

---

## “Gnosis” in Eric Voegelin’s *Philosophy*

*The book certainly has an odd reception. Setting aside a few positivists, everybody seems to consider it very important, though nobody knows exactly why. Anyway, from my correspondence I see that it is read widely; and apparently it does not sell badly.*

Eric Voegelin on *The New Science of Politics*, 11 November 1953<sup>1</sup>

The present paper re-examines the role that terms such as “gnostic,” “gnosis” and “gnosticism” played in Eric Voegelin’s thought and its development. Such a re-examination seems appropriate for a number of reasons. First, as Murray Jardine observed, Eric Voegelin is still “probably best known to the current generation of American political theorists from his unrelenting critique of modernity in *The New Science of Politics* [...]”<sup>2</sup> Voegelin’s “unrelenting critique” in what is, arguably, his most “successful” book was based on a twofold argument. He claimed (1) that “the growth of gnosticism” was “the essence of modernity” and (2) that there was a historical continuity from ancient “gnosis” to its modern variants.<sup>3</sup> For the proper evaluation of Voegelin’s work it appears essential, therefore, to locate the insights from *The New Science of Politics* (NSP)—and especially the insights concerning “gnosticism”—within the context of the overall development of Voegelin’s thought. Furthermore, and second, there is the question of the empirical validity of Voegelin’s analysis of the relationship between “gnosticism” and modernity as presented in NSP. The two problems—the

place of NSP within Voegelin's life-work and the empirical validity of the book's contents—are analytically distinct. The analysis of “gnosticism” might have been an important milestone in his work even if it were factually incorrect. The value of the work does not exclusively depend on its empirical correctness. Indeed, before we can draw any conclusions regarding the relationship between the two problems we will first need to establish in what ways, if at all, Voegelin uses “gnosticism” as an “empirical concept.”

The paper is divided into four parts. In the first part we will trace the evolution of Voegelin's treatment of “gnosticism” from NSP to *In Search of Order*. Part 2 reconstructs Voegelin's self-understanding on the basis of his presentation of the “meditative quest for truth” as we find it in *Anamnesis* and the later works. This reconstruction should then allow us to locate the work on “gnosis” within his self-understanding. The question of the empirical validity of Voegelin's analysis of “gnosticism” is briefly taken up in Part 3. In the concluding Part 4 we will explore the implications of our analysis for our understanding of Voegelin's philosophical quest as a whole.

### 1. Eric Voegelin on “gnosticism”

Many authors tend to highlight the fact that Eric Voegelin, after years of reflection, came to re-consider his views on the “corrosion of Western civilization through gnosticism.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, as we shall see below, Voegelin admitted that NSP had overemphasized the “gnostic” contribution to the shaping of modernity. Other factors, such as the “miscarriage” of Neo-Platonism during the Renaissance, had been of equal importance. Commentators have also drawn attention to NSP's aggressive style, a style that appears very remote from the “meditative essays” of his later work. Accordingly, it has been suggested that NSP is little more than an example of “Cold War rhetorics.”<sup>5</sup> On both accounts—those that emphasize flaws in its contents as well as those that emphasize flaws in its style—NSP turns out to be an exception or aberration in Voegelin's enterprise and is thus representative of only a fairly short episode in Voegelin's life and work.

These assessments, however, are problematic because they

conflict with Voegelin's understanding of this particular "episode." More than twenty years after the event, he still considered the work he did on the Walgreen Lectures a "breakthrough."<sup>6</sup> Arguably, it was this vision, the sudden recognition of a structural equivalence between ancient "gnosis" and modern ideologies, that launched Voegelin's later work.<sup>7</sup> If NSP was to be dismissed as an "episode" or aberration, the status of the late work might be called into question as well.<sup>8</sup> It seems important, therefore, to look back at what Voegelin himself had to say on this matter and at how his views evolved in the aftermath of NSP.

### 1.1. Continuity

In the book proposal for NSP, at that time still entitled *Beyond Modernity*, Voegelin explained that the second part of the proposed work was to be "devoted to modern society and the type of Gnostic truth which it represents." Emphasizing the book's originality, he added that "the idea that modern politics is essentially a Gnostic movement is quite new. It is probably not known to anybody except one or two specialists like Hans Urs von Balthasar."<sup>9</sup> These lines reveal a genuine sense of discovery. While he was preparing the volume, Voegelin must have felt that he was among the first to unearth an important truth concerning both the history and essence of modernity. This sense of discovery was later qualified as he became aware that his work continued a tradition of scholarship that included, in addition to von Balthasar, Ferdinand Christian Baur, Hans Jonas and Henri de Lubac. While this insight might have relativized his own contribution, it also allowed him to draw on an established body of scholarship in defence of his own enterprise. As late as 1959, eight years after lecturing on modernity and "gnosticism" in Chicago, Voegelin wrote in a letter to Carl J. Friedrich:

Then there is the question of Gnosis. You attribute to me the "readiness" to identify all sorts of ideas as Gnostic—as if that were my oddity. Well, if you attribute to me, as is frequently done, the great discovery of the problem of modern Gnosis and its continuity with antiquity, I must decline the honor and humbly disavow

that stroke of genius. I ran across the problem for the first time in Balthasar's *Prometheus* of 1937. Then I ascertained that he was right, through the study of Jonas's *Gnosis* of 1934, and through the reading of mountains of materials on medieval sectarianism. For the modern application, I found this view confirmed through the works of Lubac. And then I took the precaution of discussing the question in detail with Puech, Quispel, and Bultmann, that is, with the foremost living authorities on Gnosis and Christianity. They all agreed that this was indeed *the* issue. To sum up: everybody who is somebody in questions of this kind shares the opinion. Of course, you are quite right when you state that this comes as a surprise to the "profession." But you know as well as I do, that the "profession" consists to a notable percentage of academic racketeers who cash professors' salaries without the minimum effort of even reading the books written by other people. And when you speak of the "startling consequences" with regard to the bracketing of contemporary figures, I can only assure you that they are not startling at all, but common-place, to the scholars who know their business. Again, I am flabbergasted that you of all people should take the side of the racketeers against the scholars—and what scholars—look again at the names given above."<sup>10</sup>

Against mounting criticism, Voegelin continued to pursue the research program unfolding from NSP's diagnosis of modernity throughout the 1960s. In 1959, the problem of "gnosticism" was to become the central focus of the final volume of the *Order and History* series. The first part of the volume was to be entitled "The Gnosis of Western society from Charlemagne to the outburst of the Reformation," while the second part had the provisional title "The Gnostic transformation of Western society."<sup>11</sup> And although the emphasis on "gnosis" had faded to some extent, a revised outline of the final volume of the series from 1963 still concludes with a section on "The continuity of the Gnostic movement from antiquity to the present."<sup>12</sup> In 1961, as he was looking for external funding for his new institute for political science in Munich, Voegelin applied to the

Fritz-Thyssen-Stiftung with a proposal that included as one of its important projects research on the "entire complex of Gnosis, ancient and modern" as well as on the "system" as the typically "gnostic" form of thinking. When it turned out that the Thyssen foundation would not fund entire institutions but only research projects, it was suggested that Voegelin should concentrate on the project on "gnosticism." With a reformulated project on "modern political mass movements and their spiritual motivation through variants of gnosis" Voegelin's application was eventually successful. The project was funded over three years between 1962 and 1965.<sup>13</sup> And in the preface written for the 1968 American edition of *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, Voegelin still asserted with confidence that "the more we come to know about the Gnosis of antiquity, the more it becomes certain that modern movements of thought, such as progressivism, positivism, Hegelianism, and Marxism, are variants of Gnosticism."<sup>14</sup>

These ideas remained a constant in Voegelin's work also throughout the 1970s and 1980s. "The Eclipse of Reality" compares Schiller's interpretation of Genesis to the "ancient Gnostic inversion of the Fall of man as a Promethean revolt against God," and speaks of the "Gnostic endowment of the homunculus," of the imaginary man who, after embracing the "Gnostic spirit" as well as "doxic reason," eclipses both faith and philosophy.<sup>15</sup> The analysis of "gnosticism" continues in *The Ecumenic Age*, where we encounter the "gnostic thinkers," "both ancient and modern," as the "great psychologists of alienation, carriers of the Promethean revolt." In fact, Voegelin links the emergence of "gnosticism" directly to the substance of *The Ecumenic Age*: "...the Gnostic deformation of consciousness must be put into the pragmatic and spiritual context of the Ecumenic Age which is the subject-matter of the present volume." And again we are reminded of the parallels between the ancient and modern variants of the "gnostic" "distortion of reality": "In the prototypical case of modern Gnosticism, in Hegel's system, the essential core is the same as in the Valentinian speculations [...]." We learn that once "gnosticism," the "dead end," had entered the universal field of history, it was there to last:

“Since Gnosticism surrounds the libido dominandi in man with a halo of spiritualism or idealism, and can always nourish its righteousness by pointing to the evil in the world, no historical end to the attraction is predictable once magic pneumatism has entered history as a mode of existence.”<sup>16</sup>

