reading Hegel, Voegelin, and Voegelin on Hegel means an end to comfort, but not to rewards. No one reads Voegelin and Hegel in tandem to impress the pretenders. One must sense an important existential issue resting at the heart of the conversation to summon the will to work through the thousands of pages of leaden prose. For people who seek to understand the Voegelinian use of "modernity," the effort rewards one with a characterization of modernity's paradigmatic man.

In the last section I discussed two court fools whose worldly advice, laced with irony, they spoke with a mixture of hearty laughs and furtive smiles. Now we must grow serious and examine the work of sober philosophers. Although the differences appear stark, both Machiavelli and Hegel represent two stages of a process of reorienting humans away from older classical and Christian understandings of reality to a modern view that allows for human mastery of their human world and their fate. For Machiavelli, nature no longer served as a paradigm defining human good but as something more akin to putty or clay that humans might shape to fit their desires. Machiavelli revolted against the Platonist-Aristotelian model of political philosophy, with its binding "nature." Hegel revolted against the Christian reliance on a world-transcendent God by bringing God to earth in the mode of becoming and as immanent in history—a history that only God and Hegel can comprehend. One can see already the similarities in Strauss's and Voegelin's critiques of modern hubris.

Indeed, the attacks on modernity launched by these two philosophers display numerous similarities. On the descriptive level the word expresses an unambiguous meaning accepted by both Strauss and Voegelin: modernity is the quest to answer the problems and resolve the tensions once considered permanent or irresolvable. Modems, one might say, are given to "final solutions." Problems once considered structural become projects, and the limitedness that is so integral to a definition of humans emerges in the modern era as a temporary obstacle to overcome. In due course even God must be murdered to make room for human creativity and power, but this descriptive consensus does not extend to the matter of causality. When establishing the reasons or necessary conditions, or even primary (paradigmatic) characters, of the modem revolt (against nature—Strauss; or reality—Voegelin), the stories display sharply contrasting
understandings of the problem. Strauss constructed the problem as a purely philosophical matter. Machiavelli began a new science of philosophy in competition with the Platonic-Aristotelian science. From this root many ideological branches sprang, as did the final rejection of philosophy as a science.

For Voegelin modernity represented the most recent and most virulent manifestation of a recurrent spiritual disease (pneumapathology). The source or cause, consequently, was not ideational. Political ideas are crystallizations of experiences of order, and the ideas form a conceptual cover that protects their experiential sources. (Here I am discussing ideological constructions. The people who engage in a proper science of order produce symbols of their experience designed to express experiences that cannot be articulated on the conceptual level. These symbols are transparent to the experiences that engendered them.) A proper diagnosis requires that one penetrate to the spiritual source of a disorder. Voegelin did not mean, however, that all manifestations of spiritual disorder are in all important respects identical or even similar. Modernity developed in a historical context that gave it a unique-and uniquely dangerous-character. To understand Voegelin's use of the word "modernity" requires that one understand the generic qualities of a more or less ubiquitous disease and then relate the conditions that made these pathological qualities socially dominant.

Because Voegelin emphasized an underlying pathology to modem movements, it makes sense that he would find little hope for remedy in addressing the symptoms. Only by returning to the true science of order could people hope for renewal. This answer has its problems since one cannot expect the sick to heal themselves, because the very nature of their disease is a blindness to the disease. With Voegelin, hope rested, finally, with the emergence of a new Moses, or a new Plato, or a new Jesus. The "spirit" must select a carrier for its message. Voegelin could find some hope in noting that each of those spiritually gifted men emerged during periods of severe social disorder.

Order emerges out of resistance to disorder. In a context of resistance Plato produced the most penetrating analysis of this condition in reaction to the disordered souls of the sophists. As lovers of opinion rather than of wisdom, sophists had lost sight of the universal context of human existence. The philosopher, on the other hand, "is
the man who lives in partnership with what is common to all men, that is, with the divine nous or reason that transcends them all. Through participation in what is common, men become a community.... The philosopher who orders his own life, as well as his relations to his fellow-men, by this experience of the common, is in fact every man who has achieved full actualization of his manhood." 55

The sophist does not recognize this part of reality and must order life with "the resources of empirical, immanent man, without recourse to transcendent orientation. 1156 The immanent becomes the encompassing reality, making humans rather than God the measure of things.

The sophist must create an order rather than attune to an existing order. This state of affairs requires imaginative constructions and an active resistance to those facts that challenge one's construction. The modern equivalent of the sophist is the intellectual, a label of opprobrium for conservatives. In one brief description Voegelin displayed the deformed thinking of an intellectual. Condorcet, the eighteenth-century French intellectual, inferred from available statistics that life expectancy would go up indefinitely on the grounds that acquired characteristics could be inherited. Condorcet's expectations of "practical immortality" were not inconsistent with the science of the day, yet this extrapolation from the evidence would be impossible for someone who participated fully in human reality. Voegelin's analysis:

We know that the speculation is ridiculous; but we know it only because we know about our human finiteness through experience of transcendence. If we do not accept the reality of the rhythm of life and death; if we do not experience death, as Socrates and Plato so strongly did, as an essential ordering, cathartic force within our lives; if we do not experience that without death life makes no sense; then the speculation of Condorcet is not ridiculous at all. And that is what makes this type of dreaming so dangerous. On the assumptions of the dreamer, we have no argument against him. If essential sectors of reality are declared to be non-existent, the dreamer is free to develop, with rigid logic(all) consistency, the most atrocious nonsense on the basis of his fragmentary reality.57
The example of a single intellectual's dreaming begins to open up the matter by identifying the restricted ontological horizon from which moderns operate. What is not as clear from this example is the experience that engenders ideologies. A felt tension and a profound anxiety, usually expressed as a sort of alienation, provided the experiential source for modernity. Yet Voegelin associated the discovery of the tension between divine and mundane with the great spiritual "leaps in being" of Moses, Plato, and Paul. Nonetheless, a sense of alienation depends first upon the differentiation of the poles of reality. Plato, for instance, emphasized the in-betweenness of human existence, but he did not attempt to resolve this inherent tension. Only the person whose spiritual stamina is insufficient to withstand the tension, and whose intellectual capacity is sufficient to understand it, is capable of producing a second reality. The spiritual disorder of modernity became possible, therefore, only after a spiritual advance.

Voegelin's historical account of this process is extensive, and only the broad outline of this story is possible here. The best starting place is the ecumenic age, which extended from the rise of Persia to the fall of the Roman Empire. The historical events of this era (what Voegelin liked to call the pragmatic events, which has a resonance with Augustine's distinction between profane and sacred history) shook old conceptions of humanity and forced the adoption of new ones. An "ecume" is a multicivilizational empire created by conquest and maintained by military power. Empires are not societies, for their order is imposed rather than emerging from the existentially meaningful symbols of the divine cosmos. The older cosmological societies destroyed by the empires once understood themselves to be analogues to the cosmic order, or cosmions, and the orderly cosmos that operated cyclically, according to the seasons, was inhabited by a pantheon of gods whose actions secured the ongoing existence of the society in a ceaseless pattern of life, death, and rebirth. A delicate economy secured the social order, with rituals and other rites marking the changes and preventing the always changing order from slipping into nothingness (rituals might be understood as measures to prevent change, to create stasis). The members of cosmological societies understood their lives individually and collectively to have meaning as a part of this enduring process in which the indices of divine and immanent blurred. Empires broke
the cosmological symbolism by destroying the cyclical pattern and
by placing ethnic societies in a political and social order that did not
represent the experiences of reality that supply the meaningful sym-
 bols of that order.

The complex results that sprang from the new conditions of the
ecumenic age are too rich to explore here, and I instead focus on the
most important preconditions for the modern revolt against reality.
Voegelin explored with brilliant insight the development of history
as a mode of existence. The cyclical model of existence common to
cosmological societies gave way to an understanding that humans
live in history. Experiences that create a "before and after" realiza-
tion force a "leap in being," a deeper understanding of the structure
of reality. In this case the leap in being destroyed the symbolization
of endless cycles by discovering the historical mode of human exis-
tence. Still, history was not yet conceived of as an object, a totality.
One might speak of the history of something, but not of History as a
knowable object about which one might make propositions regard-
ing "its" meaning. The tremendous expansion of knowledge of
other nations or other civilizations helped forge in this period a con-
cept of universal humanity while calling into question the local
gods. Humans form a single race or species and live under one God
(the Christian tale of history that includes the Fall and redemption
provides the best example of this universalizing process). During the
ecumenic age the great universal religions arose, effectively elimi-
nating the plentiful gods who had once cohabited the cosmos with
humans. These religions (especially Christianity) stripped the heav-
ens of their capricious and colorful gods. Although the cosmos no
longer contained the gods, humans nonetheless recognized the di-
vine source of their existence, that their lives are bounded by both
the mundane and the divine. The Christian God represented the
mysterious ground of existence beyond the cosmos.38

The unchangeable structure of human consciousness became in-
creasingly differentiated during the ecumenic age, and the symbols
that emerged from these new insights into human nature effectively
expressed the tensions of human existence. Voegelin especially fa-
vored the Platonic word metaxy, meaning betweenness, to capture
this truth. Humans live in the tension between an experienced di-
vine pole and the pole of worldly or mundane life. Or, in other
words, humans recognize that they occupy a plane of experiences
that extends from the "pole" of worldly or sensual experiences to the "pole" of divine or numinous experiences. Voegelin and Plato expressed this betweenness in many ways (between the one and the many, the whole and the part, the timeless and the historical), each exposing elements in the unchangeable structure of human existence. Humans necessarily experience alienation because they feel the attraction of the divine, whole, timeless pole of existence while they live in the mundane, partial, and historical cosmos. Despite the pull toward the divine pole of our existence, human life is constituted in the tensional field between the two heuristically understood poles of existence. To ignore or attempt to eliminate one of the poles is a futile attempt to escape one's humanity.

