Revolt Against Modernity
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Published by University Press of Kansas

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Revolt Against Modernity: Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, and the Search for a PostLiberal Order.
University Press of Kansas, 1996.
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The Mystic

Serious encounters with Strauss's work will always require a rethinking of Platonic philosophy. One may, of course, reasonably argue that Strauss hid his "modern" philosophy behind a hedgerow of ancients. I do not think so. Nonetheless, his highly unorthodox reading of Plato, for instance (as the source of Western philosophical orthodoxy), has the effect of making Strauss an intriguing voice in a contemporary philosophical conversation in which almost all the participants have given up entirely upon ontology and the Platonic project as traditionally construed. Strauss's Plato (i.e., Strauss), in short, presents tantalizing possibilities for contemporary thinkers without requiring that they leave their most cherished assumptions behind. Despite the splenetics about historicism and relativism, there is much in Strauss's work to engage contemporary historicists. The same is not true in the case of Eric Voegelin.

Despite a devoted and growing coterie of followers ("Voegelinians"), Voegelin is all but unknown in philosophical circles, which is as it should be. He was an ontologist who wrote of history as a story told by God. He devoted his greatest energies to understanding consciousness, which has the individual person as an index but otherwise may not be understood as an "I." At the very least, Voegelin wrote about unfashionable subjects, and it is likely that he violated the most fundamental assumptions of the philosophical zeitgeist.

Yet he was hardly a philosophical hack. The unfashionable nature of his work does not spring from an antiquated philosophical analysis. Voegelin was not a throwback to some other century. His work emerged from the same problems and conditions that drive more fashionable philosophers—in this sense he was quite literally a postmodern. Voegelin's works were acts of resistance to the philosophical and spiritual poverty of his age—or he so understood his enter-
prise.' His inquiry, therefore, was heavily freighted with moral significance, and that is the aspect that attracts admirers. Voegelin's response to modern dilemmas neither rested upon traditional and unpersuasive answers nor bowed to contemporary antifoundationalism. For a hardy band of antimoderns who refuse to become postmodern, Voegelin is the philosopher of choice. For traditionalist conservatives, Voegelin's early work was easily appropriated into a political agenda that Voegelin never endorsed but likely supported. (As a philosopher he considered it inappropriate to endorse any political agenda.)

Admirers usually try to persuade outsiders that Voegelin's philosophy follows lines established by more famous predecessors. Most such treatments identify very valuable affinities and influences, and in some important ways Voegelin's analysis does share much with the insights of Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl, Paul Ricoeur, Bernard Lonegan, Thomas Mann, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and many others. The startlingly unpopular nature of his assumptions and arguments, nonetheless, identifies what is much more historically significant. The foundation of Voegelin's philosophy is the claim that the world is intelligible—not transparent to its structure and meaning, but intelligible. Bound up in this claim are objectives long since abandoned by most twentieth-century philosophers. For most postmodern thinkers Voegelin's preoccupation with being is, at best, a quaint and harmless activity or, at worst, a dangerous psychological disorder. It is ironic that for many contemporary philosophers the sorts of claims Voegelin made lead to the very disorder against which Voegelin rebelled. After all, at a quick glance, Voegelin appears to be looking for the answer. One wonders how much the prejudice against ontology, philosophical anthropology, and epistemology blinds some people to Voegelin's claims. For now it is important only that one understands that Voegelin was out of step with the most powerful and persuasive strains of twentieth-century philosophical inquiry, the rich web of influence notwithstanding.

THE DISCOVERY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Voegelin's concerns were social and political, but his philosophical investigation began and ended with the individual soul. One cannot
engineer social transformations at the level of ideas or doctrines, Voegelin insisted. Change requires that individuals break through the accumulation of cherished beliefs to the most basic primordial experiences accessible to humans as such (!what Voegelin called the primary experience of existence). In his *New Science of Politics*, Voegelin first emphasized the need to break through the nominalistic understanding that political science is composed of facts (!things) and values (nonthings). A truly empirical science of politics necessitates an understanding and explication of the symbols of self-interpretation that form the foundation of social and political order. As his focus became more cosmic, Voegelin found the aperture to the great mysteries in consciousness, which in turn has as its portal the individual human existing in bodily form in the context of a specific time and place. The mysteries of humans, society, history, and God rest in the depths of the individual soul. How did so much get in that small bottle? The individual human is a limiting factor, a bottleneck through which the infinite must pass. For all the limitations such a spatiotemporal being suffers, the mysteries of existence nonetheless press in on the soul, and the meaningful truths that one seeks in response to the disordered world rest in the depths of consciousness. The soul, as the location of human participation in consciousness, serves as the omnipresent source of resistance to the modern world. Order and disorder are nothing more than attunement to, or alienation from, the truths apperceived in the soul. Social and political disorder are products of individual alienation; a society is disordered only if its citizens are disordered.

The journey home, therefore, must take place in the individual consciousness of the philosopher. Through his historical analysis, Voegelin sought to recapture the experience that created the symbols of order that, for him, constituted history. Plato's experiences could make sense only if his symbols engendered a "responsive experience" in Voegelin. Consequently, despite the historicity of human thought, Voegelin's analysis depended upon an ahistorical "reality" that allowed communication across huge cultural divides. The confusions are numerous. Voegelin often wrote of a consciousness as if it were a thing, and yet he warned his readers against falling into this trap. Moreover, how should one understand Voegelin's construction of a history of order that rests on an unchanging reality?

Voegelin often wrote of "tensions," which probably, on occasion,
served as an escape from troublesome contradictions. Nonetheless, at the very heart of Voegelin's enterprise is an experience of mystery, which challenges one to accept contradictions as inherent in experience. One better understands experience by symbolizing the tension than by seeking a resolution. Indeed, Voegelin identified the desire to escape the tension as the source of modern deformations of reality (which necessarily implies a deformation of the language describing reality).

Voegelin's talk about consciousness reveals an inherent limitation in his language. He sought to dissolve all modern reifications and to confront process, tension, and rich but inherently ambiguous metaphors or myths. Yet no one reified more than Voegelin. The reason is simple but unsatisfying. Because he dissolved the objects of modern understanding into a rich and complex series of processes or tensional fields, Voegelin tended to discuss process as if "it" were something with a will. Although Voegelin would insist that consciousness is not an it-i.e., a thing—he could write about consciousness becoming luminous to itself. Since there is no-thing there, this construct leaves one, at best, with a mystery.

In many respects the mystery of human existence is precisely the "object" Voegelin sought to recapture. The articulation of the mystery and its meaning requires an exegesis of experience, and in one form or another, all of Voegelin's major works were exegetical exercises. The most concrete things at his disposal were the language symbols of thinkers like Plato, which operate like windows to the experiences that created the stories or myths or analyses. That wording is important because for Voegelin, the great mythical stories and philosophical analyses emerged from experiences. Plato, for instance, did not have a self-contained experience but participated in an experience, and the dynamics of that experience produced a story or a novel philosophical distinction. Plato contributed to the experience-first of all by his openness to the whole—and symbolized his participation, and the truths that the experience illuminated, in his writings. I do not mean that Plato might have selected from a variety of symbols to express the truths of the experience. On the contrary, the experience was only had by Plato as he symbolized it, or, to fall back on the more precise but confusing Voegelinian terminology, symbols make the experience luminous to itself. That is what
Voegelin meant when he emphasized the ontological status of language as belonging to the experience.  

Symbols can only be transparent to the people who have experienced the same truth, which does not mean that understanding precedes the reading of the great myths and philosophers. Rather, Voegelin could interpret these symbols of numinous experience only after working and puzzling over their meanings with a spirit of openness. While meditating on the spiritual struggles of Moses or Plato, the stories became incantations that helped Voegelin re-vision the experience. Voegelin worked exhaustively to understand the context for the story in order to uncover the universal experience resting beneath the historically conditioned veneer.

This makes Voegelin a mystical realist, but such labels tend to confuse the issue, if for no other reason than the fact that Voegelin used familiar philosophical terms in unfamiliar ways. Even Voegelin's exploration of being becomes something other than an ontology, so one must begin an exegesis of Voegelin's work by taking his claims about modern "hypostatizations" seriously. What happens if one dissolves all of the reifications Voegelin attributed to modern myopia? Reading Voegelin remains a chore.