The theme returns also in “Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme: A Meditation,” where Voegelin explains that the “Gnostic-satanic movements” with their “revolt against reality” had become “a force in world history.”<sup>17</sup>

Finally, both Volumes 4 and 5 of *Order and History* feature the familiar distinction between ancient and modern “gnosis.” Volume 4 asserts that while the “early [gnostic] movements attempt to escape from the metaxy by splitting its poles into the hypostases of this world and the Beyond, the modern apocalyptic-Gnostic movements attempt to abolish the metaxy by transforming the Beyond into this world.”<sup>18</sup> The formula is used also in Volume 5, where both ancient and modern “gnosis” amount to a “revolt in consciousness”:

“At the extreme of the revolt in consciousness, “reality” and the “beyond” become two separate entities, two “things,” to be magically manipulated by suffering man for the purpose of either abolishing “reality” altogether and escaping into the “beyond,” or of forcing the order of the “beyond” into “reality.” The first of the magic alternatives is preferred by the Gnostics of antiquity, the second one by the modern Gnostic thinkers.”<sup>19</sup>

Voegelin also does not in any way revoke the diagnosis of “contemporary Western society” which was first put forward in NSP. *In Search of Order* presents the “deformation of consciousness” and the “confusion of language” as syndromes of a disorder that has grown “to the proportion of an established, in the sense of publicly accepted, state of unconsciousness.”<sup>20</sup>

It is thus fair to say that Voegelin never departed fundamentally from the NSP vision of a structural equivalence between ancient and modern “gnosis.” Even if we admit that “gnosticism” did not again feature as prominently as it did in NSP, the evidence still suggests

that this was not because Voegelin abandoned the arguments first made in NSP but because he took them for granted and left the details to the specialists and to his students.

### 1.2. Adjustments

Although, as we saw, Voegelin never abandoned his ideas on “gnosticism” entirely, he had many reasons for becoming more cautious in presenting them in his later work. After all, even the authorities mentioned in his letter to Friedrich had openly expressed their disagreement. Bultmann, for example, found Voegelin’s characterization of “gnosis” inappropriate. He spoke of a “secularization” of the term and wondered whether this gesture was “admissible.” And again, commenting on *Wissenschaft, Politik und Gnosis*, he disapproved of Voegelin’s use of the label “gnosis” and “gnostic.”<sup>21</sup> Voegelin’s friend Alfred Schütz, too, expressed reservations.<sup>22</sup> As always, however, the criticism that carried most weight and, therefore, was most painful to endure was the criticism that came from experts like Bultmann. In a letter to Gerhart Niemeyer, Voegelin complained that

“[w]henver you suggest a general causal connection between an institutional state of order or disorder and a spiritual experience and its symbolization, you run into the snag that a connoisseur of history can give you an *instantia contraria* which invalidates the general relation which you have assumed on the basis of your limited materials.”<sup>23</sup>

Voegelin responded to the criticisms not by giving up his claims regarding the contemporary relevance of “gnosticism” but by refining them. In a lecture given at the Eric Voegelin-Symposium at the University of Notre Dame during Spring 1971, held in honor of “20 years of *The New Science of Politics*,” he noted that “there is nothing about *The New Science of Politics*, as I wrote it twenty years ago, that has to be retracted. It fits, on the whole, still, but a lot has to be added.”<sup>24</sup> On this occasion, he lamented the “dogmatization, which sets in whenever a book is published.” In case of NSP, this dogmatization was

perhaps more dangerous than in the other situations,...because immediately the problem of gnosis as characteristic of modern political ideas—especially in the great speculative systems of Fichte, Hegel, of Marx and Comte, et al.—attracted attention and was absolutized. And every day I get questions of the kind: “Is the Russian government a Gnostic government?” Of course, things are not that simple.

The situation was “not that simple,” he explained, because “gnosis” turned out to be but one element in the “modern compound.” There were other elements, including apocalyptic and Neo-Platonic symbolisms. He concluded: “Gnosis is not the panacea and the recipe for dealing with modernity. There are other problems besides Gnosis in modern political science.”<sup>25</sup>

This broadening of the original vision is also discussed in the *Autobiographical Reflections*, dictated in 1973:

Since my first applications of Gnosticism to modern phenomena in *The New Science of Politics* and in 1959 in my study on *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*, I have had to revise my position. The application of the category of Gnosticism to modern ideology, of course, stands. In a more complete analysis, however, there are other factors to be considered in addition. One of these factors is the metastatic apocalypse deriving directly from the Israelite prophets, via Paul, and forming a permanent strand in Christian sectarian movements right up to the Renaissance.... I found, furthermore, that neither the apocalyptic nor the Gnostic strand completely accounts for the process of immanentization. This factor has independent origins in the revival of neo-Platonism in Florence in the late fifteenth century.<sup>26</sup>

As always when he felt it necessary to revise his “position,” Voegelin explained the revision as an adjustment made in response to new empirical material becoming available:

...over the years what I had seen in the 1940s and 1950s as a problem had also been seen by others, and the historical exploration of such problems as Gnosticism, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the



Nag Hammadi finds, the prehistory of Pseudo-Dionysius, the revival of neo-Platonism in the Renaissance and its developments up to Hegel, had made enormous progress, so that now I could refer to the studies of the sources conducted by a great number of scholars—sources that had not been accessible to the public in the 1940s and 1950s....”<sup>27</sup>

Thus, in 1973 Voegelin had plans to develop a “philosophy of history” that would “include the new picture of prehistory that is emerging following the revision of the C-14 dates after 1966, as well as *the entirely new picture of origins of modernity* in the Renaissance with special emphasis on hermetism, neo-Platonism, magic, apocalypse, and Gnosticism as compound strands in the structure of the modern West.”<sup>28</sup> The extent to which Voegelin’s horizon had broadened since the 1950s is nicely illustrated in a list of twelve “languages of order” [Sprachen der Ordnung] to be found in a file “Notes and research material on Philosophy of History” in the Hoover Archives.<sup>29</sup> The twelve “languages of order” are:

Myth, ancient-oriental [alt-orientalisch]

Myth, hellenic

Revelation

Philosophy

Metaphysics

Theology

Apocalyptic

Gnosis

Neo-Platonic systems

Mysticism

Ideology

Philosophy of consciousness

The list indicates how, for Voegelin, the problem of “gnosis” had become just one item in a cluster of fundamental problems related to the experience and expression of order. Indeed, the problem that was at the centre of the second part of NSP, the characterization of

modernity, seems to have largely disappeared from the range of problems that Voegelin was exploring in his work. The problem faded into background as it became clear that the periodization of history into epochs or eras such as “modernity” resulted from “the application of apocalyptic symbols to immanent history.” In the address given at Notre Dame in 1971, Voegelin noted that the problem of historical epochs, “the paroxysm of successive avantgardes,” was one of the problems he had neglected in NSP.<sup>30</sup> It is perhaps not surprising, then, that later in his life he devoted more time to the paleolithicum—he travelled to France, Ireland, Iran and Hawaii in order to see pre-historical cave paintings and monuments—than to “modernity.”

Accordingly, when invited by Richard Bishirjian in 1976 to contribute to a book on “Gnosticism and Modernity,” Voegelin declined, referring to “all [his] other work” that he was burdened with. But he offered important advice:

One comment I should make right now. Obviously the title “Gnosticism and Modernity” is, at least partly, inspired by my own work in the field. But when I hit on this problem, that was 25 years ago. In the meantime, science in this matter has advanced. And today I would have to say that Gnosticism is one component in the historical structure of modernity but no more than one. Of equal importance, it has turned out, are apocalyptic, neo-Platonism, hermeticism, alchemy, and magic. Your projected volume would have to take account of this newer development in the historical sciences—or there will be critics who will blame it for inadequacy.<sup>31</sup>

In his reply Bishirjian wondered whether “these various movements [could] be considered species of the genus Gnosticism.”<sup>32</sup> But Voegelin disagreed:

The literature on magic, neo-Platonism, apocalyptic, Kabbalah, hermeticism, and alchemy is growing prodigiously and can be read by anybody who cares to read it. All of these factors are components in the present intellectual disorder, just as is Gnosticism.... I would be cautious about using “Gnosticism” as a genus, comprehending the other movements.<sup>33</sup>

There almost developed an aversion on Voegelin's part against attempts at making him the representative of a "position" in the debate on "modernity." He did not hide his impatience when he felt that the insights of NSP were "dogmatized" beyond the empirical analysis from which, he claimed, they were derived. For example, in a letter to Dante Germino he writes:

Since you include some remarks on what I have said now almost twenty years ago about the problem of modernity, I should perhaps express a little sorrow that you tend to dogmatize a result of empirical analysis. During the last twenty years, the study of Gnosticism and its modern variants has advanced very much. Hence, what apparently you consider a "position" in the matter, has undergone considerable changes, which, in their turn, are not a "position" but an expression of the *present* state of science in this matter.... In the meanwhile, we have learned about the connections between gnosis on the one side and sorcery and alchemy on the other side through Festugière. It now looks as if the sorcery which emerges from Enlightenment rationalism were a sequel to medieval alchemy.<sup>34</sup>