All of these developments Voegelin understood to be important insights into the structure of the reality in which humans have their being. But these very insights—which were nothing more than the differentiation of the component parts of the experienced reality of the earlier cosmological societies—tended to accentuate the tensional nature of human existence, heightening the alienation experienced in the soul of the individual. Once one recognizes the tensional attraction toward transcending the very structure of existence and this attraction toward transcendence is itself part of the structure of existence, the desire to escape earthly alienation becomes more powerful, and the threat to the balance of consciousness symbolized by the metaxy becomes more real. Christianity heightened the tension with a further differentiation and thus called for an extra measure of spiritual stamina. By highlighting earthly alienation and by introducing a heightened sense of chiliastic expectation, Christianity made this world less attractive. As the accent fell on humans as heirs or sons of God, the world seemed more of a prison from which one sought release.

The Christian religion altered human understanding in at least two very important respects. First, by emptying the cosmos of immanent divinity, Christians gave the world completely over to humans as their special domain. Second, Paul's vision of the resurrected led him to expect an imminent end of history with the early return of Jesus. Consequently, Paul was the first important figure in Western history to develop a philosophy of history in terms of identifying the meaning of history. He traced its beginning from Adam, and its imminent conclusion was to be Jesus's second coming.
which would lead to a transfiguration of all God's people. Paul introduced two related concepts into Western thought: history has a meaning with a clear and identifiable teleology and human alienation would soon end with the eschaton (or end times). Although Paul was wrong about Jesus's speedy return, he introduced an expectation of the eschaton (or the end of History) that has become a recurring theme in Western thought. Moreover, once this world became the temporary home of alienated souls, the soul became unbalanced in two distinct ways. First, the emphasis upon the other world deemphasized human reality by denying the proper place of the world, and when this existential condition became secularized, alienation became a condition in need of immanent elimination. As the heavenly hereafter lost its appeal, in other words, humans sought to create a heaven on earth.

The expectations spawned by Paul (which he later deemphasized) but not fulfilled during his lifetime sent many people who followed him in search of the apodictic knowledge that Paul had claimed, and that need shifted Christianity as a historical movement off its existential foundation of faith. In an especially lucid passage, Voegelin indicated the meaning and importance of Christian faith and the difficulties it imposed upon the believer:

Uncertainty is the very essence of Christianity. The feeling of security in a "world full of gods" is lost with the gods themselves; when the world is de-divinized, communication with the world-transcendent God is reduced to the tenuous bond of faith, in the sense of Heb. 11:1, as the substance of things hoped for and the proof of things unseen. The bond is tenuous, indeed, and it may snap easily. The life of the soul in openness toward God, the waiting, the periods of aridity and dulness, guilt and despondency, contrition and repentance, forsakenness and hope against hope, the silent stirrings of love and grace, the very lightness of this fabric may prove too heavy a burden for men who lust for massively possessive experience.

The anxiety caused by the uncertainty of faith leads people in search of knowledge (gnosis). The existential heart of the modern revolt is made up of this anxiety and the attempt to provide apodictic knowledge about those things humans can only see dimly. Thus, the great
insight of Christianity about the world-transcendent God whom humans can know only through faith proved too heavy a burden for most people to bear.

From the beginning, the Christian church struggled to balance the expectations of transformation and the realizations of earthly existence. Augustine formulated the orthodox position with the greatest success, and he resolved the problem of history inspired by Paul's metastatic expectation by making the post-Resurrection era a time of waiting. The world, moreover, became the temporary home for the invisible church trapped in an irredeemable world, as Augustine balanced the apocalyptic expectations against an earthly existence that could not be perfected. But even Augustine's masterful construction could not eliminate the heightened sense of alienation, and numerous attempts to escape the taint of corrupted earth threatened to unbalance the Augustinian construction. However, the more dangerous manifestations of these experiences of alienation would take the form of earthly perfectionism as humans tried to turn the prison into a paradise.

For the earthly paradise to become real moderns had to replace Augustine's construction of history with one that allows for, or inherently requires, a transformed world. In the twelfth century Joachim of Flora created a speculative construction of history that would become paradigmatic for modern ideologues. History moves progressively through discrete stages or eras, and these eras, for Joachim, corresponded with the three persons of the Trinity. The first stage of history was the age of the Father; the incarnation of Jesus inaugurated the second, more advanced age; and Joachim speculated that he was living at the cusp of the final age, the age of the Holy Spirit. History moved toward ever-greater godlikeness, or freedom, as God was slowly perfecting humans. Joachim had discovered the structure of this process.

Each age opened with three important figures, two precursors and the leader of the age (Abraham was the first spiritual leader, followed by Jesus). Based upon Joachim's calculations, he expected the leader of the third age to appear by 1260. This final age of spiritual maturity would be the age of the monk and be characterized by complete autonomy made possible by spiritual maturity. History had progressed from the law, to a mediated grace, to the anticipated autonomy of the third age. Belief in the evolving human was a necessary prerequi-
site for all such constructions of history, because only when a belief in human perfection becomes existentially viable can the past be shaped into progressive phases leading inexorably to the felicity of the near future. Moreover, only the person who believes himself to be sufficiently mature to occupy this final stage has the ability to recognize that history leads directly to himself as the paradigmatic last man.