One has always to remind oneself that the spatial and temporal symbols Voegelin employed so often and with such care are never descriptive but exegetical. And so there one is, surrounded by reality, being, consciousness, and numerous other "things" that are not really things. Voegelin might retort that no better symbols have emerged from human experience and that, moreover, to the sufficiently supple mind the ambiguity inherent in such a language expresses the ambiguity of the articulated experience. There is a sense that for Voegelin, a fully satisfying expression of these experiences is unacceptable. The unquestionable truth of human experiences of reality is that they must remain dim images, as though looking in a glass darkly. To have penetrated that darkness is to have transcended the human condition. For this reason Voegelin targeted the "systems" of modernity (e.g., those of Hegel and Marx) as products of libidinous hearts. These systems help the authors hide the mysterious elements of reality in order to create the hope of a world without alienation. Still, the Voegelin reader remains mired in a confusing babble of linguistic indices, most borrowed from ancient Greece, looking for conceptual terra firma. It is best to start with the experi-
ences of the single person (qua person). Yet even here one starts in the middle since the person turns out to be an index of reality. But then Voegelin argued that all human stories begin in the middle.9

As humans, "we are thrown into and out of existence without knowing the Why or the How, but while in it we know that we are of the being to which we return."10 To be thrown into reality is to find oneself in the middle, confused but with some clues as to the meaning of one’s existence. Those clues do not come to one as objects that might surrender their secrets to an inquiring physicist; rather, one comes to some understanding from inside the process. One participates in the very process under investigation. The "object" one seeks to understand includes one’s self in relation to the rest of reality—the whole is hidden from view but understood as a necessary condition for one’s search for personal meaning. The primordial character of the experience of participation binds one together with the other partners so forcibly that the "consubstantiality of the partners will [initially] override the separateness of substances."11

Nonetheless, the totality one apprehends displays structural elements that expose the partners as resting in hierarchical order. The experiences of life and death, of coming to be and expiring, of a fertile world, of the durability of the heavens, of the rise and fall of societies (at least in collective memory), and of the nothingness that collects all objects in the fullness of time display a hierarchy of being ranked according to duration. According to Voegelin, the partners in this community emerge as God and man, world and society. The individual participates in all four areas of being and through this participation comes to recognize a hierarchy descending from God to world to society to the fleeting individual. The discovery of these structures creates a struggle to find one’s place in being, and this struggle for attunement finds expression through symbols of reality that help one—or a society—to find a place. Symbols of order maintain their legitimacy so long as conditions do not challenge them. But disorder befalls all societies. When experienced at the personal level, the disorder of an age spurs a search for new and more adequate symbols. But no matter how these symbols change, they must account for the basic structure found in experience. "Every society," Voegelin emphasized, "is burdened with the task, under its concrete conditions, of creating an order that will endow the fact of its existence of meaning in terms of ends divine and human."12
The search for more adequate symbols must not falsify the primary experience of being, argued Voegelin. People who kill off God as a partner in being merely transfer divinity from the "beyond" to the immanent. As new gods themselves, these ideologues will stop at nothing to re-create reality in their image. More satisfying symbols of order account for all the partners, but these new symbols provide a keener insight into experience, exposing hitherto unrecognized distinctions. Voegelin's philosophy of consciousness begins here, with the struggle to articulate a sufficiently differentiated structure of experience that does not violate the primary experience of the cosmos. Voegelin lived in a postcosmological age as philosophers and prophets had irreparably damaged the older cosmologies. Moderns, however, had been unable to maintain the tension of existence and had thereby lost sight of the primary experience of reality. Thus Voegelin's task was to recover the differentiated insights of Plato and Aristotle, Moses and Jesus, and to translate them to a world whose understandings have been shaped by modern physics. He sought, not simply to recapture, but to recast these understandings in a way compatible with his perspective in being, which obviously differed from Plato's.

An overview of Voegelin's history of order is given in Chapter 4, but a brief description, with a slightly altered emphasis, is necessary here to clarify the issues. Cosmological symbols dealt with the problem of how existence proceeds from nonexistence. The gods, who inhabit the cosmos with humans, serve as the divine, but they do not resolve the matter of the ground or origin of the cosmos. The tension between existence and nonexistence is "absorbed into the wholeness of the intermediate reality that we call cosmic." This tightly ordered cosmos, in which the parts interpenetrate, works according to a rather tenuous economy. That is, the in-betweeness of the cosmological order requires constant renewal. Life comes with numerous disasters that threaten to unbalance the system. Thus, in a society ordered in accordance with cosmological truth—in which the society understands itself to be an analogue of the cosmos—constant efforts at renewal (ritual or propitiatory) help maintain the delicate economy of being.

Societies so ordered (which Voegelin learned, to his surprise, created histories extending from divine origins to their present) face severe challenges in times of empire building. Multi-ethnic orders no
longer reflect the order of the cosmos; political and spiritual order dissociate. During the age of empires (the ecumenic age), Voegelin argued, the great philosophical and prophetic achievements emerged out of resistance to the disorder experienced as a result of the spiritual dislocation attending conquest. For the Israelites, the articulation of the Moses "I AM" experience discerned a God beyond the cosmos (thereby differentiating the more compact experience of the cosmos). The myth of Genesis that followed symbolized the fundamental question of "beginnings" even as it created history as a form of Jewish self-interpretation. The Jews were the people of the God whose will directs the course of human events. They had broken free of the closed cosmos and provided sturdy symbols for the "beginning" (creatio ex nihilo) and for the "beyond" (Yahweh). Human life would, thereby, take on meaning as part of an eschatologically oriented course rather than as part of a more static (or cyclical) cosmos. Attunement to reality now requires an orientation to the divine beyond the cosmos, which is its source and sustainer.

The discoveries (as Voegelin understood them) that constitute Hellenistic philosophy as well as Christianity further weakened the hold of the cosmological form of truth. "Consciousness" is the shorthand expression for these discoveries, and the rest of this section is devoted to this complicated subject, but it is important here to note that the discovery of consciousness placed the burden of truth on the individual who, by virtue of one's soul, participates directly in the four-part community of being. To the degree that the symbols created by the experiences of Plato, Aristotle, Jesus, and Paul create a social field of meaning, the burden of attunement rests with the soul of each person. The social implications are dramatic. Instead of the political and social order functioning as an analogue to the cosmic order, the locus of order rests with the individual who must attune his life to the order detected in his soul. Consequently, the social order becomes a reflection of the order attained by the individual. Society is "man written large" rather than the cosmos written small. The burden of this new, personal responsibility helped create numerous evasions from the immediacy of consciousness, so Voegelin looked back to the sources of differentiation-to Plato and Paul—to begin anew the meditation moderns had rejected.

Consciousness is the modern equivalent of the classical symbol "human nature." Voegelin preferred the modern term because the
older phrase, with the language of a static "nature," had become en-
krusted with too many meanings, technical and otherwise. Con-
sciousness, while usually employed as a reified object, is less suscep-
tible to the subject-object fallacy. Still, as Glenn Hughes noted in his
excellent monograph, *Mystery and Myth in the Philosophy of Eric
Voegelin*, Voegelin appropriated the word but not the meanings nor-
mally associated with it. Hughes persuasively argues that in the
contemporary philosophical context, Voegelin's use of conscious-
ness most nearly parallels Heidegger's *Dasein* as the place in being
where being becomes aware of itself (a process Voegelin called "lu-
minosity").

The apparent origins of Voegelin's serious investigation of con-
sciousness date back to his reading of Husserl's *Krisis* in the early
1940s [English title, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcen-
dental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Phi-
losophy*]. He saw dangers in the Husserl of the *Krisis*: the exclusion
of the historicity of consciousness from Husserl's investigation and
the restriction of consciousness to its intentionality. In a broader
sense Voegelin argued against all the stream-of-consciousness theo-
ries, including Husserl's effort to make the ego into an agent that
structures the stream into an intelligible unit. Moreover, Voegelin
sought a way around the hopelessly confused idealist/materialist di-
chotomy. He began his work on consciousness in 1943 in some corre-
spondence with Alfred Schuetz concerning Husserl's theory and
printed the letters in *Anamnesis*.

In the key letter of this correspondence, bearing the title "On the
Theory of Consciousness," the broad themes of Voegelin's under-
standing emerge, if in rather elliptical form [it was, after all, a per-
sonal letter]. First, to understand consciousness as a stream is to
mistake a process in consciousness for its character. The mistake is-
ues from the misguided focus on the senses. Voegelin noted that
"the limit experience of 'flowing' as demonstrated through the
model of the perception of a tone is possible only in a specific act of
turning attention to that limit. It is not consciousness of time that is
constituted by the flow but rather the experience of the flow is con-
stituted by consciousness, which itself is not flowing." Not only
does consciousness not flow, it constitutes "the spaceless and time-
less world of meaning, sense, and the soul's order," and the associa-
tion of consciousness with flow requires a severe delimiting of expe-
rience, including sensual perceptions. The problem springs from the attempt to place a physiological limit on consciousness. Voegelin no doubt considered this construction of consciousness to be part of the larger process of restricting knowledge to the facts that emerge from the objectivizing sciences. At any rate, Voegelin insisted that "in experience, consciousness with its structures, whatever they may be, is an antecedent given."