## 2. "Gnosticism" as a "type-concept"

The previous discussion does not allow us to draw easy conclusions. As much as the question of "modernity" and "epochs" faded into the background of Voegelin's work, "gnosticism" *gained* in importance as a perennial problem, as a temptation that was "a constant force in the millennial process of the quest for truth."<sup>35</sup> With the focus on modernity gone, the analysis could move to the more general problem of "the experiences that result in immanentist constructions."<sup>36</sup>

"Gnosticism," as a theme, runs through Eric Voegelin's work from NSP to *In Search of Order*. To be sure, there were qualifications, revisions, and adjustments as indicated in the previous section. But Voegelin never surrendered his belief that behind the notion of "gnosis" or "gnosticism" there was a very serious, perennial, spiritual problem that somehow, in the modern era, had risen to the level of social and political mass phenomena. The image that

emerges from the quotations provided in the first part of this paper is the image of a thinker who wrestles with the discovery of a problem and who struggles with its articulation. Voegelin is not struggling with “solutions”; his problem is the articulation of the problem. It is thus not surprising that Voegelin returned to the problem again and again, wrestling with its meaning and its implications. His letters reveal that there were the occasional moments when he felt that he was finally able to fully articulate the problem. In retrospective, a brief hint found in a 1962 letter appears almost comical:

The last week was somewhat hectic, as I finally had to solve the problem of gnosis.<sup>37</sup>

As late as 1977, as we noted above, Voegelin was still working on the relationship between the various historical manifestations of “gnosticism.” He announced that work on “Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme” had finally allowed him to “render more precise the distinction between ancient and modern gnosis.”<sup>38</sup> The fact that Voegelin was never able to put the problem to rest suggests that its full articulation was never accomplished.

The criticism that his use of words such as “gnostic” and “gnosis” provoked, of course, left its mark. At various times Voegelin considered giving up the label—“gnosticism”—but he remained loyal to the problem. For example, in 1956 he wrote in a letter:

And I have solved at last the great methodological and terminological problem for classifying ideas which operate with a change in the nature of the world. Their origin lies with the Prophets; and the term found is *metastasis*. *That ought to make everybody happy who balked at gnosis*.—That is now a great relief, because I have the conceptual instruments to handle such phenomena as gnosis and Marcionism, and especially the modern ideas.<sup>39</sup>

The quotation is revealing. Voegelin could not ignore the expert criticism, the “balking,” and yet he was unwilling to surrender the problem as meaningless. It was now under the label of “metastasis” that ancient “gnosis” and “especially the modern ideas” were sub-

sumed. The "solution" was stable, however, only for a short time as he was unable to avoid the notion of "gnosticism" altogether. Voegelin continued to look for alternative labels for the "gnostic" spiritual problem and its various dimensions and manifestations. Among the other labels that he proposed in this context are: "egophany," "egophanic revolt," "pneumopathology," "doxic reason," "resistance to reality," "deformation of existence," "refusal to apperceive," "schizophrenia." At some point Voegelin was looking for similarities between clinical schizophrenia and the "split consciousness" of the creators of "systems."<sup>40</sup> There is also the notion of "second realities," which caught his attention while he was reading Musil and Doderer in 1956/7.<sup>41</sup>

We will be able to comprehend the meaning and the direction of the development of Voegelin's work only if we appreciate how his language "expanded." For the terms listed above occur together, in various permutations and combinations, emphasizing various aspects of the one cluster of spiritual problems that was once subsumed—in a more compact "concept"—under the label "gnosticism." As we noted above, the process whereby these terms were introduced never came to an end; and the new terms never fully replaced the earlier ones. None of the terms, taken on its own, seemed to capture the problems in its entirety. The terms worked together, as in a cluster, so that Voegelin's language in which he explored the problem was enriched and thereby refined.

An important implication of this observation is that Voegelin's use of the label "gnosticism" cannot be fully comprehended and evaluated in terms of its empirical validity. In the context of Voegelin's development, "gnosticism" is a concept that corresponds to a particular phase in a research process that continued to look for more effective language tools for the articulation of its "object." This process was probably initiated with the work on NSP and continued after its publication; indeed, the process becomes thematic in *Anamnesis*. We must not forget that the quest that Voegelin explores in *Anamnesis* and his post-NSP works is also a self-exegesis, the exegesis of a quest that Voegelin himself was pursuing.<sup>42</sup> And it might be instructive, therefore, to follow his lead in *our* interpreta-

tion of his endeavour.

Beginning with *Anamnesis*, Voegelin's work becomes increasingly self-referential. A questioning movement is examined and, thereby, exemplified. In its course, various names are given to the movement. It finds its historical antecedent in the "classical noesis" of Plato and Aristotle; it takes place in the divine-human in-between, in the metaxy, and is variously characterized as "the quest for the ground," "noetic exegesis," "participation," "cognitive reflection," "meditation," "meditative process," "reflective distance." In the following we will highlight those features of Voegelin's "cognitive reflection" that are of interest to us in the context of the present paper.

(i) The various names that the meditative process assigns to itself are not concepts or definitions referring to objects. This observation is so important to Voegelin that he repeats it again and again. Cognitive reflection, he explains in "The Beginning and the Beyond," "does not arise from the observation of an external object but within the process from acts of reflection that relate present insights to earlier ones." Thus, "reflection is not an external act of cognition directed towards the process as its object, but part of a process that internally has cognitive structure." Within the meditative process, "there is no such thing as a pre-existent language that can be applied to the movement of appeal-response; there is only the language that arises from the metaxy of the process in its course."<sup>43</sup> In his essay "Was ist politische Realität?" ["What is Political Reality?"], Voegelin introduces the notion of "language indices" of the meditative movement.<sup>44</sup> The language symbols that emerge from the process do not denote objects or their properties but are language "indices" arising from the metaxy in the event of its becoming luminous for itself and for the comprehensive reality. Indeed, "the symbols of noesis are linguistic indices of a movement of participation. Their primary function is to illuminate this movement itself, but they cannot illuminate it without simultaneously expressing insights into the participating realities."<sup>45</sup> In other words, the symbols are "exegetic, not descriptive."<sup>46</sup> They are not to be understood as a "truth" to be possessed as "informative doctrine." "The truth of

the symbols is not informative; it is evocative. The symbols do not refer to structures in the external world but to the existential movement in the metaxy from which they mysteriously emerge as the exegesis of the movement in intelligibly expressive language." The "reflective distance" is the distance between the philosopher's existence "as an event of participatory consciousness, and the exegesis of the event through the symbols he developed in his work."<sup>47</sup> Voegelin agrees with Bodin, who, in his *Colloquium Heptaplomeres*, appears to suggest that "symbolism is nothing more than the last word of each historical religion; the reality of faith through *conversio* lies beyond the symbols."<sup>48</sup> Accordingly, the symbols have to be understood as an "index" of the meditative movement because they lose their meaning if taken out of the context of the movement that engendered them. If they are separated from the engendering experience, the result will be a "hardening" of the symbols into hypostases or doctrines. These doctrines, as they enter history, then have an impact of their own as they provoke "alternative doctrines" which are not motivated by noetic experience. Voegelin dealt extensively with the resulting confusion under titles such "literalism," "literalization," "doctrinization."<sup>49</sup> In a letter to F.A. Wilhelmsen, focusing more specifically on "metaphysical symbols," Voegelin explained:

...metaphysical symbols...only make sense as the terminal points of the existential movement of participation in the divine. It appears to me that, in this manner, one can more convincingly explain what is meant by doctrinization, i.e. by the separation of the terminal symbols from the movement that has engendered them.<sup>50</sup>

Voegelin later added this phenomenon of "doctrinization" to the list of factors which he considered components in "the present intellectual disorder" next to "gnosticism," magic, Neo-Platonism, apocalypticism, hermeticism etc.<sup>51</sup>

(ii) The various symbols that emerge from the meditative process may occur together, as in a group or cluster. They may form what Voegelin calls a "complex" or "meditative complex." A complex is a "symbolic framework," a unity, in which the symbols relate to and

mutually illuminate each other. The two perhaps most important examples of such complexes are developed in *In Search of Order*: “consciousness–reality–language” and “intentionality–luminosity–reflective distance.”<sup>52</sup> *The Ecumenic Age* mentions the complex “experience–question–answer,” which only when taken as a whole can be considered a “constant of consciousness.”<sup>53</sup> A complex is usually the most appropriate form of symbolization for the experience of a tension; the complex holds the various poles of the tension together as parts of the one reality that becomes cognitively luminous in the experience, thereby preventing them from being misconstrued as separate entities.<sup>54</sup> Thus, by calling these configurations “complexes,” Voegelin implies that their components are not to be separated; a complex is not meant to be “cut up into pieces or fragmentized.” For example, the “tension towards the ground” can evoke a complex of three symbols: a divine reality that inspires the soul’s movement, a concrete human soul that quests, and the in-between of the metaxy. To say that this complex must not be fragmented means that the study of the divine side (theology), or of the human side (anthropology), or the study of the in-between process (psychology) should not stand separately. “The meditative investigation must not be deformed into these three forms” because “the in-between is not a question of psychology, theology or anthropology; it is always a matter of the response, of the movements and countermovements.”<sup>55</sup> The fragmentation of a complex is a derailment closely related to the phenomena of deformation and “doctrinization.”