Voegelin emphasized that Joachim constructed the "aggregate of symbols which govern the intellectualist interpretation of politics and history to this day." 62 These "symbols" are four in number. First, the three stages of history, with varying degrees of precision, became crucial components in the thought of Turgot, Comte, Hegel, Marx, and Hitler. Second, Joachim emphasized the spiritual leader, which also became part of the modern understanding of history. Third, the new age requires preparation in the form of prophets or precursors, and the ideologues themselves take on this role. The fourth symbol is the final freedom of the third realm in which all tensions will be absorbed and the sources of corruption eliminated. These four symbols form the primary ideological resources of the modern age, though various ideologues have placed different emphases on each.

Joachim replaced the mystery of existence with unquestioned knowledge about human destiny, and he resolved the tension between a fallen world and a transcendent paradise by making history the process through which humans reach their final destination in an immanent eschaton—a worldly paradise. Also important was the sense of living in the final moments of history. The profound and as yet unresolved alienation he and others experienced only sharpened their desire to bring about the final transformation.

From this obscure beginning, Voegelin emphasized the "immanentization" of the process of history. Later ideologues would create a history with no otherworldly eschaton, and they would even begin to equate human knowledge with the power necessary to bring the process of history to a desired but worldly conclusion. All of these developments issued from the logic of a sick soul confronted with knee-knocking uncertainty. When the world appears suddenly imbalanced and faith supplies only hope based upon an apperception of a normative order, people lacking spiritual guts will close their eyes and dream of a better reality. Closed to a world that does not fit their
expectations, these dreamers must live closed to reality, and one final need makes them especially dangerous. In order to validate their dream reality, they must draw others (by persuasion or force) into the dream by characterizing the world as being divided between the elect and the enemy. The stakes are too high to tolerate the unenlightened. Of the many independent but existentially related lines of development, there is space here for a quick glance at only a few of the more important ones.

Voegelin placed much of the burden for later ideological developments upon Calvin and his followers (even extending this indictment to all parts of the Reformation), which may help account for Voegelin's appeal among Catholic scholars. In a letter to Leo Strauss, Voegelin tried to explain his position.

If we follow the logic of the problem (that is, immanentization) to its beginning, then I would see in orthodox Protestantism already the start of immanentization. Calvin flirts with the problem in the Institutes, where his concern for the certitudo salutis through the unequivocal "call" is quite clearly a Gnostic attempt to gain certitude of salvation, which is a bit more certain than orthodox cognitio fidei. Luther vacillates, but his hatred of the ides caritate formata, his wild efforts to take love out of faith, and to make deliberate knowledge into its substance, seems to me to lead in the same direction.63

Out of the messy history of the Reformation, Voegelin focused upon the English Puritans as models of modern gnosticism (borrowing too heavily for his characterization from Richard Hooker, an Anglican foe and a poor judge of Puritans). Calvin and the Puritans sought a greater certainty of salvation, and in order to achieve this psychological advantage, they had to doctrinalize the Bible. Since all their claims would ultimately be tested against the biblical text, they had to establish a standardized interpretation that brought ideological order to the rich work. Calvin accomplished this task with his Institutes, which Voegelin likened to the Encyclopédie Francaise produced by the philosophes. Both works presented the believer with the essential knowledge for interpretation) for a proper life. Once the Puritans viewed themselves as the chosen people of God (the elect), possessing the only proper reading of God's word and certain knowl-
edge about their own salvation, they became God's agents on earth. Consequently, their knowledge, their discipline, in the words of Richard Hooker as cited by Voegelin, "must be received although the world by receiving it should be clean turned upside down; herein Heth the greatest danger of all." The Puritan possession of spiritual knowledge necessitated a form of imperialism and dogmatism. Oddly, Voegelin tended to refute standard interpretations of texts by claiming that his reading had penetrated to the experiences that had engendered the story. Perhaps Voegelin and Calvin had more in common than either would recognize.

The Puritan episode took place in a historical field crowded with claims to certain knowledge. Voegelin detected a doctrinalization of the Bible in the Middle Ages, making the symbols of numinous experience, meant to be transparent to the experience, into concepts about which competing parties might argue, fight, even kill. Even with the great Thomas Aquinas, Voegelin found the separation between natural reason and revelation to be a major step toward losing the experiences of the Bible, and thereby their truth. Even though a certain amount of concretizing is necessary to transmit the truths contained in the experiences to ever-larger and less educated populations, the reductionism of the late Middle Ages followed by the Reformation was a final capitulation to the gnostic spirit of reducing every sort of knowledge to "ideas." This hypostatization, especially concerning a text as rich as the Bible, leads to innumerable conflicts. In an environment in which certainty was prized above all else, and where the future paradise depended upon the promulgation of the right ideas, such ideological pluralism would naturally produce violence and disorder. The sixteenth century was nothing if not disordered.

For much of the modern age, thinkers have sought to find a common ground that would transcend the bloody differences of opinions. Descartes's attempt was only one of a number of such struggles to find a new ordering truth, and at first all such efforts were Christian. Descartes and Newton, for instance, both sought to confirm their faith through immanent reason. In due course the Christian objective would disappear, but not the faith that immanent reason was the compass that would lead humans to the new promised land.