It follows, then, that consciousness does not take the form of "I" indeed, the I is not a "given at all but rather a highly complex symbol for certain perspectives in consciousness. The disappearing I formed an important part of Voegelin's understanding of consciousness from an early date. However he might have understood this issue, his constructions put one in mind of the German idealist tradition. Voegelin's work draws mightily from important idealists, including his great philosophical bogey, Hegel, but nonetheless, Voegelin insisted that consciousness is always human consciousness, situated in an individual who lives in the physical world, bound by time and space. Voegelin could not make sense of a disembodied consciousness, much less something like a collective consciousness. Not only does one come away from these assertions asking the question, What is consciousness? but one must wonder about the meanings Voegelin invested in such key words as "society," "mankind," and "history."

To return to the initial problem, Voegelin recognized that consciousness has a "paradoxical structure," and his clearest articulation of this structure is in his last book, *In Search of Order*.

On the one hand, we speak of consciousness as something located in human beings in their bodily existence. In relation to this concretely embodied consciousness, reality assumes the position of an object intended. Moreover, by its position as an object intended by a consciousness that is bodily located, reality itself acquires a metaphorical touch of external thingness. We use this metaphor in such phrases as "being conscious of something," "remembering or imagining something," "thinking about something." I shall, therefore, call this structure of consciousness its intentionality, and the corresponding structure of reality its thingness. On the other hand, we know the bodily located consciousness to be also real; and this concretely located
consciousness does not belong to another genus of reality, but is part of the same reality that has moved, in its relation to man's consciousness, into the position of a thing-reality. In this second sense, then, reality is not an object of consciousness but the something in which consciousness occurs as an event of participation between partners in the community of being.

In the complex of experience, presently in process of articulation, reality moves from the position of an intended object to that of a subject, while the consciousness of the human subject intending objects moves to the position of a predicative event in the subject "reality" as it becomes luminous for its truth. Consciousness, thus, has the structural aspect not only of intentionality but also of luminosity. Moreover, when consciousness is experienced as an event of participatory illumination in the reality that comprehends the partners to the event, it has to be located, not in one of the partners, but in the comprehending reality; consciousness has a structural dimension by which it belongs, not to man in his bodily existence, but to the reality in which man, the other partners to the community of being, and the participatory relations among them occur. If the spatial metaphor be still permitted, the luminosity of consciousness is located somewhere "between" human consciousness in bodily existence and reality intended in its mode of thingness.22

The two structural dimensions of consciousness must retain their proper relationship in one's thinking to prevent "deformations" common in the modem era. Voegelin thought that he escaped the limited horizon created by Husserl by differentiating the intentionalist function of consciousness-with its discrete objects apprehended by a subject-and the participatory quality of consciousness as an event in a comprehensive reality. By limiting consciousness to its intentionality, Husserl and others reified it. Once one becomes conscious of the participatory nature of existence, consciousness becomes "consciousness-reality," a complex that more accurately locates consciousness in a whole. As a complex, consciousness-reality may be understood, not as a relationship (which suggests a sense of separateness), but as a participation (event) that constitutes consciousness as it appears to the individual human. Humans learn about the story in which they discover themselves only from the per-
spective of participants. They seek to understand the story and their part in it.

The exploration of the world of things (what Voegelin called "thing-reality") in the form of intentionality produces a conceptual language appropriate to the experience of a subject apprehending objects-it names and groups things. But when one discovers that one's consciousness and its intentional acts participate in a comprehensive reality (which Voegelin called "it-reality"), the language of things no longer suffices. The matter is further confused because one cannot identify one's self as the subject of knowledge received. The subject, in this case, is the reality. Yet, this construction might lead to another reification-reality. Because there is no object or subject of knowledge, Voegelin talked of "luminosity," of the structure of consciousness-reality becoming luminous to "itself." The luminosity of consciousness creates a symbolic expression belonging, ontologically, to the experience. Because symbols relating the event of consciousness becoming luminous to itself have no object to which they refer, they must be understood as exegetical rather than descriptive in nature. The reality illumined includes the historical/cultural context in which the event takes place-at the immanent pole of the experience. Consequently, the symbols that emerge from the event are forged by the constituent parts of the complex, including humans drawing on their historical store of symbols and meanings. If consciousness-reality produces symbols articulating the luminous experience, those symbols reflect the historical conditions of their time but also share in the timelessness of the reality in which consciousness participates.

One wonders how satisfying this construction is for most people. By employing "luminosity" Voegelin meant to express a form of cognition different from that concerning the physical world. There is no object of cognition in the usual sense of the word, making propositional language useless—or worse. The luminous discovery identifies a part of reality in which "the knower and the known move into the position of tensional poles in a consciousness that we call luminous as far as it engenders the symbols which express the experience of its own structure" (the emphasis should rest on the phrase "its own structure"). The point, so difficult to make, is that there is not only no object of knowledge but also no subject. At times the claims become even more mystical, such as the claim that one must have
"faith" that "man participates representatively in the divine drama of truth becoming luminous." Luminous to whom? To Voegelin this is an illegitimate question because it demonstrates the desire to have possessive knowledge in the form of propositions about physical reality.23

If consciousness possesses this two-part structure (remember that it is a structure of an event or an experience), how does one come to recognize this structure, or why is the structure not recognized readily by everyone? According to Voegelin, Plato described the process of examining one's consciousness as Anamnesis-remembering. In the German edition of Anamnesis, Voegelin wrote:

Remembering is the activity of consciousness by which what has been forgotten, i.e., the knowledge latent within consciousness, is raised up out of unconsciousness into a specific presence of consciousness. In the Enneads IV 3 30], Plotinus described this activity as the transition from non-articulated to articulate, self-perceiving thought. The non-articulated knowledge (noema) becomes conscious knowledge by an act of perceptive attending (antilepsis); and this antileptic knowledge is fixed again by language (logos). Remembering, then, is the process in which non-articulated (ameres) knowledge is elevated into the realm of linguistic picturability (Bildlichkeit) (to phantastikon) and through expression, in the pregnant sense of taking external shape (eis to exo), attains to linguistically articulated presence of consciousness.14

To this process of remembering Voegelin attached the label "reflective distance." Consciousness is capable of looking back on itself, as if the act of reflection were separate from the "object" of its investigation. One comes to recognize the paradox of intentionality and luminosity, and thereby produces symbols expressing this paradoxical nature. Through meditation, one (though I do not think this means just anyone! re-visions experiences heretofore latent and therefore mute. The very language of "reflective distance" suggests that the event (and Voegelin never suggests that it is anything other than an event] includes no new experience but an analysis of a "past experience.11 This construction suffers from several problems, however, and it is truer to Voegelin's meaning, I think, to emphasize that
meditation calls up experiences that have a "pastness" to them but that in their recall have an immediacy and are transformed by a differentiating vision. The "vision" does not eliminate the primary experience but exposes a structure bound in the more compact symbolism.

Voegelin's emphasis, in his later works, on "vision" (borrowed from Plato's opsis) stresses the experiential nature of reflective distance. Through meditation one gains reflective distance from consciousness though the process takes place in consciousness). This distance not only differentiates intentionality from luminosity but reawakens experiences of luminosity that may, in the clearer light of reflective distance, be expressed with more adequate symbols. In other words, one always participates in reality in its mode of luminosity. Humans participate in the larger story of being, but this participation may not be clear to the human whose experiences they are. To apperceive reality means little more than to examine the experiences of participation that had heretofore relinquished none of their meanings. The re-experiencing, however, amounts to a new experience - a vision that exposes embedded structures and meanings.

Still, Voegelin could not escape the tension between reflective distance as an act of cognition of the sort associated with rationalists like Descartes and a theophanic experience in which one participates in an event not entirely of one's own making. Voegelin understood reflective distance to refer to the philosophical inquiry in which experienced unrest sends one back to the symbols of order readily at hand (for Plato, a species of cosmological symbols) in order to penetrate to their experiences as a means of supplying more adequate or precise symbols. "While the original symbols," wrote Voegelin, referring to nonreflective symbols that emerge out of luminous consciousness, "contain a rational structure that can be further articulated through reflection, the reflective acts of cognition can be true only if they participate in the divine reality that participated in the emergence of the symbols. . . . Reflection is not an external act of cognition directed toward the process as its object, but part of a process that internally has cognitive structure." Here, as in so many other places, Voegelin used the language of process to subvert the tendency to reify. Reflective distance participates in the process it seeks to explicate, and the symbols that emerge from that process expose a noetic structure to the experience, but those sym-
Symbols cannot be understood to apply to objects. In this way Voegelin undermined the now-accepted way of discussing Plato’s philosophy as a set of beliefs or ideas (propositions about reality). Of course, one may choose to accept or reject another person’s “ideas,” but how can one reject someone’s symbolic expression of an experience?