A meditative complex emerges and unfolds as the result of a process of differentiation. As the meditative process continues, an integral set of new symbols (or old symbols with new meanings) replaces, or is added to, the symbols already in use. The new symbols manifest a refinement of the original insight into the experience that engendered the earlier symbols. An enrichment of language may reflect a refinement of “vision” and a differentiation of the consciousness undergoing the meditative process. In the course of this differentiation, the singularity of one “compact” symbol is replaced with the complexity of a meditative complex. The complex itself



thereby becomes an index of the meditative process. Through these complexes of symbols and their differentiation the process becomes luminous for itself.

(iii) Voegelin emphasizes that noesis "arises, not independently of the conception of order of the surrounding society, but in a critical argument with the latter. Wherever noesis appears, it stands in a relation of tension to society's self-interpretation."<sup>56</sup> "The movement towards truth always resists an untruth."<sup>57</sup>

(iv) As they try to protect the noetic center of the metaxy against the "deformative forces prevalent at the time," the meditations obtain a "historical dimension."<sup>58</sup> As noesis enters history, and consciousness gains insights into its structure, all non-noetic experiences and symbols are revealed as "attempts to gain true insights into the existential tension towards the ground." Noesis establishes a basic equivalence with other types of symbolisms and thereby evokes the "universal field of history" with itself as the standard of "rationality." In other words, noesis "indexes history as a field of rational structure" by identifying the degree of rationality of other truths in relation to itself. A ranking or "positioning" takes place, which is expressed in "type-concepts." As examples of "modern type-concepts," Voegelin lists "compact and differentiated experiences," the "primary cosmic experience," the "noetic and revelatory experiences of transcendence," the "*parekbasis* or derailment into dogmatism," the "metastatic, apocalyptic, and Gnostic experiences," "revolutionary experiences," "and so on [usw]."<sup>59</sup> The formation of type-concepts reflects that noesis forces all other interpretations of order into the role of "objects":

In this oppositional relation lies the starting point for a process of differentiation, in which the noetic interpretation can become a "science" relating to political reality as its "object." This oppositional relation is, furthermore, reciprocal in that the protagonists of a given non-noetic interpretation are not helpless when their noetic critics attempt to objectify them. They do not let themselves be pushed into the role of an "object of investigation" without resistance. Instead, they will in turn objectify their noetic

opponents from the viewpoint of their own knowledge of order.<sup>60</sup>

These type-concepts, he elaborates further, are to be distinguished “from the indices of the exegesis, in which the noetic movement of participation becomes linguistically transparent to itself and thereby communicable. Even though type-concepts can be developed only in consequence of this exegesis, they do not interpret the noetic experience itself but refer to phenomena beyond its scope.”<sup>61</sup> It is here, thus, where Voegelin helps us explain his use of the term “gnosticism” as a “type-concept.”

(v) Voegelin is right in distinguishing the “type-concepts” from the indices of the meditative movement. The concepts are not interpretations of the noetic experience; moreover, they objectify the aspects of reality they refer to while, as noted above, the symbols and complexes do not refer to “objects” at all. Indeed, Voegelin’s late work defines the distinction between symbols and concepts in terms of the distinction between luminosity and intentionality.<sup>62</sup> While this definition emphasizes the fundamental difference between symbols and concepts, it also makes us realize their equivalence. Both luminosity and intentionality are “structural meanings” of consciousness, and they both are part of the complex “luminosity–intentionality–reflective distance,” and hence they are, in a sense, complementary. In particular, the concepts, too, are indices of the meditative movement that engendered them through objectification. For the meditative process begins in existential unrest caused by the surrounding disorder; every movement towards truth always resists an untruth. In this sense, the movement towards truth is “indexed” by the untruth it resists. The type-concepts make this resistance communicable.

(vi) We can push this analysis further by arguing that type-concepts, too, can form a “complex.” Just as the meditative process leads to a refinement of meditative symbols and complexes, the type-concepts, too, can be elaborated by adding more concepts which, in their relationship to the concepts already in use, lead to a refinement of “vision.” In “Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme,” Voegelin speaks of two correlative complexes, the meditative complex of

"(divine) appeal–(human) response–metaxy" and a "deformation complex," to be derived from the former through fragmentation.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, there is the possibility of "deformation complexes" undergoing "differentiating advances" in parallel with the meditative complex. This possibility is acknowledged in *In Search of Order*:

If, however, one does not stop thinking, the recall [of various cases of "disturbances of existential consciousness"] will read as a "story" of deformative symbols [sic] engendered parallel with the formative differentiation of the Beyond in the Near Eastern ethnic cultures of the cosmological empires and the Chosen People. The recall, far from being a plain account of indifferently equal cases coming under a general head, tells a story of increasingly conscious resistance to beginnings that come to an end without reaching the End, culminating in the phantasy of a beginning that will make an end of the Beginning. In the context of the story, therefore, the cases partake of the diversification that characterizes the quest for truth. Parallel with the diversified history of truth and of attunement to its order, and closely related to its substance, there appears to run a diversified history of untruth and disorder.<sup>64</sup>

(vii) The notions of "parallelism," "opposition" or "correlation," however, do not adequately capture the complicated, multi-layered relationship between the two stories/complexes. The two stories are intertwined; there is a sense, in fact, in which they mutually constitute each other. The forces of imagination that bring forth luminous symbols are the very same forces that bring forth objectifying concepts. The history of the quest for truth is involved in the history of the resistance to truth, the history of untruth, and vice versa. History "turns out to be a process not only of truth becoming luminous, but also of truth becoming deformed and lost by the very forces of imagination and language which let the truth break forth into image and word." Even more, "the differentiating advances of truth can become the source of new types of untruth, when visions are misused to obscure areas of reality outside their more immediate field, or when visionary symbols are subjected to the deformative

processes of doctrinization and literalization.”<sup>65</sup> But the meditative quest is not simply passively subjected to deformation; it actively contributes to the deformative process by objectifying its competitors. Through language symbols the process becomes luminous for itself and the participating realities; through type-concepts the process structures the universal field of history in which it finds itself. Its competitors in the struggle for truth are objectified and ranked according to their degree of rationality. The situation of the struggle induces “a ‘language of the struggle,’...burdening the formulation with the double meaning of truth and opposition to untruth; and through the oppositional component of meaning something of the untruth opposed creeps into the symbolization of truth.”<sup>66</sup> At the same time, the meditative process finds itself objectified by its competitors in the struggle for truth. Historically, therefore, the struggle is bound to adopt the form of “verbal mimesis.”

(viii) Voegelin analyses the dynamics of the “verbal mimesis” in his discussion of the role of the “fool” in Anselm of Canterbury’s exchange with Gaunilo, following the *Proslogion*.<sup>67</sup> In the context of Anselm’s text, Gaunilo acts “the role of the fool, of the *insipiens*, who says ‘There is no God’ and assumes that the explorer of faith [Anselm] is engaged in a ‘proof’ for the assertion that God exists.” As we noted above, it is the encounter with untruth, with the fool, that provokes the noetic response. The noetic response, of course, is not a “proof” in the sense of a logical demonstration, “but only in the sense of an *epideixis*, of a pointing to an area of reality that the constructor of the negative propositions has chosen to overlook, or to ignore, or refuses to perceive. One cannot prove reality by a syllogism; one can only point to it and invite the doubter to look.”

This “pointing to reality” may lead noesis to counter the fool’s “negative propositions” with “positive propositions” of its own. “Reality” then becomes a “this” or “that” rather than a mystery in the process of revelation. The encounter with the fool, thus, affects the noetic reflection in that the latter, confronting the negative assertion that God does not exist, acquires the “character of an affirmative position.” Hence, “the symbolism of the noetic quest threatens to

derail into a quarrel about proof and non-proof of a proposition when the fool enters the discussion." This quarrel between the "positive" and "negative" response to the divine appeal is an example of "verbal mimesis":

As a consequence, the two types of theology together represent the verbal mimesis of the human tension between the potentialities of response or non-response to divine presence in personal, social, and historical existence.<sup>68</sup>

(ix) Thus, truth and untruth, meditation and deformation, meditative complex and deformation complex are not simply "opposed" to each other. Voegelin, as we saw, acknowledged that "something of the untruth opposed creeps into the symbolization of truth"; and at least indirectly he also acknowledged the reverse effect, that something of the truth denied and resisted creeps into the symbolization of untruth.<sup>69</sup> We also noted that the meditative process is a real player in the mimetic game of objectification; it entails the seed, we may say, for its own deformation. But there is also a sense in which, vice versa, the process of deformation can contribute to the formative quest:

...a movement of resistance [against truth], if it achieves clarity about its experiential motivations and elaborates the story of its deformative quest, can contribute substantially to the understanding of the paradox in the formative structure it resists, while the defenders of the truth may fall into the various traps prepared by their own self-assertive resistance and thus contribute substantially to an understanding of the forces of deformation.<sup>70</sup>