Thomas Hobbes, according to Voegelin, was one of the last great Christian philosophers. "Hobbes's intention," wrote Voegelin, was
to establish "Christianity (understood as identical in substance with the law of nature) as an English theologia civilis." Hobbes argued, for all his Christian faith, from natural science, which supplied, he thought, the foundations of civil thought. Reason drawn from natural science provided no *summum bonum* around which to organize a society (at least not modern society with its competing factions). Instead of a greatest good, Hobbes introduced the *summum malum*, the fear of death, as the controlling factor. By changing the orientation from the greatest good to the greatest fear, Hobbes had performed an "ontological reduction," meaning that he had lowered the controlling element from the human spirit attuned to the transcendental order to a crude self-interest (eventually this ontological reduction would culminate in the sexual drives of Freudian thought). Moreover, Hobbes made order a product of agreement (contrast) rather than a common bond. "The binding force of specific agreement," Voegelin argued, "derives from the ontological pre-existent common bond: one cannot derive the common bond from agreement.... It is the typical doxa of an immanentist intellectual who, since he has no experience of the transcendental sources of order, must let the phenomenon of order originate in actions of individuals who want to avoid the disadvantages of disorder." Voegelin reminded the reader that these developments issued from diseased souls.

Nonetheless, the contract theory of Hobbes appears quite distant from Marx's proletarian revolution or Hitler's Third Reich. The transformation took place in the eighteenth century-the century of Enlightenment-and by the nineteenth century, with Hegel, Comte, Marx, and others, the full fury of modern thinking was unleashed as ideological plans for world transformation. Much like the back edge of a hurricane, the twentieth century would absorb the full blow of this ideological madness. The historical connections that tie these phenomena together run beneath the ideational constructs. John Hallowell aptly stated the thrust of Voegelin's argument: "What many regard as the political crisis of our times is shown to be a deeply rooted spiritual crisis that challenges the very substance of our humanity.

Voegelin published a portion of his *History of Political Ideas* under the title *From Enlightenment to Revolution*, his most extensive analysis of the spiritual roots of modernity. A rough chronology
structures the book, leading from the mild and tolerant Voltaire to Karl Marx's "intellectual swindle" (from Enlightenment to revolution). A necessary precondition for this transformation was the slow attenuation of Christianity as the source of social and political order. By Voltaire's time Christianity had already divided into warring camps, each dedicated to some doctrinal reading of the Bible. The richly textured stories of the Bible had lost their luminosity, and the images and myths had become objectified, severing the symbol from the experience of truth and thereby cutting the power of the Bible to order the individual soul. Although many of the forms and habits of Christianity maintained some hold upon thinkers, even these residual and salutary effects of Christianity would fade.

For Voltaire, much like Newton, whom he much admired and imitated, the symbols of Christian life had grown opaque. He did not abandon the symbols completely, but submitted them to rational simplification, psychological interpretation and utilitarian justification. The transformation was nonetheless decisive. The overarching drama of salvation that had structured Christians' understanding of themselves in relation to the whole no longer had meaning because he had rationalized away the spiritual dimension. As a consequence Voltaire inverted Christianity and history, making the former a part of the latter rather than history serving as the temporal dimension of the Christian tale. Still, Voltaire retained the Christian emphasis upon history as a universal and meaningful process, only now the meaning was purely "intramundane."

Once Voltaire had divested history of its transcendental dimension he had the profoundly difficult task of constructing a meaningful course out of the empirical evidence—by then swollen with new information about Eastern civilizations. The skein of meanings running through history frustrates any honest attempt to declare the meaning (singular and universal) of history (singular) when the only reference is the phenomenal realm. Voltaire stepped around this difficulty by declaring a meaning and then constructing the historical evidence to support it (moving from the present to the past). Yet even as Voltaire changed the frame of reference to the mundane realm, Voegelin insisted that he did not jettison religion: Voltaire's history "serves as the expression of a new intraworldly religiousness."

The historicizing of Christianity was only part of the emerging
new religion. Because the Christian experience of faith and knowledge had disappeared (at the level of socially relevant experiences), and with it the force of order, Enlightenment thinkers turned to the most effective sort of knowledge-scientific knowledge. The new standard for knowledge made the personal god of Christianity untenable but allowed room for the distant god of deism. "The existence of God is the object of an hypothesis with a high degree of probability," wrote Voegelin, but a hypothetical god creates problems in terms of deciding the good. Voltaire's new worldly religion required that ethics-social and personal-be defined according to immanent reason (in contrast to the Platonic nous). Whereas the Platonic-Christian notions of ethics sprang from the well-ordered soul, Voltaire could not make sense of virtue in a personal sense but only in relation to "that which is useful to society."

A restricted ontological horizon means that social utility will take on a materialistic or even an animalistic cast. Voegelin saw great significance in this early form of utilitarianism. All of the evils of the Reign of Terror, the gulag, and Dachau seemed bound up in the ontological reduction of the Enlightenment. He wrote that the "identification of the good with the socially useful foreshadows the compulsory goodness of the social planner as well as the idea of revolutionary justice, with its assumption that right is what serves the proletariat, the nation or the chosen race. Social utility is reduced to the material needs and comforts that science has proved so capable of supplying. So defined, the good places an exaggerated emphasis upon technological advancement-a characteristic common to all the ideologies: Marxism, National Socialism, and liberal progressivism.