Is it really "someone’s" symbolic expression? Earlier in this chapter I touched upon Voegelin’s claim that the language expressing an experience belongs to the experience "itself." Although the mystery of the linguistic eruption makes some sense in terms of the cosmological symbols that emerge from luminosity, does it make sense to claim the same concerning reflection directed toward a noetically structured event? In other words, is it safe to assume that philosophers choose their own words to express the results of their inquiries? No. Plato, in the *Timaeus* and *Republic*, employed vision (opsis) to express "the experiential process in which the order of reality is seen, becomes reflectively known, and finds its appropriate language symbols" (emphasis added). Again, Voegelin has reality (not a thing) engendering symbols out of a participatory experience. He emphasized that "Plato (was] careful about precluding subjectivist misunderstandings. The 'vision' is not somebody's fancy but the imaginative power of response to the reality seen; and the reality seen is the cause (caitio) of this power (dynamis)." The vision is a revelation, but it is also an "imaginative response," and surely imagination belongs to the person responding rather than to the event. Voegelin wrote:

Imagination, as a structure in the process of a reality that moves toward its truth, belongs both to human consciousness in its bodily location and to the reality that comprehends bodily located man as a partner in a community of being. There is no truth symbolized without man’s imaginative power to find the symbols that will express his response to the appeal of reality: but there is not truth to be symbolized without the comprehending It-reality in which such structures as man with his participatory consciousness, experiences of appeal and response, language, and imagination occur. Through the imaginative power of man the It-reality moves imaginatively toward its truth.27
The emphasis necessarily falls upon the human in his capacity to respond. If not, how could philosophers deform reality [a la modernity]? Voegelin strained to emphasize that the vision—at least as Plato used it—emerged out of human participation with the comprehensive reality, and the imaginative response takes place during the remembrance Voegelin called reflective distance. As a response, imagination is a partner in the process it seeks to illuminate. The human, in his imaginative capacity, is creative, and because humans are creative participants in this process, they have the power to pervert the experience by stressing their creative roles (libido dominandi). "Imaginative remembrance of the process," Voegelin emphasized, "implies the potential of imaginative oblivion," by which he meant the capacity to ignore the comprehensive reality—or rather, the divine ground of that reality—and create a system that replaced the tensions experienced in the metaxy. By limiting the horizon of reality, these ideologues can more easily gain knowledge (they have removed from their system the unknown god of Plato and the mysterious "I AM" of Moses), and with (apodictic) knowledge comes power and control. Thus, all systems that either eliminate God (Marx) or claim to know him (Hegel) are cases of imaginative oblivion.

The three dimensions of consciousness (intentionality, luminosity, and reflective distance) help explain Voegelin's understanding of the relationship between disorder and philosophy. So long as the symbols forged out of the experience of luminosity retain a basic believability, one feels no compulsion to explore the subject. When, however, the social and political conditions fracture the symbols of order (which emerge as products of a particular historical condition), the individual begins to feel the disorder in his soul. Once the existential need emerges, a particularly sensitive soul begins the exploration of his own experiences of reality in search of a more adequate understanding. Why this person and not another? Why Voegelin and not Karl Jaspers? Voegelin emphasized that all examples of reflective distance have the character of a theophany. In short, the mysterious reason for the timing and place and person of new and more adequate symbols of order is lodged in God.

I will later explore Voegelin's argument that history is nothing but the story of consciousness as it emerges from confrontation with disorder in the form of symbols produced by a divine-human en-
counter, but here I want to note that Voegelin implicitly gave to his work, especially late in his life, the status of theophany. He lived in a disordered world where the transcendent no longer operated as an ordering presence. Voegelin’s historical exploration of order—that for which he is most known—was most of all his own search for order. The title of his five-volume opus, *Order and History*, therefore takes on a new meaning. The search for order creates history, but the examination of history [so defined] becomes a mode of the search itself. Voegelin surely understood his project in this light, and as early as 1956 he wrote: ‘‘If today the state of science permits the critical analysis of such phenomena, it is clearly a scholar’s duty to undertake it for his own sake as a man and to make the results accessible to his fellow man. *Order and History* should be read, not as an attempt to explore curiosities of a dead past, but as an inquiry into the structure of the order in which we live presently.’’ In other words, Voegelin wrote his books as part of his philosophical and personal search for order—the results of which he offered to a disordered world. Moreover, he connected his work of philosophy [in both purpose and nature] with Plato, who understood philosophy to be the ‘‘love of divine Being.’’ Voegelin wrote that the diagnostic and therapeutic functions are inseparable in philosophy as a form of existence. And ever since Plato, in the disorder of his time, discovered the connection, philosophical inquiry has been one of the means of establishing islands of order in the disorder of the age. *Order and History* is a philosophical inquiry concerning the order of human existence in society and history. Perhaps it will have its remedial effect—in the modest measure that, in the passionate course of events, is allowed to philosophy.\(^{2a}\)

Voegelin identified himself so closely with Plato because the ancient Greek discovered philosophy and Voegelin rediscovered it.\(^{3a}\) Plato served as the primary guide to the primordial philosophical awareness that centuries of doctrinalization had obscured. Only late in his life did Voegelin believe he had liberated himself sufficiently from modernity to continue the philosophical journey [the work of reflective distance] begun by Plato.

In sharp contrast to the direction of Strauss’s work, Voegelin found
a prophetic impulse in Plato and all legitimate philosophers. Although philosophers stress the structure of the human response in the complex consciousness-reality, prophets stress the source of the experience rather than its structure. Nonetheless, Voegelin made prophets out of philosophers. A prophet who too closely resembles his age, or whose words echo the reigning orthodoxy, is no prophet. A prophet must speak to people's needs, not their wants. He brings an unpopular message of repentance and a warning about the perils of apostasy. The truth of his message becomes clear only with the fulfillment of his predictions. Is obscurity a form of testimony?

THE STRUCTURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Reflective distance differentiates the structure of the luminous dimension of consciousness—of consciousness-reality. Of course the word "structure" tends to obscure Voegelin's emphasis upon the tensions, movements, and events that constitute this structure, as the analysis is again plagued by the propensity of the terms of analysis to ossify into things. Reification, however, has become a pandemic in the modern era. For this reason Voegelin returned to the philosophical journey as expressed in its original simplicity. Philosophy began with Plato and Aristotle. Because Voegelin thought it necessary to recover the existential origins of philosophy, his own analysis rests upon the language originated by his Greek predecessors.

Much of Voegelin's examination of ancient Greek philosophy focused upon recovering the experiences obscured by modern reifications. When moderns speak of Plato's beliefs, ideas, or even ideology the vision is destroyed. The historian, then, must strip away the modern conceptual apparatus in order to rediscover the experiences that rest beneath the increasingly transparent Platonic symbols. The objective that dominated Voegelin's enterprise bears a striking resemblance to Strauss's quest for the "natural cave." For both philosophers Plato stands at the beginning of a process "detailed" by modernity (to employ another reification). The philosophical journey may begin again only by returning to its origin. Consequently, Voegelin explored his philosophical themes with the terms of analysis that emerged from his historical investigation.
Plato, Voegelin's primary guide, began his philosophy in the experience of call-response. The emphasis may fall upon the mysterious, divine drawing—as with Moses or Paul—or upon the questioning, seeking unrest—as with Plato or Aristotle. Either way, the experience requires both parts to form an intelligible unit. From the human perspective the questioning arises from the recognition of the contingency of one's existence and the further observation that all existing things eventually cease to exist. The precariousness of all being things raises the question of the ultimate ground—"the question is inherent in the experience from which it arises." Plato and Aristotle, however, discovered that this restlessness of known ignorance was the defining human characteristic. The Question (capitalized), as Voegelin called it, is a constant in history. Of course, this questioning was part of prephilosophical experiences, but not previously discovered as definitively human—as a defining characteristic. Moreover, the philosopher is sensitive to this structure in his consciousness. For him, "the questioning is experienced with an index of urgency. It is not a game to be played or not. The philosopher feels himself moved (kinein) by some unknown force to ask the question, he feels himself drawn (helkein) into the search." The Question becomes an overwhelming concern, and the pull of the golden cord of reason, borrowing from more Platonic imagery, is identified as the source of restlessness. Therefore, one's ignorance is structured by an object of one's desire. As Voegelin put the matter in reference to Aristotle's analysis: "The search . . . is not blind; the questioning is knowing and the knowing is questioning. The desire to know what one knows to desire injects internal order into the search, for the questioning is directed toward an object of knowledge (neoton) that is recognizable as the object desired (orekton) once it is found."