Therefore, Voegelin concluded, "in the depth of the quest, formative truth and deformative untruth are more closely related than the language of 'truth' and 'resistance' would suggest."<sup>71</sup>

(x) The spectacular drama of the struggle for truth in history should not overshadow the fact that the struggle is fought also "within" the consciousness engaged in the meditative quest. "The fool cannot be dismissed lightly," Voegelin explains, because "the folly of responding to the divine appeal by denial or evasion is just

as much a human possibility as the positive response. As a potentiality it is present in every man, including the believer; and in certain historical situations its actualization can become a massive social force.”<sup>72</sup> Therefore, “the thinker engaged in the formative quest is a human being plagued by the forces of self-assertive resistance in his soul just as much as his counterpart, the resister to the paradoxical structure of consciousness-reality, is plagued by the truth of reality.”<sup>73</sup> For it is from within the quest that both luminous symbols and objectifying type-concepts unfold. At any cross-section of history, therefore, it is only its reflective distance that distinguishes the formative quest from the other players in the mimetic game of objectification. By reflectively distancing itself from the symbols and concepts currently in use, the meditative process reminds itself that both symbols and concepts are but *indices* of its differentiating advance; they never fully exhaust the process itself. Referring specifically to Plato’s example, Voegelin observes that

Plato’s positive “type of theology” derived its validity from the defense of truth against the negative type of the Sophists, *but the truth defended was not to be found in the propositional “type” itself*; even the positive type would have been empty without its background in the truth of experience.<sup>74</sup>

(xi) The insight into the truth which is beyond the symbols used in its defence explains Voegelin’s interest in mysticism. According to “What is Political Reality?,” classical noesis and mysticism are the two “pre-dogmatic realities of knowledge” in which the logos of consciousness was optimally differentiated. In modern times, Voegelin explains, mysticism has twice become the source of attempts to find the way back from dogmatism to the rationality of thought: once by Bodin in the 16th century, “in the situation of theological dogmatomachy”; the second time by Bergson in the 20th century, “in the situation of ideological dogmatomachy.” The mysticism of Bodin avoids the derailment into “literalist dogma” by maintaining the balance between the knowledge of symbols and the knowledge of what lies beyond them. This balance between the

realms of silence and of expression characterizes the nature of "tolerance."<sup>75</sup>

Voegelin's interest in mysticism pre-dates NSP. In a letter to Friedrich von Engel-Janosi, Voegelin noted in 1943 that the "philosophical process begins, not with the categories of being, but with the rationalization of the encounter with the divine [Rationalisierung des Gotteserlebnisses] through the mysticism of the *via negativa*."<sup>76</sup> At the end of 1944 Voegelin explained that he had interpreted Nietzsche, for the study on Nietzsche and Pascal, from the perspective of the "*theologia negativa*," and this for the following reason:

What collapses is a historical stage of concretisation and the corresponding institutions; for the individual today, as much as for the individual in the 5th and 15th century, there remains the *socially indestructible* position of the *theologia negativa*; for the individual undergoes a crisis only if he insists on finding his absolute coordinates in his nation, as a Marxist, as a Liberal etc.<sup>77</sup>

This is a revealing quote in that it draws our attention to the experiential context of Voegelin's pursuit of the *via negativa*. In a time of "collapse," the individual avoids being drawn into the surrounding disorder by adopting the "socially indestructible position" of the "*theologia negativa*."

We are now in a position to characterize Voegelin's use of "gnosticism" as a concept. As we saw, Voegelin's noetic quest arises in the form of a resistance against the surrounding disorder; the quest for truth always resists an untruth. In Voegelin's case, this "untruth" was at some point subsumed under the label "gnosticism," a type-concept derived from the noetic indexation of history. In order to appreciate the significance of the label for Voegelin's analysis, we need to remind ourselves again that both the meditative symbols as well as the objectifying type-concepts are achievements of the consciousness engaged in the meditative quest. The indexation of history is at the same time a self-indexation of the meditation; it is indexed by the untruth that it resists. Accordingly, Voegelin's work is indexed by its meditative symbols as much as by its type-

concepts. However, in the course of the meditative process, both the meditative symbols and the type-concepts undergo a differentiating advance whereby the more compact language symbols and concepts are replaced or qualified by newer, more refined symbols and concepts. According to the self-understanding of Voegelin's quest, this process is to be expected; it signifies a "refinement of," rather than a "departure from," earlier assumptions.

The close relationship in Voegelin's analysis between symbols and concepts, between the meditative complex and the "deformation complex," will allow us, in the concluding Part 4 of this paper, to characterize the "philosophical type" that Voegelin's philosophy represents. Before we can turn to this conclusion, however, we need to briefly examine the question of the empirical validity of Voegelin's analysis of "gnosticism."

### 3. Voegelin's "errors"

The previous observations are not meant to be "apologetic"; we are not attempting to "rescue" Voegelin's work on "gnosticism" from attacks by zealous critics. On the contrary, if "gnosis" and "gnosticism" in Voegelin are understood as empirical concepts then we must agree with the critics that his work is full of problems. Two observations deserve to be highlighted in this context. First, his use of "gnosticism" violated the most elementary methodological principles that he had defined for himself long before and, in fact, *in (!)* NSP. Let us briefly review these principles. In *On the Form of the American Mind*, Voegelin had explained that his analysis was not meant to impose an interpretation "from the outside" onto the material; instead it represented an "attempt at extracting the instruments of interpretation as well as the meaning from the material itself."<sup>78</sup> In NSP Voegelin was able to articulate his methodological principles with greater clarity by distinguishing between "the language symbols that are produced as an integral part of the social cosmion in the process of its self-illumination and the language symbols in political science." The relationship between the two sets of symbols is such that the latter should always derive from the former:



Both are related with each other in so far as the second set is developed out of the first one through the process that provisionally was called critical clarification. In the course of this process some of the symbols that occur in reality will be dropped because they cannot be put to any use in the economy of science, while new symbols will be developed in theory for the critically adequate description of symbols that are part of reality.<sup>79</sup>

In NSP, the symbols of political science are referred to as "concepts." Voegelin thereby introduced for the first time a distinction between "symbols" and "concepts"—long before the two terms became attached to the distinction between luminosity and intentionality. At the time of NSP the meaning of the two terms is fairly straightforward. "Symbols" emerge from the self-interpretation of the social cosmion, while theoretical "concepts" are the result of the "critical clarification" of the symbols. Political science begins with the symbols, with the self-interpretation of the cosmion, and advances towards concepts. Voegelin noted that there were many symbols that could not be clarified to the point that they were of "any cognitive use in science":

More than once in a discussion of a political topic it has happened that a student—and for that matter not always a student—would ask me how I defined fascism, or socialism, or some other ism of that order. And more than once I had to surprise the questioner—who apparently as part of a college education had picked up the idea that science was a warehouse of dictionary definitions—by my assurance that I did not feel obliged to indulge in such definitions, because movements of the suggested type, together with their symbolisms, were part of reality, that only concepts could be defined but not reality, and that it was highly doubtful whether the language symbols in question could be critically clarified to such a point that they were of any cognitive use in science.<sup>80</sup>

If Voegelin had applied these principles—which he finds in Aristotle—to the analysis of "gnosticism," he could not have written

*The New Science of Politics*. The term “gnosticism” did not arise from the self-interpretation of a social cosmion, nor can it be considered the result of a process of “critical clarification” on the part of political scientists. In fact, the term “gnosticism” emerged in 18th century France; applying it to religious movements in late antiquity is an anachronism. While Greek words like *Christianos*, *Christianikos*, *Christianismos* began to appear in ancient texts a few generations after Jesus, no such words existed for “gnosticism” or a “gnostic religion.” Some Christian heresiologists reported that the members of at least some groups which later came to be called “gnostic” referred to themselves as *gnostikos*. As the heresiologists then began to compile catalogues of heresies, they were unable to resist the temptation to generalize such sporadic self-designations into one single category. There are instances in Irenaeus, for example, in which the term “gnostics” is used as a generalising label for all heretics. For a long time the main sources available on “gnostic” sects and movements were the treatises of Christian heresiologists writing explicitly against the heretics. When the “ism” was created in the 18th century, the term “gnosticism” still had a pejorative connotation. Thus, “gnosticism” is not a symbol as understood in NSP; the large majority of groups designated as “gnostic” did not interpret themselves in these terms. But, in Voegelin’s usage of the term, “gnosticism” is not a “concept” either because he does not provide a “critical clarification” of (i) the self-understanding of religious movements of late antiquity, or of (ii) the heresiologists who categorized them or of (iii) the French thinkers who introduced this particular “ism” in the 18th century. On the contrary, NSP contributed to the inflationary use of the term which makes today’s students of early Christianity and religions of the Greco-Roman world wonder how they could have learned “from very authoritative interpreters of Gnosis” that “science is Gnostic and superstition is Gnostic; power, counter-power, and lack of power are Gnostic; left is Gnostic and right is Gnostic; Hegel is Gnostic and Marx is Gnostic; Freud is Gnostic and Jung is Gnostic; all things and their opposites are equally Gnostic.”<sup>81</sup> The confusion is largely due to

the fact that "gnosticism" cannot be defined as a category of ideas or "ideal type" that exists outside history. Attempts to delineate its margins through lists of characteristic features and symbols—such as the six defining features listed in Voegelin's "Ersatz Religion: The Gnostic Mass Movements of our Time"<sup>82</sup>—against which concrete historical manifestations are "checked" have been shown to encompass either too much or too little.<sup>83</sup>