The relative harmlessness of Voltaire, who never claimed the special, final knowledge of a Comte or Marx, camouflaged the damage he inflicted on Western civilization. He not only helped introduce (and here Voegelin discussed Voltaire as much as an example as for his creativity or direct influence) the new worldly religion of social utility that destroyed the Christian transcendental orientation and the Christian anthropology or view of human nature, but he created a style of thinking that encouraged irresponsibility. A willingness to speak on any subject whether he was grounded in the subject or not (the forerunner of the pundit), a superficiality protected by an air of authority, a sophomoric delight in detracting from the thought of
better minds, a belief that "irresponsibility of thought is synony-
mous with freedom of thought" - in all these ways Voltaire "has
done more than anybody else to make the darkness of enlightened
reason descend on the Western world.  

The eclipse of the transcendent pole of human experience (the
process of immanentization) served, as we have seen throughout this
section, as Voegelin's point of departure for understanding modern
ideologies. The new, limited perspective requires new forms of social
and political order like the one developed by Hobbes. Few Enlighten-
ment thinkers would equal the careful and subtle arguments made
by Hobbes, rendering their answers to the problem increasingly
questionable on a theoretical or philosophical level. John Locke, for
instance, served as the target of some of Voegelin's harshest criti-
cism. Much like Voltaire, Locke's "habits of philosophizing" did
more damage than his arguments, and Locke's penchant for exposing
to criticism some philosophical position without penetrating to the
issue resting beneath the particular argument especially galled
Voegelin. Moreover, Locke tended to argue against abstractions,
pressing some argument to its absurd conclusion, though he names
no person who makes that argument.76 This "style of speculation"
resulted in a theoretical desert that allowed others-even encouraged
them-to concoct the most noxious claims out of their perverted
but fecund imaginations. Helvetius was one such character who oc-
cupied this philosophical wasteland, drew suspect conclusions from
the thought of Locke, and created a speculative order.

Voegelin characterized Helvetius as standing between Locke and
Bentham, and with Helvetius, the process of salvation became fully
secularized. He constructed his perfectionist dream upon an anthro-
po...
Because this view makes the disordered soul normative, order becomes "intimately connected with the ... instrumentalization of man. Man is no longer an entity that has its existential center within itself; he has become a mechanism of pleasure, pain and passions which can be harnessed by another man, the 'legislator,' for purposes of his own.... Only when the spiritual center of man through which man is open to the transcendental realissimum, is destroyed can the disorderly aggregate of passions be used as an instrument by the legislator." 77 Once the transformation into the closed horizon of immanentist reason is complete and education becomes the shaping of the socially useful member, the spiritual source of order is all but lost—the transcendental ground of existence hidden behind a second reality.

Voegelin emphasized that this dream calls, not for the abolition of religious life, but the transfer of religious symbols into an immanent religion. The political religions, as Voegelin called them, become the primary replacement for Christianity in the modern world. They externalize the personal journey of the individual soul. Salvation is no longer personal and individual but social or even tribal. By the nineteenth century the spiritual state of the West had so deteriorated that the spiritually deficient (who were becoming increasingly powerful in a de-Christianized civilization) had only two real choices: they could embrace a relativism, or they could claim to have saving knowledge that will usher in paradise. Voegelin traced the second of these options through the ideological madness of the twentieth century. Strauss focused upon the threat of relativism.

The philosophical climate of the nineteenth century meant that people seeking escape from the spiritual deformation of the age had little support or means of influence. They were largely trapped by the immanentist language of their time and by the general reduction of all thought to ideas. The socially effective intellectuals of the nineteenth century were those who discovered the meaning of history and offered themselves as prophets, or even as saviors. They constructed an intellectual iron curtain around this world and mustered immanent reason as the defense of and instrument for the transformation of humans and human society. The enlightened dreams of intellectuals culminated in an unprecedented orgy of power with visions of human potential hitched to revolutionary passion. A revolutionary intellectual cannot afford doubt nor suffer
those who stand in the way of the fulfillment of human potential. Communication ceases, and the curtain joins on the far side, trapping all those inside.

We have made our way to the age of egophanic revolt—the age of Comte, Hegel, French philosophes, and Marx. Voegelin argued that the human attempt to transform the world and human nature reached its most obsessive and libidinous depths in the nineteenth century, and perhaps with Comte the fusion of the Enlightenment dreams reached its greatest synthesis. With him the religiousness of ideological thought had been thoroughly de-Christianized and the locus of human potential had centered most unquestionably in the political realm. Comte joined together the prestige of science with the need for a new ordering principle, and his positivistic sociology would replace the worn-out superstitions of Christianity as the new religion and guide toward perfection. Along with Condorcet, the vision had grown to universal proportions. The entire human race became a single tribe.

Voegelin stressed the religiousness of Comte's system. God was dead, but divinity was not exhausted. The experience of divine reality had simply been absorbed into the closed mundane system, divinizing the human species: "Man" will save himself. The earth has become the tribal habitat for "mankind." The phenomenal world, once so mysterious and dangerous, was fast giving up its secrets, and the total domination of humans over their home appeared a tantalizing prospect. Total power intoxicated Comte.