The centrality of the symbol "eros" for Plato becomes evident. Since Eros, as the myth goes, was the offspring of Plenty and Poverty, he partook of both natures but belonged to neither. His life was spent in tension toward the fullness detected in his soul, and the tension expressed in the myth applied to the human whose mortality was structured by an awareness of immortality in which he had a part. Voegelin preferred the Platonic word *metaxy*, meaning in-between, as the preferred symbol of the peculiar human condition. Humans participate in both immanent reality and transcendent reality (or, rather, reality in both modes). Of course the tension is struc-
tured by the attraction toward the divine, transcendent pole. Human life is invested with an eschatological index. The tension in the metaxy may be so great that some people seek to give up the transcendent in favor of a transformed world; others might choose to believe they are about to escape their mortal bonds.

Voegelin exaggerated the significance of the term metaxy in Platonic thought, as the term appears in only two dialogues: Symposium and Philebus. He might have maintained the tensional character by emphasizing the erotic search but with the added benefit of pushing back the spatial imagery. No matter how often Voegelin warned the reader not to make the in-between (metaxy) into a place, or to reify the "poles" of this tension, the language rather defeats the purpose. In the end, how is one to think of poles in a tensional field except as things?

Voegelin also emphasized the Aristotelian construction of human as the zoon nous echon—the living being that possesses nous. Humans participate in all the strata of being, including the divine nous and the "Apeiron depth," or the nothingness over which existence hangs. These strata provide the boundaries of human participation and the means of ordering their individual and social lives. By participating in the divine nous one recognizes and participates in the hierarchy of being, and it is by means of this hierarchy that one may order or attune one's life in harmony with being. 37

At any rate, the philosopher discovers the restless search for the ground of existence as the quintessentially human activity. Plato and Aristotle "locate" this search in the psyche, which is a metaphor for the location or area where the questioning takes place and as the instrument (sensorium) of human reception of the divine attraction. 38 Voegelin described the experience in this manner:

The man who asks questions, and the divine ground about which the questions are asked, will merge in the experience of questioning as a divine-human encounter and reemerge as the participants in the encounter that has the luminosity and structure of consciousness. . . . The ground is not a spatially distant thing but a divine presence that becomes manifest in the experience of unrest and the desire to know. The wondering and questioning is sensed as the beginning of a theophanic event that can become fully luminous to itself if it finds the proper responses
in the psyche of concrete human beings. . . . Hence, philosophy in the classic sense is not a body of "ideas" or "opinions" about the divine ground dispensed by a person who calls himself a "philosopher," but a man's responsive pursuit of his questioning unrest to the divine source that has aroused it.39

The structure of the experience, as Voegelin understood it, requires both partners. There is no experience of seeking without the divine pull. They form an intelligible unit. Moreover, the "vision" or experience is invested with a noetic structure,40 so the structure, therefore, presents itself for noetic analysis by the being possessing nous. "By nous," wrote Voegelin, Aristotle "understands both the human capacity for questioning about the ground and also the ground of being itself, which is experienced as the directing mover of questions."41 Glenn Hughes emphasizes, with relation to this and similar claims, that Voegelin accepted the ontological claims made for nous by Aristotle and Plato, writing that "the tension of consciousness is not drawn toward the ground as a mere object of possible, or hoped for, knowledge. The ground is consciousness' own identity; human consciousness participates in the ground; the ground is a Thinking or Intelligence that is the fullness of human thinking and intelligence."42

Human nous participates in divine nous—or more precisely, the human feels the attraction to the divine as the fulfillment of one's nature. This mutual participation forms consciousness, which may be understood as belonging to the ground but which reaches the human soul. In this latter sense, one may speak of "human consciousness," which is shaped by the limitations of perspective associated with an embodied being structured by time, space, and cultural memory. Because consciousness is an event of participation, Voegelin could emphasize that there is no consciousness outside the "concrete person." Similarly, there are no symbols of this participation that are free of culturally defined meanings, and the meanings that become clear in this process of participation belong to the experience and may not be extended beyond that limit. The failure to recognize this limitation leads to a doctrinalization of the symbols of experience—the symbols take on a propositional character as if they referred to things one might observe from an Archimedean point. One might, under these conditions, ask about Plato's "ideas" or
"beliefs" without referring to the experiences that created the symbols. In short, one may look to the writings of Plato and accept the "propositions" or not because one considers them to be the product of Plato the subject examining reality the object. Voegelin began to emphasize Plato's "vision" as a technical term in order to recapture the theopanic character of his writings. Because symbols emerge mysteriously from an event or a vision, Voegelin considered that his historical uncovering was radically empirical. He had recaptured the experiences by liberating the symbols of those events from modern deformations (reifications), thus restoring their transparency to their sources.

New experiences transform one's relationship with reality by exposing once-unknown structures. For Voegelin, the experiences of Plato or Moses presented a "differentiated" view of the structure of reality so that parts or tensions once bound together in the tighter construction of cosmological symbols are exposed as identifiable if related parts. The most powerful differentiation concerned the distinction between the existent world and the non-existent ground. Once one understood that the cosmos was not self-sufficient—or when one recognized that "things" of the cosmos are not self-created, nor do they contain their meanings within themselves—the question of the ground of reality made the anxiety of the Question more acute. Voegelin referred to this newly differentiated state as the "truth of existence." The "truth of the cosmos" retains its hold on one because the discovery of the non-existent ground does not remove one from the "world." Nonetheless, the new understanding heightens the mystery of existence and makes problematic the place one occupies in the whole.

The answers that emerge from the Question take one of two forms (or stress one and imply the other): the "beginning" or the "beyond." The Israelites discovered the divine and mysterious origin of existence in the myth of the beginning (Genesis 1). "The creation story," wrote Voegelin, "lets the cosmos, with its hierarchy of being from inorganic universe, through vegetable and animal life, to man, be spoken into existence by God. Reality is a story spoken in the creative language of God; and in one of its figures, in man who is created in the image of God, reality responds to the mystery of the creative word with the truth of the creation story." The myth thus provides excellent (useful or meaningful) symbols for the differenti-
ated truths experienced. The cosmos emerges from a divine source who shapes his creation according to a hierarchy with God as the apex. The why of the creation is answered only by oblique references to the creation being good. The purpose of the cosmos—much less the divine ground—is impenetrable. Nonetheless, this reality has "man" as a being who can participate in all strata of reality. Thus the mystery of human anxiety is understood by reference to one's participation in the divine beyond of existence. By establishing a beginning, with the human as the creative participant in the story, the Israelites created history as the process in which the logos of human participation plays out. Humans, in their historical participation in the divine story, possess an eschatological index. Genesis 1 is the most important story ever told.

The tale of divine beginnings highlights the human-divine interplay at the historical and social level. That is, the divine imprint on the individual human, while not absent, is nonetheless unaccented. The Israelites may have discovered history, but they did not know of the soul. Plato reversed the emphasis. By discovering the psyche Plato could emphasize the ordering presence of divinity (detected in the psyche) that is both the source of existence and the goal of human seeking. Thus, while humans remain tethered to their bodily existence, Plato discovered the capacity of consciousness to "transcend" the immanent in the direction of a mysterious and divine beyond. However, the language of "transcendence" and "beyond" gives rise to a conception of a completely de-divinized world (i.e., a world shorn of divine presence) and a divine reality beyond. There is only one reality. Therefore, the words must break out of the intentionalist paradigm so that one might understand that for Plato, "the Beyond symbolizes the goal of a meditative act that transcends the divinely permeated reality of the 'cosmos.'" Voegelin emphasized further that "there is no 'transcendent reality' other than the Beyond experienced in the 'rise.'"45

For Plato, the experience of the beyond creates problems for understanding being. Does this beyond have status as being? At first, Voegelin emphasized, Plato could deal with the matter only by thinking of the beyond as non-being or beyond-being. In the Phaedrus, Plato characterized the divine ground as "truly-being" because the cosmos depends upon the beyond for its existence and essence. More precisely, the cosmos "is" because of the divine presence (pa-
rousia). Yet Plato was left with an insoluble paradox: "The divine reality that reveals its presence in the meditative act is both within Being as its creative core and outside of Being in some Beyond of it." Plato's paradoxical construction makes it impossible to think of his works in terms of propositional metaphysics. As Voegelin put it, "There is no Beyond lying around somewhere," there is just the beyond as experienced. Plato's experience did not nullify the truth of being presented by his predecessor, Anaximander—of things emerging from the Apeiron and returning to it. The universe is still ruled by the law of becoming and perishing. However, Plato's experience of the divine presence "reveals itself [as] a Being that is neither the Apeiron nor one of the cosmic things but the immortally divine reality that will redeem its followers from their Apeironic fate. The Beyond is indeed beyond the cosmos because the participation in its parousia permits the soul of man to 'rise' from intracosmic mortality to transcosmic immortality." For Plato—and Aristotle—salvation from the fate of mortality comes with participation in the mortal divine presence.