Moreover, the alleged historical continuity linking ancient and modern manifestations of "gnosticism" is deeply problematic. In Chapter 54 of his *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Edward Gibbon had already established a direct line of continuity beginning with the Paulicians in seventh century Syria and Armenia, to their resettlement in the Balkans, their ramification into the Bogomils, the migration of both Bogomils and Paulicians into Northern Italy, and the emergence of the Cathars in Southern France in the eleventh century. From the Cathars Gibbon saw links to the Waldenses and Spiritual Franciscans and the later sectarian movements, which spread all over Europe with climaxes in the Lollard movement in England and the Hussite movement in Bohemia in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. By the time of the Reformation, these protest movements had grown into mass movements with manifestations in the Peasant Wars in Germany and the Anabaptist movement, which continued to diffuse into the Netherlands and Moravia. Gibbon considered the Paulicians as "non-Manichaeian Gnostics." For him, as for many Protestant writers, the Paulicians were the ancestors of the Protestant churches and hence had to be absolved from "heretic" Manichaeian influences. Accordingly, Gibbon does not attempt to establish the Paulicians' roots in late Antiquity. However, many scholars assume that the Paulician heresy (in its dualist version) originated in late Antiquity with direct or indirect links to Manichaeism, Marcionism, and possibly "other" "gnostic" groups, and hence make the Paulicians a crucial link in a continuity of "dualist" teaching from Antiquity to the late Middle Ages. But the evidence they refer to in defence of this continuity is partly circumstantial and partly anachronistic. There is evidence that Manichaeian groups were present in Armenia in the late sixth

century, some fifty years before Armenia became the geographic centre of the Paulician movement.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, we have Peter of Sicily's report on the Paulicians, which he wrote from his visit to Tephrike, the capital of the by then powerful Paulician organization, in 869. After his nine-month visit, Peter characterized the Paulicians as offshoots of the Manichaeans, and all subsequent Byzantine historians and theologians considered them direct descendants of the Manichaeans; the two groups were in fact considered the same heresy. Considering the conventions of the time—"Manichaeism" was often used as a generic label for all "dualist" heresies—and considering the context of Peter's visit—as an ambassador of the Byzantine Empire, his task was to negotiate peace and arrange an exchange of prisoners in what was effectively a state of war—his account must be treated with caution. In any case, we know of a Manichaean presence in Armenia prior to the arrival of the Paulicians, and Peter's evidence comes from the ninth century; but we do not have any contemporary corroboration of direct contacts between Manichaeans and Paulicians from the crucial sixth and seventh centuries.<sup>85</sup>

Interestingly, these problems do not affect Voegelin's analysis in NSP as much as we might fear because, although it treats "gnosticism" as an ancient religious movement that "accompanied Christianity from its very beginnings," NSP does not talk about ancient "gnosticism":

The economy of this lecture does not allow a description of the gnosis of antiquity or of the history of its transmission into the Western Middle Ages; enough to say that at the time gnosis was a living religious culture on which men could fall back.<sup>86</sup>

Instead Voegelin's analysis begins with the late Middle Ages:

There emerges the image of a society, identifiable and intelligible as a unit by its evolution as the representative of a historically unique type of Gnostic truth. Following the Aristotelian procedure, the analysis started from the self-interpretation of society by means of the Joachitic symbols of the twelfth century. Now that their meaning has been clarified through theoretical understand-

ing, a date can be assigned to the beginning of this civilizational course. A suitable date for its formal beginning would be the activation of ancient Gnosticism through Scotus Eriugena in the ninth century, because his works, as well as those of Dionysius Areopagita which he translated, were a continuous influence in the underground Gnostic sects before they came to the surface in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>87</sup>

Why the "critical clarification" of "gnostic symbols" should begin with Joachim is not clear. The impetus to call these phenomena "gnostic" does not appear to be based on any work on primary sources that Voegelin did on his own. He was probably led to use the label by his readings of studies such as Puech's on Manichaeism and Söderberg's on the Cathars.<sup>88</sup> Both talk about "continuity" but Söderberg's proposal of an uninterrupted chain of a tradition of "gnostic ideology" is problematic for the reasons mentioned above, and Puech's argument is derived from a history of ideas—that is, from exactly the literary genre that Voegelin had abandoned during the years just prior to NSP. In fact, he later presented NSP as the "breakthrough" after "a period of indecision" between 1945 and 1950 following his growing awareness "of the theoretical inadequacy of [his] conventional preconceptions about a history of ideas."<sup>89</sup> NSP itself expresses his criticism of the genre.<sup>90</sup> We have to conclude, therefore, that the "vision" articulated in NSP could not have been formulated in accordance with the methodological principles on which the book claimed to base itself. The empirical material as it presented itself to Voegelin in the 1940s and 1950s did not warrant Voegelin's use of the term "Gnosticism"; thus, the "vision" of NSP cannot be explained exhaustively as an immediate response to, and clarification of, the "empirical material."

The second observation that we want to highlight in this context confirms this conclusion. As we noted earlier, Voegelin denied that he had advocated a "position" in NSP; thus, he cautioned Dante Germino, who had attributed such a "position" to Voegelin, that he should not "dogmatize a result of empirical analysis." Voegelin did not want to be held responsible for a "position" which, in light of the

advances made in the “study of Gnosticism,” obviously had to be revised. Whatever it was that he proposed in NSP, it was a mere reflection, he claimed, of what was then the “present state of science.”<sup>91</sup> We have already suggested in the previous paragraph that this self-assessment is wrong. What we want to add to this in the following is the very simple observation, implicit in what was said above, that Voegelin could have known, at the time, that NSP did *not* reflect the “present state of science.” Our previous discussion drew partly on literature that was not available to Voegelin as he was working on NSP but the problems with “gnosticism” were perfectly visible in the sources that Voegelin was using at the time. This was the conclusion also of Voegelin’s friend, Gregor Sebba, who reviewed the literature on “gnosticism” in an illuminating paper written for the *Festschrift* published on the occasion of Voegelin’s 80th birthday.<sup>92</sup> As Sebba was working on his paper, he shared his insights with Voegelin. In October 1978 he wrote to Voegelin:

...from the sources that were available to you at the time, it follows without doubt that not a single one of the features that are thought to characterize classical gnosis fits without problems.... Nevertheless the whole phenomenon of gnosis has a sharp profile. One motive applies throughout: the radical rejection of any immanentization of transcendence.<sup>93</sup>

This is a remarkable statement, coming from a sympathetic reader whom Voegelin trusted as a reliable interpreter of his work.<sup>94</sup> The statement confirms, in its first part, what we noted above, that “gnosticism” cannot be defined as a “category” or “idea” through a list of “characteristics.” However, if one wants to hold on to the notion and study historically what are commonly regarded as its manifestations, the one motive that could be considered its “essence” turns out to be the very opposite of what Voegelin had presented as the essence of “modern gnosticism” because, according to Sebba, it is exactly the *rejection* of any “immanentization of transcendence” that characterizes “classical gnosis.” Sebba fully understands the implications of his finding:

To claim, as Voegelin does, that modern political and intellectual movements like positivism or Marxism are "gnostic" amounts to saying that ancient gnosticism has turned into its opposite while remaining what it is.<sup>95</sup>

Sebba is sensitive to the problems in Voegelin's analysis but his account remains sympathetic. He continues:

This would be the final word on the link between modernity and gnosticism, were it not for the fact that this issue raises a far more fundamental one: that of the nature of history.

Sebba is right in concluding that the findings of NSP are not simply "a result of empirical analysis" as Voegelin wants to make us believe. Before one can even think of "linking" modernity and "gnosticism" in the way in which Voegelin linked these two notions one must begin with presuppositions that can in no way be "extracted" from the "empirical" material that becomes visible in light of these presuppositions. Sebba's essay does not go far enough because it still takes the notion of "gnosticism" for granted as an empirical concept. Therefore he does not ask the crucial question of how this construction, this particular "ism," could come to assume such an important role in Voegelin's thinking. Still, Sebba deserves credit for bringing the author of NSP, the person Eric Voegelin, back into the picture. It is truly remarkable how Voegelin throughout his life, and with much success, attempted to hide behind a smokescreen of statements in which he denies the responsibility of authorship. As late as 1983, when asked whether there was anything in *Anamnesis* he would deny 17 years after its publication, he replied by repeating the old formula: "No. I rarely have something to deny because I always stick close to the empirical materials and do not generalize beyond them. So when I generalize, I have to generalize because of the materials."<sup>96</sup> We will return to the person Eric Voegelin in our conclusions.