The worship of human power and dignity had already become a part of concrete human affairs during the French Revolution. The transformation of humans (i.e., human nature) that Enlightenment figures had thought of as a process of education leading to enlightened nations (or even world tribe) no longer satisfied people who lusted for a new world order. Revolution, Voegelin further argued, became the means rather than the result of change. Remove the corrupting institutions and state of affairs, and the intellectuals would midwife the birth of a new human—chaste and good and, above all, malleable. This shift in emphasis to revolution as the means of transformation was expected most strongly by Karl Marx.

The pressure felt by other intellectuals to articulate the objective, the paradise, was all but absent in Marx. In an elusive way the end of history was freedom. But freedom to do what? The great emphasis
Marx placed upon the abolition of private property emphasizes his reluctance to examine the final objective of revolution, since the stipulated goal must be understood as leading to some greater goal. Marx's shift later in his career to the practical preparation of revolution absolved him of the duty to articulate the objective. "The immenseness of the preparatory work in the realm of necessity," Voegelin wrote concerning Marx, "completely overshadowed the eschatological experience which had motivated the revolutionary vision as well as the ultimate purpose of the revolution, that is the realization of the realm of freedom." The greater emphasis upon revolution meant the attenuation of Marx's vision, leaving the field open for those who came after to take up Marx's revolutionary fervor and its theoretical justification without having to share his vision of freedom.

The triumph of the will to power made the elusive but real realm of substance too elusive for intellectuals. They sought to narrow human existence to that which they could control, to reduce humans to self-interest, economic interest, sexual drives, or some other manageable and calculable characteristic. Voegelin emphasized that the spiritual heart of modernity was the nexus of power, control, and immanentization. But the true depth of the spiritual disease was represented by one of the age's most brilliant thinkers, as Hegel's system far surpassed all others with regard to its theoretical penetration and philosophical acumen. Because Hegel did not escape the desire to collapse divinity into himself, and to lead all of history to his own revelation, he represented the paradigmatic modern for Voegelin. This status came to Hegel because his spiritual disease was so advanced that even his extensive philosophical knowledge and his brilliance as a philosopher could not keep him from deicide. The will to power overwhelmed or hid the tensional nature of human existence, and Hegel sought to resolve the tensions, which is to say, he sought to transcend the human condition.

My examination of Hegel will center on Voegelin's lengthy essay "On Hegel: A Study in Sorcery." The use of sorcery in the title introduces the magical component of modernity. All matme expressions of modern eschatology, Voegelin believed, include an intellectual sleight of hand. Moreover, gnostics expect to achieve a transformed humanity through magic. Voegelin became more convinced during the latter part of his life that a belief in the magical ability I"metas-
taxis" was Voegelin's word) to change reality animated all gnostic thinkers, especially those who emphasized revolution. A sorcerer or a magician is a fraud or a swindler; such people perform tricks, not magic. One might think of Hegel as a magician and Voegelin as the one who revealed his tricks.

Despite Hegel's sorcery, Voegelin considered him a profound thinker. Indeed, his very brilliance makes him of special interest in explaining the modern phenomenon. Voegelin must explain how so superior a thinker could deform reality, and early in the essay he characterized Hegel as a divided self, a tortured soul. Hegel, wrote Voegelin, "is a sensitive philosopher and spiritualist, a noetically and pneumatically competent critic of the age, an intellectual force of the first rank, and yet, he cannot quite gain the stature of his true self as a man under God. From the darkness of this existential deficiency, then, rises the libido dominandi and forces him into the imaginative construction of a false self as the messias of the new age." Hegel the angel and Hegel the demon, locked in the same soul, fight for supremacy. Voegelin considered Hegel to be an effective critic of his age—even more, to have fully realized the disorder of his time. Hegel's inability to "achieve the truth of his own existence" transmogrified his efforts to solve the disorder into a further example of the disorder.

The deficiency of Hegel's soul might best be understood as the inability to live in the metaxy ("betweenness"). The anxiety of existence so overwhelmed him that he had to resolve the antinomies that constitute human existence, which is to say that he sought an end to human alienation. But since no person can step out of reality—no human can choose to become a god, or in any way alter his nature—Hegel must "eclipse" reality and construct a "second reality." His brilliant and grand scheme to resolve the antinomies of reality through an inherent logic in being gave Hegel his new reality. But the depth of Hegel's spiritual disease required more of him than philosophy. "Hence, in order to accommodate a libido dominandi that cannot be fulfilled by a philosopher's existence, philosophy must be dressed up as 'religion.' " Voegelin believed that Hegel considered himself the new Christ, the locus of a spiritual energy that inaugurates a new age. Hegel did transform philosophy into something new. In the age of Hegel, the philosopher would no longer limit himself to the search for wisdom (which is the chastened
search of the one who recognizes human limitation) but would search for truth. Hegel’s pursuit was further blessed with the "new symbol 'science' which began, in the wake of Newton, to acquire its peculiar modern magic."^12

Voegelin’s reading of Hegel takes a far more radical tone than most. He rejected or sometimes just dismissed as too vague the characterizations of Hegel as an Enlightenment philosopher, or a Christian (Protestant) philosopher, or a conservative philosopher. Voegelin accepted Hegel’s own designation as the philosopher of the French Revolution,^8 and even though the meaning of the label is elusive, it does mark Hegel as a revolutionary. One must always keep in mind Voegelin’s characterization of Hegel as a soul lusting for power. The existential imperative controlled the shape of Hegel’s work, and in some way Hegel had to make his philosophy an integral part of the evolving process of history. The famous example of Hegel’s watching Napoleon as he passed through Hegel’s town becomes the occasion for intense jealousy when viewed from Voegelin’s portrayal of Hegel’s psychology. To understand Voegelin’s interpretation of Hegel we should examine a key passage from Hegel and Voegelin’s reading of it.