Of course, all of this—the claims of Plato and Voegelin—rested upon faith. Nothing is so important to Voegelin's philosophy, nor so overlooked, as faith. It is the existential trait that allows one to search for the truth, and its loss is the reason for the monstrous deformations of reality, for the obsessive search for certainty, and even for final solutions. Modernity is one colossal loss of faith.

For Voegelin, the classic expression of faith appears in Hebrews 11:1: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped and the evidence of things unseen." Voegelin found in Christianity, as expressed in such texts, an essential uncertainty. "Ontologically," he wrote concerning the Hebrews passage, "the substance of things hoped for is nowhere to be found but in faith itself; and, epistemologically, there is no proof for things unseen but again this very faith." Unlike tribal gods, the Christian God places the burden of belief on the individual human soul. In this most spiritualized of religions, belief is a response to a "movement" in one's soul, and in the end, one cannot look to another for confirmation. One detects God's presence and sets out to discover the meaning of, or proper response to, that presence. More accurately, one sets out in search of the source of the divine attraction. The Question that rises from this experience has no ready answer, but it presupposes that there is an answer."
speaking to others about such matters one can only discuss one's experiences—no more. As Voegelin emphasized in one of his most eloquent passages:

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, trembling on the verge of a certainty which if gained is loss—the very lightness of this fabric may prove too heavy a burden for men who lust for massively possessive experience.\(^{48}\)

Of course, for most people the desire for certainty overwhelms the call. The best one can hope for is a Socratic ignorance. Although Socrates could live happily with the quest for the unknown, others quake at the uncertainty inherent in such a life. They create universalist answers, and they draw from any number of sources for these answers. The scriptures present an easy and likely target. One can wrench these books from their experiential sources and turn them into doctrinal tracts that give the possessors greater assurance of the truth of one's religion. By clutching to doctrines [of a Christian or Marxist or other sort] one can ignore [hide from] the uncertainties engendered in the experiences of the soul. Thus, while the experiences of the soul are as "real" as any experiences, their meaning and purpose is unclear. It is easier to close off that part of one's consciousness and the uncertainties created there. For this reason Voegelin referred repeatedly to the openness of the soul as the precondition for an escape from the second realities of the modern era.

Oddly enough, Voegelin clarified many of the issues involved in his use of the term "faith" by referring to St. Anselm's so-called ontological proof. Like so much else, Voegelin insisted, the matter is confused by intentionalist reductions. Anselm attempted no "proof," and even the word "ontological" is anachronistic. Anselm felt no need to prove the "existence" of God—he believed. His faith served as the point of departure rather than as the goal of his famous prayer [Proslogion], for one who has such a faith seeks to understand his faith. The prayer is an appeal for greater understanding of the already "known" [or experienced] relationship. Anselm, Voegelin in-
sisted, understood the *metaxy* of human existence. His faith—rather than his reason—sought understanding. "The labor of the mind," Voegelin wrote, "will not arrive at the understanding of anything unless the something to be understood is already present, even though in the form of an intellectually less satisfying response to the divine appeal." Only in response to challenges by the "fool" Caunilo did Anselm resort to the language of "proof." In this case Anselm dealt with someone who sought to answer matters of this sort outside the *metaxy*—someone who ignored the apperceived reality and had thereby lost all contact with the *metaxy*. As Voegelin insisted, "one cannot prove reality by a syllogism; one can only point to it and invite the doubter to look." The confusions, he asserts further, surrounding the dual meanings of the word "proof" have become "a standard trick employed by the negators in the contemporary ideological debates." 49

Why did Anselm have a faith that sought understanding? Unlike Plato, who, faced with the foolish negation of the sophists, created philosophy, Anselm inherited a traditionally burdened philosophy and creedal apparatus. These conditions shaped Anselm's question: Is the God experienced in the soul the same God found in the creed? The mode of his investigation was further dictated by these conditions. He would examine the noetic structure of his faith to test the creed against the God experienced, or, as Voegelin put it, "He wants to discover the structure in human reason that permits the questioning response to man to understand the *ratio* [reason] in the symbols of Faith." This search requires four factors in the life of the seeker:

1. a trust in the existence of the unknown structure
2. an awareness that its knowledge is missing
3. a state of the intellectual means that will permit the discovery, and
4. a pressure in the historical situation that arouses the awareness of the problem and makes the search impelling. 51

Although Anselm remained tethered to the creedal understanding of God, and thus did not achieve sufficient "distance," he nonetheless pursued the same objectives found in Plato's *Phaedrus*, for instance, or Voegelin's essay in which this analysis takes place.

Voegelin's philosophy of consciousness, it now appears, depends
upon a number of basic assumptions. Most important, one must assume an intelligibility to reality. "It" is a mystery, to be sure, but a mystery with clues. Moreover, insight into this reality applies to all humans, and one discovers a truth about human existence [i.e., human nature]. Furthermore, one accepts the divine ground of existence—a ground that is not in the physical universe but is the source of the universe and whose presence permeates and maintains it. Of course, Voegelin insisted that these and other insights emerge from experiences that provide symbols which are translucent to their sources. These experiences are enormously variegated, according to historical, cultural conditions and the whim of God, but they all rest upon a theophanic ground—they are gifts. In this sense, the experiences of Moses and Plato are "equivalent" even if they expose different dimensions of the common experienced reality. Consequently, in sharp contrast to Strauss, Voegelin did not juxtapose faith and reason, nor did he suggest that they were complementary faculties. Faith and reason belong together as parts of the same experience. Faith carries with it a rational [noetic] structure that human reason (nous) can explore and differentiate. Paul and Moses felt the overwhelming immediacy of theophany and thus emphasized the sublime and awful God who calls. Plato and Aristotle discovered the human soul as the site of God's call, and they further discovered that the soul can detect the call because it shares in its nature—i.e., the human soul has reason (nous) that yearns after the perfection of itself in God. Now we see darkly . . .

A STORY TOLD BY GOD

There is no history without God. Moreover, the meaning of history, the theme of God's story, remains locked in His inscrutable will. Humans participate as actors in this drama more or less unaware of its goal or purpose. As Eugene Webb noted, one of Voegelin's favorite novelists, Thomas Mann, supplied a most apt expression of Voegelin's point at the conclusion of Joseph and His Brothers. Joseph, speaking to his brothers, said: "When you talk to me about forgiveness it seems to me you have missed the meaning of the whole story we are in. . . . One can easily be in a story and not understand it." Mann concluded the book with, "And so ended the beautiful story
and God-inventions of JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS. Yet Voegelin's references to God—found predominantly, even prominently, in the books he published in the 1950s—should not be turned into an affirmation of the doctrinally circumscribed God of the Jews or Christians. For Voegelin, one senses, such treatment demystifies God. The mystery of divine-human interaction, and hence of history, cannot be penetrated by a set of doctrines about the nature of God. But the term "God" is rather more satisfying than the "divine ground of being" or even "reality." Even though the personalized God of Jewish and Christian doctrine does not exhaust Voegelin's understanding of the divine, the personal God Yahweh nonetheless serves as an especially rich symbol (when understood as a symbol) of human-divine interaction.

One is apt to hear oblique references to providence from certain Jewish and Christian believers, but one does not expect a philosopher of history to involve God so intimately in human matters, so it is little wonder that Voegelin is all but unknown among philosophers of history. His obscurity, in part, rests with the unfashionable meaning he attached to "history," emphatically rejecting all conceptions of history as an "object" of reflection. Hegel, Marx, and others treated history as though they could observe it in both its beginning and its end. This presumption that one has cracked the code of history and thus participated in its Logos requires that one forget the perspectival nature of one's observation. More than that, it requires that one accept the mantle of the storyteller, with its overtones of divinity. Voegelin was both awed by the erudition that could sustain such acts of divinization and appalled at the hubris that drove them.

The problem of the reification of history remained a prime concern because to Voegelin, history was a philosophical activity and, therefore, his work was already cast in the mold of Hegel, Marx, Spengler, Jaspers, and Toynbee. In a sense, then, Voegelin never escaped the issue of the meaning of history. His warnings against such reification merely suggested the horizon imposed on the inquiring human and the cloud of mystery cloaking the truth so desired. He yearned to know what Hegel claimed to know. Voegelin simply learned to be at peace with the mystery. Thus his work much more closely resembles Hegel's than Toynbee's. Toynbee—at least the early Toynbee—identified patterns in history but pronounced that
the process as a whole was meaningless. Although Voegelin assiduously avoided the language of "meaning," he had faith in the meaningful configuration of history.