#### 4. Conclusions

Voegelin considered *The New Science* a "livre de circonstance"<sup>97</sup>—

and yet we have argued in this paper that it can be used as an index of his life work. The fact that “gnosticism,” as used by Voegelin, cannot be interpreted as an empirical concept, draws our attention to Voegelin’s “Zutat,” to the imaginative and visionary power of NSP’s author.<sup>98</sup> Precisely because NSP was a “livre de circonstance,” a book written under various pressures, Voegelin could not wait for the material to “speak for itself”—in any case, it never does. It is in all that is *not* in the “empirical material” that we find, carefully concealed, the author’s signature. For this reason, NSP is not an aberration but an index.

Our discussion in Part 2 has shown that at the heart of Voegelin’s exploration of the “meditative quest,” of the “in-between,” of his interpretation of Bodin and the notion of tolerance, of his treatment of symbols and concepts, of his warnings against the dangers of “doctrinization”—at the heart of all this we find a notion that he emphasized already in the early 1940s as the one and only “position” [sic] that was “socially indestructible”: the mysticism of the *via negativa*. The only position that is not vulnerable to “social destruction” is a non-position that continues to move beyond all positions. In a letter of October 1977 we find the following discussion of the tension, “in Western language,” between the “theologia dogmatica” and the “theologia mystica”:

The experience of divine presence, when symbolized, is burdened with the historical concreteness of the symbols. No symbolization is adequate to the ineffability of the divine Beyond. Hence, when you are a believer on the level of symbols, you become an “infidel” to the ineffable truth of divine reality; and when your faith is constituted by your relation to the ineffably divine, you become an “infidel” on the level of the symbols. Again in Western language, the problem looks to me very much like that of the *fides quaerens intellectum*, of the faith on the level of imaginative symbolism moving beyond its acceptance of the symbols, through meditative contemplation, towards the understanding of the experiences which endow the symbols with their



sense.<sup>99</sup>

Voegelin took pleasure from being "an infidel on the level of the symbols," laughing at his readers who attempted to "position" him. Asked whether it was true that he referred to himself as a "pre-Reformation Christian," Voegelin replied in 1977:

The "pre-Reformation Christian" is a joke. I never have written any such thing. These canards arise because I frequently have to ward off people who want to "classify" me. When somebody wants me to be a Catholic or a Protestant, I tell him that I am a "pre-Reformation Christian." If he wants to nail me down as a Thomist or Augustinian, I tell him I am a "pre-Nicene Christian." And if he wants to nail me down earlier, I tell him that even Mary the Virgin was not a member of the Catholic Church. I have quite a number of such stock answers for people who pester me after a lecture; and then they get talked around as authentic information on my "position."<sup>100</sup>

These statements too are expressions of Voegelin's *via negativa*; they are reminiscent of Michel Foucault's declaration that he "wrote in order to have no face"<sup>101</sup>—an intellectual gesture that is not uncommon.

Voegelin's non-position can also be characterized by relating it to the main character and title of one of his favorite novels, Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*. Voegelin's admiration for Musil's work is well known. He read it as a treatment of the "problem of the 'second reality'...which in its variegated forms of sexual perversions, dream worlds, political ideologies, etc. superimposes itself on the 'first reality' which furnishes the frame of human existence." Musil's novel studied "the conflicts and catastrophies, arising from the clash between the two realities,...in the Austrian society immediately preceding the first World War..." Voegelin respected Musil as an "incredibly careful observer of reality" and as a "master of the intellectual problems involved."<sup>102</sup> Musil, in turn, had great respect for Voegelin's work; the two men met several times in Vienna.<sup>103</sup> The main hero of the novel, Ulrich, shares with

Voegelin (and Musil) an interest in mysticism. His mystic inclinations compensate for his growing loss of confidence in language as a means for conceptualizing and communicating reality. Showing his sister his magnificent library of mystical writings, Ulrich explains:

Here are Christian, Judaic, Indian, and Chinese testimonies. Between some of them there lie as much as a thousand years. And yet in all of them one recognizes the same pattern of inner movement, one that diverges from the normal but which is in itself integral. Almost the only way in which they differ from each other at all is just in whatever comes from being connected with theological constructions, as it were a doctrinal edifice that supplies them with a sheltering roof overhead. What it comes to, then, is that we can assume the existence of a characteristic second, extraordinary condition, a highly important condition that man is capable of entering into and which has deeper origins than the religions.<sup>104</sup>

Ulrich identifies here, beneath the second realities that dominate his social environment and, in fact, beneath the religious symbolisms, the truth and first reality of mysticism. Musil's novel is interspersed with more than three hundred quotations from Martin Buber's collection *Ecstatic Confessions: The Heart of Mysticism*, published in 1909. Ulrich's library derives in effect from Buber's *Ecstatic Confessions*.<sup>105</sup> Ulrich would have little difficulty in understanding both Voegelin's claim that the reality of faith "lies beyond the symbols" and his later writings on the "equivalences of experiences." Accordingly, the two also share a peculiar lack of "qualities"; they are both "men without qualities," or at least they aspire to be such men for only "men without qualities" do not possess qualities that are "socially destructable." Ulrich, like Voegelin, is a "man without qualities" because, to use Voegelin's words cited above, he does not insist on "finding his absolute co-ordinates in his nation, as a Marxist, as a liberal etc." Both do not tie their identities to what are merely the "last words of each historical religion." Both know that the "reality of faith" lies beyond the symbols. One commentator characterized Ulrich as a "man of faith who merely happens not to believe

in anything,"<sup>106</sup> and we suggest that Voegelin's *via negativa* was ultimately driven by the same problem: the erosion of coordinates. As we noted above, the non-position of the *via negativa* promises to lift the individual above the symptoms of the collapse of order.

The mysticism of the "man of faith who merely happens not to believe in anything" is a mysticism that is born of skepticism. As Friedrich Nietzsche once observed, "when scepticism mates with longing, mysticism is born."<sup>107</sup> And we must remember in this context Voegelin's declaration, from 1928, that reality must be approached with a "loving skepticism" [zärtliche Skepsis].<sup>108</sup> This skepticism is built into Voegelin's *via negativa* from the outset because his quest for truth, as we saw, always resists an untruth; the quest is a "critical" endeavor that proceeds primarily by leaving behind what is deemed untrue rather than by incorporating what is deemed true. But the untruth resisted is in itself a resistance to the truth of reality. Voegelin's meditative quest therefore resists the resistance to reality; it refuses the refusal to apperceive. It is, in its own way, the result of a double negation. Being a "resister" himself, he understands his opponents all too well. It is worthwhile to quote again his profound insight from *In Search of Order*, where he acknowledges that "in the depth of the quest, formative truth and deformative untruth are more closely related than the language of "truth" and "resistance" would suggest."<sup>109</sup> And it is again in his last book that we find a reference to the troubled soul of the questioner, who, as we saw, has to produce both illuminating symbols and objectifying type-concepts:

The questions touch a cardinal problem inherent to the analysis of existential consciousness, the inherent temptation that is every questioner's burden, the temptation to deform the Beyond and its formative Parousia, as they are experienced and symbolized in the respective quest, by transforming the Beyond into a thing and its Parousia into the imposition of a definite form on reality. The temptation not only affects the present analysis, but is a constant force in the millennial process of the quest for truth.<sup>110</sup>

Voegelin even notes that the "symbolisms engendered by distur-

bances of existential consciousness” have a “fascination” and “charm” of their own. This, we observe in passing, is another theme that runs through Voegelin’s work: the insight into the attractiveness of evil. In the Preface to the American edition of *The Political Religions*, Voegelin writes:

If my representation gives rise to the impression that it is too “objective” and “advertises” for National Socialism, then that to me seems to be a sign that my representation is good—for the Luciferian aspects are not simply morally negative or atrocious, but are a force and a very attractive force at that.<sup>111</sup>

Here is where Voegelin’s “gnosticism” finally finds its context and meaning. In NSP, “gnosticism” assumes the role of a generic label for the untruth that Voegelin’s mystic quest resists. The *via negativa* is concerned with the preservation of the openness of the whole of reality by preventing hypostatizations. It never takes the symbols and concepts that reality generates for the whole of reality; there is always something “beyond” the symbols. Accordingly, the “truncation of reality” is the counter-movement to the movement of the *via negativa*. As Gregor Sebba observed in a letter to Voegelin of 1978:

In the final analysis you call Gnostic everything that reflects a truncation of reality, and this goes far beyond the narrow concept of gnosis.<sup>112</sup>

The “need” for a term such as “gnosticism” does not derive from empirical analysis but from the intrinsic dynamics of Voegelin’s quest, which finally found its “target” in “gnosis.” The meditative quest for truth can begin because he has found the untruth that needs to be resisted. In subsequent works, Voegelin refines his understanding of both the meditative *and* the deformative complex. The harshness of at least some of the formulations in NSP are not so much due to the fact that “gnosticism” was an existential problem for Western civilization; nor was it due to the pressures and tensions of the Cold War environment in which NSP was written. We suggest that its harshness was due, rather, to the fact that NSP entailed an element of “self-overcoming.” Voegelin knew of the attractiveness

and "proximity" of the "derailment" of "gnosis." The greatest threat to Voegelin's mystic quest is the temptation to find a resting place, a finality, on the level of symbols, and to take as final what is merely an "index." The "truncation of reality," Voegelin's "gnosticism," is the one route that must be avoided on the *via negativa*. And yet, although he knew how tempting it was to take that route, it is a remarkable trait of Voegelin's personality that he insisted that the individual human being was responsible for staying on the right path. In a letter to Jakob Taubes, written in 1953, we read:

The question of metaphysical blindness. You tend to see in such blindness a fate that befalls a human being. I rather tend to emphasize personal guilt. As far as my side of the dichotomy is concerned, I can only talk of a "tendency"; I have not been able to achieve much clarity in the context of this question.<sup>113</sup>

In spite of his failure to achieve clarity, Voegelin suggested two explanations for his "tendency." First, he felt that the representatives of "metaphysical blindness" show in their writings that, in fact, they were not blind. The lucidity of their works showed that they could have seen if they had wanted to. They simply chose to ignore that they could see and hence were responsible for their blindness. But Voegelin's second explanation is more important because he refers to "personal motives":

In every visage of a positivistic professor or liberal pastor I see the visage of the SS-murderer that he causes.