Every single man is but a blind link in the chain of absolute necessity by which the world builds itself forth (sich fortbildet). The single man can elevate himself to dominance (Herrschaft) over an appreciable length of this chain only if he knows the direction in which the great necessity wants to move and if he learns from this knowledge to pronounce the magic words (die Zauberworte) that will evoke its shape (Gestalt).^5

Voegelin placed great significance on this quotation, for it reveals Hegel’s "resentment" as well as providing the k\textsubscript{ey} insight into "modern existence." Voegelin emphasized the utter inconsequential nature of humans, what Voegelin called a "blind particle." From this state of essential nothingness, the individual human (the single person) provides himself with knowledge—the blind particle gives itself sight. More obvious, and very much a part of Voegelin’s larger characterization of modernity, was Hegel’s emphasis upon what one might call "redemptive knowledge." If the single man can learn the direction of necessity, he "can elevate himself to dominance"—
knowledge and dominance—the source and the objective of modernity. Finally, one notes the reference to "magic words" that will evoke the shape of the great necessity. Voegelin wrote: "The imaginative project of history falls in its place in the pattern of modern existence as the conjurer's instrument of power." 1186

Hegel's spiritual condition served as the focal point of Voegelin's analysis because it exposed the motivation for the "system." Textual analysis of Hegel's Phenomenology is conspicuously scant in Voegelin's scholarly corpus; indeed, he developed most of his conclusions about the purpose behind Hegel's work from other works. Nonetheless, having called Hegel a sorcerer, Voegelin had to expose his tricks, and a few examples will help us understand what Voegelin meant. He labeled Hegel's philosophy of history a "system," which suggests a kind of internal and circular logic. Once inside—that is, once one accepts the premises—one is trapped. Part of the trick for Hegel was to employ standard symbols and invest them with new meanings. More important to Hegel's game was a circularity of language. After describing a paragraph from the Phenomenology Voegelin characterized it this way:

Though the paragraph begins with the Incarnation of God in Christ and ends with self-consciousness that operates its own transfiguration, by writing the Phaenomenologie, Hegel has talked, with the appearance of perfect innocence, about nothing but the Wesen, that is Geist, about the Geist that is Selbstbewusstsein, and about the Selbstbewusstsein that is the Wesen of the Geist. The game is rigged; you can't win once you let yourself be sucked into accepting Hegel's language. 87

Hegel took the precaution of protecting himself by affirming Christian orthodoxy and even employing doctrinal language in his works. But these moves do not change the self-deification that Voegelin found logically entailed in Hegel's philosophy. The progressive development of Consciousness—which Hegel equated with absolute reality—that forms the core of Hegel's story leads to Consciousness as absolute knowledge. The final transformation that culminates in the fully realized Consciousness is the development from religion inaugurated by Jesus) to philosophy. This final age (the third age) is the age of Hegel. Hegel has replaced Jesus by bring-
ing the fullest revelation; once again spirit and flesh have become one.

The strange coupling of Paul and Hegel in the same chapter of Voegelin's *The Ecumenic Age* now makes some sense. Both Paul's vision of the resurrected and Hegel's philosophy of history express the same experience of "the movement of reality beyond its structure." The erotic pull toward the divine pole of existence is a permanent part of human existence, but it is a part that one experiences as seeking to transcend this structure. This is the source of human alienation. Plato understood the movement toward transcending reality as being a constituent part of reality and recognized that all of these moves take place in the *metaxy*, which is the tensional field between God and man, the divine and the mundane, the One and the many. The fact that a quality of that field is the erotic desire to transcend this very structure does not mean that humans can escape the *metaxy*. Paul introduced the anticipation of transfiguration (resurrection), which would be the end of history and human fulfillment in the presence of God. Paul expected God to transform humans outside of history into something other than humans. This expectation became a part of the Western self-understanding, which in time developed from an expectation of God's transforming humans outside of history to the transformation of humans by humans in history. Hegel's system was the product of the same experience known by Paul but with the added ingredients of a diseased soul bent on domination, and a brilliant mind able to perform magic with words.

The second reality created by Hegel or other ideologues becomes a replacement for the *metaxy*. But the *metaxy* does not cease to characterize human existence because humans will it away. Because the second reality sprang, not from reality, but from the speculative mind of a megalomaniac, it will produce constant tensions caused by its ill-fit to the human experiences on which it is superimposed. No conditions poses greater danger to human society than an ideological failure. The diseased souls who accept any second reality can no longer see an alternative and will become most violent in their efforts to realize the final paradise promised by some ideological deformation of reality. Only a return to the balanced consciousness and an acceptance of the reality of the *metaxy* can deliver us from the violence and disorder of modernity.