What is this configuration? In an astonishingly clear and overlooked passage, Voegelin wrote:

Configuration refers to more than the patterns that are observable in history, such as sequences of institutions. In various high civilizations we know that we begin with certain types of political organization, usually of a monarchical or an aristocratic type, and that democratic types always come rather late in the course of a civilization. Such sequences would be patterns that can be empirically observed. But this is not all, because conceptions of order in a civilization are always accompanied by the self-interpretation of that order as meaningful; that is, the persons living in an order have opinions about the particular meaning that order has. In this sense, self-interpretation is always part of the reality which we live.

This, of course, was what Voegelin meant by history—the story of human self-interpretation. He established this objective on the first page of the first volume of Order and History:

The order of history emerges from the history of order. Every society is burdened with the task, under its concrete conditions, of creating an order that will endow the fact of its existence with meaning in terms of ends divine and human. And the attempts to find symbolic forms that will adequately express the meaning, while imperfect, do not form a senseless series of failures.

The struggle for order is the attempt to attune one’s self to the most real, to the form behind the image, or, at the most elemental level, to that which is most lasting. People living under cosmological symbolism understood the cosmos to be that which is most lasting. Their societies functioned as analogues to the cosmos and the structures experienced therein. In due course cosmological symbols lost their potency and, in the anxiety of this fall from being, the struggle for new symbols resulted in "leaps in being" that exposed the transcendent, divine ground "beyond" the cosmos as well as the
soul (psyche or pneuma) as the location of divine participation in human affairs. The horizon changed, and in this case, one does not step from one horizon into another, as though they were so many rooms. The new perspective that has uncovered structures creates an awareness of change—a before-and-after experience. The older, more restrictive horizon is no longer "true" in light of the more comprehensive vision. One can see much more clearly now, and this clarity allows one to tell a story of change—of dramatic and epochal change. One has stepped into history. History, then, is the story of differentiating consciousness as told by one who understands the differentiations.

But is history a story rather than several stories? This question vexed Voegelin, though he did not pose it in this fashion. No one doubts that history, conventionally understood, is really an infinite number of stories told in response to particular questions. One might tell the story of the fall of the Roman Empire, and through carefully stipulated definitions of key words like "fall," "Roman," and "empire" and a lifetime of hard work one could tell a story with reasonably fixed temporal boundaries. But one who is engaged in such an enterprise is always aware of the artificiality of the story, aware that the storyteller defines the object. Moreover, an unanswered question goes largely ignored: How does this story fit into "the story"—History?

Toynbee addressed this problem by dividing history into sequential "civilizations" that have a sort of internal logic or cycle. Putting aside the numerous difficulties with which Toynbee grappled, especially later in his career, he concluded with what one might consider a denial of history—a potentially endless course of civilizations. Voegelin emphasized that Toynbee dealt with history at the level of phenomena. But what are the experiences of order—or of disorder—that create and shape these civilizations? Voegelin hoped to penetrate to these experiential roots in order to understand better human understanding of itself in its modes of individual, society, and history. Thus a history of human self-interpretation must account for the socially relevant symbols of reality. What is one's place in being? What role does one's society play in reality? What is the meaning of the course of events leading to one's present? An ordered society supplies satisfactory answers to these questions. These questions find answers in consciousness—in the consciousness that is
located in the individual and that supplies symbols which become socially relevant by speaking to the needs of other humans (a sense of place and purpose). A history of order is a history of consciousness; a history of consciousness is a history of divine-human interaction as articulated by the symbols that emerge from this mutual participation. History is a story told by God.

With amazing erudition, Voegelin began to tell God's story in the first three volumes of *Order and History*. The project, charged with concern about a contemporary fall from being, was to follow the empirical evidence of ordering experiences through time, from cosmological societies to Israelite and Hellenic differentiations through Christian forms to the modern gnostic forms of order. Of course, Voegelin understood that this development does not follow so simple a course, but however shrouded in mystery, Voegelin nonetheless believed that a generally sequential and progressive course leading to the most differentiated symbols of the Christian order—followed by the deformation of modernity—characterized the history of order. Voegelin's was a more or less Western history, and when he expanded his study of order to encompass Eastern civilizations during the 1960s and early 1970s, an astonishing array of differentiations overwhelmed his project. The consequences were numerous. First, he distanced himself from the traditional Christian story, or at least he rejected emphatically the singular truth of Christianity. He maintained, however, that the New Testament expressed the most differentiated understanding of reality presently available. This proviso was not enough for his Catholic admirers, who had been his most ardent followers. Many could never forgive Voegelin for interpreting Paul as having allowed his epiphany to unbalance his consciousness—to allow him, however briefly, to reject the immanent pole of existence in anticipation of imminent transfiguration. But more to the point, Voegelin rejected Catholic understandings of the nature of revelation and the church.

Second, and more important here, Voegelin had to give up all claims to a universal history (and they had been muted all along). The fourth volume of *Order and History* (*The Ecumenic Age*), was his answer to the problem. The first three volumes constitute an intellectual history of order proceeding chronologically from the ancient civilizations of the Near East to the symbols of order articulated by Plato and Aristotle. The two fundamental leaps in being
represented by Israel (faith) and Athens (reason) do not evolve one out of the other. Indeed, Voegelin was always sensitive to the problems of accounting for these "leaps." If they fit on a time-line that ends with one's own philosophical efforts, then one might expect to detect some genetic relationship between them. Voegelin never did, which is what salvaged his project. Although he admitted he had conceived of a more or less unilinear history that led to the present, he could not account for the spiritual eruptions by any of the standard methods (e.g., cultural diffusion). His own answer was that social disorder created a search for order which produced new and improved symbols. This structural element survived the break in his project.

In the end, this understanding of history, especially when the histories of the East are taken into account, simply does not fit a single history in which one development prepared the way for another. To make matters worse, Voegelin discovered that this effort to force historical events into a single meaningful course (what he called "historiogenesis") has a long history going back at least as far as the Sumerian king list. Historiogenesis reached manic proportions in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as Hegel, Comte, Marx, and others had to deal with an enormous range of recalcitrant data from the East to make the story complete with them. Still, Voegelin sought a way to account for the exceptional number of "spiritual outbursts" in the thousand years leading to Jesus, but since Voegelin concerned himself with self-interpretations in history and these outbursts occurred independent of one another, they could not be considered meaningful elements in the history of order. Consequently, these "events, though they constitute structures of meaning in history, do not themselves fall readily into a pattern that could be understood as meaningful." Voegelin concluded from these observations that the "process of history, and such order as can be discerned in it, is not a story to be told from the beginning to its happy, or unhappy, end; it is a mystery in process of revelation." Even in his later works, Voegelin trusted in the meaningfulness of the totality, but as a whole, history is beyond human ken. No perspective in history can make sense of the totality.

Consequently, The Ecumenic Age is a markedly nonlinear history. Voegelin told stories, of a sort, in this book, but they do not build upon one another into a large narrative that is structured by a begin-
ning and an end. The book is a mansion of middles, each room a historical *metaxy*. Voegelin had given up on a history of order in favor of historical consciousness and the perpetual human struggle for order. Indeed, the whole of *Order and History* was to be a chapter in this struggle, with not insignificant advances in the differentiation of consciousness.

In the Preface to volume one, *Israel and Revelation*, Voegelin emphasized that his massive enterprise represented a diagnostic and therapeutic effort to bring order out of modern malaise. By the fourth volume, Voegelin had sharpened his understanding of the nature of both the diagnosis and the therapy. The great advances in differentiating consciousness, he emphasized in the Introduction to volume four, had emerged during the period of conquest beginning with the rise of the Persian Empire and concluding with the fall of the Roman Empire. Out of the disruptions attending empire building came the great prophetic and philosophical insights that the modern world inherited. The tensions created by such differentiations spawned a long series of doctrinalizations whereby the insights contained in Plato's work or Christian scriptures, for instance, were transformed into objects outside the *metaxy* of human consciousness. Plato's symbols became propositions about which one might agree or not. This process eclipses the experience Plato sought to illuminate because symbols of experience became "'ideas' or 'beliefs.'" "The return from symbols which have lost their meaning to experiences which constitute meaning is so generally recognizable as the problem of the present that specific references are unnecessary." But the problems of return are numerous. Of special importance "is the massive block of accumulated symbols, secondary and tertiary, which eclipses the reality of man's existence in the Metaxy. To raise this obstacle and its structure into consciousness, and by its removal to help in the return to the truth of reality as it reveals itself in history, has become the purpose of *Order and History."" A more antimodern sentiment could hardly be expressed.

The problem with modern civilization is that it has inherited the symbols of the differentiated consciousness that found its synthesis in Christianity and those symbols have lost their transparency to truth. A bastardized set of ideas, beliefs, and ideologies have issued from this decay, and these ideas neither rest upon an experiential base nor function to orient individuals or societies to being. Indeed,
control replaced attunement. Humans who grow tired of living in-between will ignore the pole of reality beyond human control and thereby declare themselves masters of a niggardly reality. Masters they become but at the cost of their humanity. People choose their realities by selecting from the array of ideas and ideologies. One might become a Christian if one wants to believe in some powerful "being" called God. One might choose to believe in Marx if one can stomach a reality bound by immanent limits. Either way, one must close one's eyes to the nonexistent ground. The bogus certainty of intellectually possessing objects (what moderns like to call "knowledge" or, better yet, "scientific knowledge") pastes over the uncertainty detected in Leibniz's paradigmatic questions: Why is there something, why not nothing? and Why is the something as it is? By recapturing the truth of human existence in the metaxy, Voegelin hoped to introduce a healthy dose of uncertainty to a world bent upon fighting over competing certainties.

Since truths emerge in history, history is the "place" to begin the return. The two meanings of history just suggested might be called "historical consciousness" and "historical inquiry" (i.e., inquiry into historical consciousness). At no point in Voegelin's work is history understood as a catalog of events, civilizations, technologies, ideas, and such. Political, social, economic, and technological developments over time play important roles in "history," but they are not the stuff of history, which is the story of consciousness as it becomes aware of its structure. But history is also a structure in consciousness. "Through the differentiations of consciousness," wrote Voegelin, "history becomes visible as the process in which the differentiations occur." And further, "Since the differentiations advance man's insight into the constitution of his humanity, history becomes visible as a dimension of humanity beyond man's personal existence in society." Thus one recognizes that the process of differentiation—which is orchestrated by the God who calls—is historical. Moreover, by acquiring this historical awareness one transcends or escapes one's provincialism and participates in "humanity." An analysis of this last claim must wait, but one recognizes that a historical inquiry concerns the rather large question of human nature—or man's insight into the constitution of his humanity, which extends beyond any subject or object "man" to the process of reality in which the man participates. Indeed, Voegelin understood "human-
ity' to mean this participation. Human history is the story of participation that necessarily includes the various constituents in their respective roles—or, more precisely, the understanding of man's humanity granted by the experience of theophany.

Voegelin's history of historical consciousness constitutes an examination of a dimension of consciousness clarified in the era he examined—the ecumenic age. In that age Voegelin detected a triadic structure of ecumenic empire, spiritual outburst, and historiography. When multivilizational empires undermined faith in societies as the carriers of transcendent meaning the existential disorder that resulted precipitated a spiritual outburst. The newly differentiated understanding of reality exposed the older symbols of order as false, though they had been true in their time. Voegelin called this a before-and-after experience, by which he meant that the discovery created a recognition in the carrier that some new era had dawned—that the old symbols could never again be meaningful after such a leap in being. In the ecumenic age humans came to recognize distinct eras. God had written a new chapter.

When Moses discovered the "I AM" beyond the cosmos as the source and sustainer of existence he was forced to ask questions about the beginnings and the purposes of existence. As a result, the Israelites stepped out of the cycle of the cosmos and into the immediacy of God's presence in history. They were His people, and they would participate in the story He told. Similarly, Plato discovered the soul as the means of participation in the divine will. Right order, as a consequence, became a matter of personal or individual attunement with reality as apperceived. In both cases, the older cosmological order represented an outdated understanding of reality, and of "man." Man's humanity became luminous in its tension toward the beyond (God), and moreover, the process of discovery exposed the historical structure of humanity—i.e., that consciousness differentiates. "What happens 'in' history is the very process of differentiating consciousness that constitutes history."

Christianity, with its emphasis upon individual salvation, created the strongest sense of history as a story told by God in which individuals might open their souls to God's spirit and be thereby transfigured. The Christian salvation story thus heightened the eschatological structure of consciousness, and it replaced the tribe with the individual soul yearning for God. If not balanced by the recognition
of human earthliness, the tensional direction detected in consciousness might give way to expectations of imminent transfiguration—as it did for Paul. Paul then came to believe that he not only lived in God’s story—history—but that he had come to understand it in its entirety. Paul was the first person, Voegelin argued, to think of history as an “it.” Paul allowed his theophanic vision to become the final answer; he thought he had gained a perspective beyond history.

Nonetheless, Christianity, more than any other symbolism of order, exposes the individual living in immediacy before God in a story structured by theophanies. Like Plato earlier, but with greater emphasis, New Testament writers stressed man’s humanity as participation with the divine presence. In the age of empires, then, Christianity emerged as the great religion of humanity. By differentiating consciousness and exposing the character of human existence, the before-and-after experience that created historical consciousness extended to all humanity. History is universal history. That is, the truth that emerges from differentiating consciousness (and history is the story of differentiating consciousness) applies to Everyman. In this regard, again, Christian writers repeated with emphasis an understanding found in Plato.

The history of the discovery of history, Voegelin believed, exposed the historical structure of consciousness. “History,” he emphasized in connection with both Plato and Paul, “is the area of reality where the directional movement of the cosmos achieves luminosity in consciousness.” As Voegelin explored the meaning of history (the symbol “history”), the similarities with his analysis of consciousness come to mind. As he put it one place, “The reality of history is . . . the In-Between where man responds to the divine presence and divine presence evokes the response of man.” History is located in the metaxis. Paradoxically, then, history is not only about change but about changelessness. Because consciousness participates in the time of the physical world in which the person finds himself and in what Voegelin called the flux of divine presence, the discovery of the structure, which takes place in calendar time, exposes the unchanging presence of the divine ground. That is, differentiation is about the structure of consciousness—and history is God’s revelation of this structure. Of course, we must remind ourselves that consciousness is, not a thing, but a process in tension toward the ground.

Thus, Voegelin tried to limit “history” to mean theophanic events
that engender an experience of historical consciousness. He considered all attempts to superimpose a structure of historical meaning not available in the experiences themselves illegitimate, and his awareness of Eastern differentiations—he tried to incorporate this in one chapter of *The Ecumenic Age*—forced him to give up a single story line leading to his present. Instead, he focused upon the historical dimension of consciousness that appeared in the ecumenic age as a way of recovering an understanding of consciousness long since buried under a mountain of doctrines, ideas, ideologies, and other intentionalist fallacies. He believed that his own history penetrated to the experiences of the paradigmatic theophanies of the West, and he tried to dissolve all nonmetaphorical reifications so as to make clear the experiences he exposed. Along the way he created another historical moment—a before-and-after experience. Voegelin exposed the gnosticism of modernity and illuminated a structure of reality altogether obscured by a severely delimited horizon. The order of history really does emerge out of the history of order.

PHILOSOPHY OF POLITICS

Even as historian, Voegelin focused upon a philosophy of consciousness, and his quest to understand consciousness in turn issued from a concern about the political and social disorder of his time. In the Foreword to the German edition of *Anamnesis*, Voegelin noted that "the philosophy of consciousness is the centerpiece of a philosophy of politics." In his 1952 book, *New Science of Politics*, Voegelin sketched the numerous problems plaguing modern political science, as well as a brief history of modern gnosticism as the existential disease that stunted modern understanding of political reality.

The modern science of politics rested upon an antimetaphysical bias springing from a lust for power or control. The problems of both positivism and historicism discussed in Chapter 3 spring to mind. In light of his philosophy of consciousness, one must understand that Voegelin pointed to the eclipse of the transcendent pole of reality and the concomitant reification of immanent reality as the foundations for the despiritualized political philosophy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Because modern theorists lost access to the *metaxy*, they could not conceive of a right order. Instead, they talked
of "values," which began to take on the look of phenomena or objects. Such reductionism was required if one was limited to the intentionality of consciousness. Participation in the process of reality is obscured by immanent constructions of reality; as human constructs they tend to compete. Cut off from participation in the metatax, how can one adjudicate? One cannot.

Such an intellectual and spiritual environment supplies no resistance to the development of the most monstrous ideologies. In an age of disorder in which one's spiritual roots are cut, in which economic upheaval follows cultural and social disorder, one is apt to believe in a messiah promising participation in a world-historic event or in the establishment of a thousand-year Reich or promising the dawning of the communist age. Realities become intellectual and existential fashions that one may choose or not according to one's whim.

The verities of liberalism, with abstract notions of human dignity and rights, sustain so long as generalized rules of conduct do not make a mockery of those verities. I do not think Voegelin believed America and the West could long last with such a minimalist conception of the good. True order, in other words, emerges from an understanding of the good that rests in something larger than collective individual goods. For Voegelin, then, a new science of politics requires an understanding of consciousness that enlarges the realm of human participation to include the divine pole of reality. Indeed, the only true order is structured by the tension toward the divine ground experienced in consciousness. Of course, Voegelin did not call for any old god—as Strauss came close to advocating—but for the mysterious God beyond existence whose revelations are revelations of mystery. Politics is equally dangerous with reified gods or with no gods at all.