Against the obvious experiential background implied in this statement, Voegelin emphasizes both personal responsibility and the attractiveness of evil. The result is a tension that explains much of the intensity of his writings. If there is harshness, it is directed against others as much as against himself.

We can conclude that there is no difference between a "late," "meditative" Voegelin and the Voegelin of NSP. The two are one and the same. His work is indexed by both the symbols and the concepts that it generated. Indeed, his experiential background is reflected not only in particular symbols or concepts but also in the overall

direction and form of his quest as a whole:

The Word of truth, “the tale that saves” as told by Socrates-Plato, is not a piece of information available to everybody. The tale has to be found by the man who is suffering the death of reality and, in the cave of his death, is moved to turn around towards the divine light.<sup>114</sup>

The death of reality leads to scepticism and longing; scepticism and longing lead to the mysticism of the *via negativa* in the hope that it might be “socially indestructible.” The quest of the *via negativa* is Voegelin’s “saving tale”—a tale that must be told and lived—in the sense that it promises immunity against the death of reality. A critique of Voegelin’s approach must move beyond questions of empirical validity and address the question of the price that one pays for this “immunity.”

Stefan Rossbach  
University of Kent at Canterbury

#### NOTES

1. Letter to Barry D. Karl, 11 November 1953, Box 38, File 38.1, Eric Voegelin Papers (EVP), Hoover Archives, Stanford.

2. Murray Jardine, “Eric Voegelin’s interpretation(s) of modernity: a reconsideration of the spiritual and political implications of Voegelin’s therapeutic analysis,” *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 57, No.4 (Fall 1995), pp. 581-605 (581).

3. Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction* (NSP), (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1952), p. 126; reprinted in Manfred Henningsen (ed.), *Modernity without Restraint: The Political Religions, The New Science of Politics, and Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, Volume 5 of *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin* (CW 5), (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), pp. 75-241 (190).

4. NSP, p.188, and CW 5, p. 241.

5. See Michael G. Franz, *Eric Voegelin and the Politics of Spiritual Revolt: The Roots of Modern Ideology*, (Baton Rouge:

Louisiana State University Press, 1993); Eugene Webb, "Eric Voegelin at the End of an Era: Differentiations of Consciousness and the Search for the Universal," in Stephen A. McKnight and Geoffrey L. Price (eds), *International and Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Eric Voegelin*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), pp.159-188; Eugene Webb, "Review of Michael G. Franz, Eric Voegelin and the Politics of Spiritual Revolt, and M.W. Pourier, "Voegelin—A Voice of the Cold War Era? A Comment on a Eugene Webb Review," both in *Eric Voegelin Research News*, Vol. 3 (1997), archived at <http://vax2.concordia.ca/~vorenews>; and Geoffrey L. Price, "Recovery from Metastatic Consciousness: Voegelin and Jeremiah," in Glenn Hughes, Stephen A. McKnight, Geoffrey L. Price (eds), *Politics, Order and History: Essays on the Work of Eric Voegelin*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp.185-207 (185-186).

6. Eric Voegelin, *Autobiographical Reflections*, edited by Ellis Sandoz, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), p. 64.

7. Arpad Szokolczai characterizes Voegelin's work on gnosticism and modernity as an "anti-prophetic prophetic vision" in *Reflexive Historical Sociology*, (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 97-99.

8. See Szokolczai, *Reflexive Historical Sociology*, p. 57.

9. "Questionnaire," no date, pp.2-3, Box 38, File 38.21, EVP.

10. Letter to Carl J. Friedrich, 12 April 1959, Box 13, File 13.16, EVP.

11. Letter to Donald R. Ellegood, 27 October 1959, Box 23, File 23.28, EVP.

12. Letter to Donald R. Ellegood, 22 February 1963, Box 24, File 24.1, EVP.

13. "Forschungsprojekt des Instituts für Politische Wissenschaften," 29 Juni 1961, Box 13, File 13.21, EVP.

14. CW 5, p.247.

15. Eric Voegelin, "The Eclipse of Reality," in Thomas A. Hollweck, Paul Caringella (eds), *What is History? And Other Late Unpublished Writings*, Volume 28 of *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin* (CW 28), (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press,

1990), pp. 111-162 (123,143).

16. Eric Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age, Volume 4 of Order and History*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), pp.28-29; now also available in Michael Franz (ed.), *The Ecumenic Age, Volume 17 of The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin* (CW 17), (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), p.74.

17. Eric Voegelin, "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme: A Meditation," in Ellis Sandoz (ed.), *Published Essays 1966-1985, Volume 12 of The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin* (CW 12), pp. 315-375 (338-339).

18. *The Ecumenic Age*, pp.237-238; CW 17, p. 302.

19. Eric Voegelin, *In Search of Order, Volume 5 of Order and History*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), p. 37; reprinted in Ellis Sandoz (ed.), *In Search of Order, Volume 18 of The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin* (CW 18), (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), p. 51.

20. *In Search of Order*, p.45; CW 18, p. 59.

21. Letters from Rudolf Bultmann to Eric Voegelin, 19 July 1957 and 4 March 1960, Box 8, File 8.55, EVP.

22. Letter from Schütz to Voegelin, November 1952, pp. 20-21, Box 34, File 34.11, EVP.

23. Letter to Gerhart Niemeyer, 29 July 1957, Box 27, File 27.13, EVP.

24. Paper delivered at the Eric Voegelin-Symposium, Notre Dame University, Spring 1971, transcript, p. 2, Box 77, File 77.6, EVP.

25. Transcript, p. 3, Box 77, File 77.6, EVP.

26. *Autobiographical Reflections*, pp. 66-67.

27. *Autobiographical Reflections*, p. 81.

28. Letter to Denis Mack Smith, 28 March 1973, Box 6, File 6.9, EVP. My emphasis.

29. No date, Box 50, File 50.3, EVP.

30. Paper delivered at the Eric Voegelin-Symposium, Notre Dame University, Spring 1971, transcript, p. 26, Box 77, File 77.6, EVP.

31. Letter to Richard J. Bishirjian, 8 September 1976, Box 8, File 8.18, EVP.



32. Letter from Richard J. Bishirjian to Voegelin, 14 September 1976, Box 8, File 8.18, EVP.
33. Letter to Bishirjian, 21 October 1976, Box 8, File 8.18, EVP.
34. Letter to Dante Germino, 13 May 1970, Box 14, File 14.14, EVP.
35. *In Search of Order*, p.33; CW 18, p. 47.
36. *Autobiographical Reflections*, p. 67.
37. Letter to Franz-Martin Schmölz, 5 February 1962, Box 33, File 33.11, EVP. My translation.
38. Letter to Arno Baruzzi, 30 December 1977, Box 7, File 7.15, EVP.
39. Letter to Peter Fliess, 9 January 1956, Box 12, File 12.25, EVP. My emphasis.
40. Letter to Manfred Henningsen, 19 November 1970, Box 43, File 43.17, EVP. See also "The Eclipse of Reality," CW 28, pp.137-139, 160-162.
41. Letter to Robert Heilman, 23 February 1957, Box 17, File 17.9, EVP.
42. See e.g. "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme," CW 12, p. 372.
43. Eric Voegelin, "The Beginning and the Beyond: A Meditation on Truth," CW 28, pp. 173-232 (179,189-190).
44. "Was ist politische Realität?," in *Anamnesis: Zur Theorie der Geschichte und Politik*, (München: Piper, 1966), pp. 283-354 (315-323). A new English translation of this important paper is now available in David Walsh (ed.), *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics, Volume 6 of The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin* (CW 6), (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002). The section on "language indices" is on pp. 373-381.
45. "Was ist politische Realität?," p. 317; CW 6, p. 375.
46. "The Beginning and the Beyond," CW 28, p. 185.
47. "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme," CW 12, p. 344.
48. "Was ist politische Realität?," p.337; CW 6, pp. 395-396.
49. See e.g. *The Ecumenic Age*, pp.36-43; CW 17, pp. 83-91.
50. Letter to F.A. Wilhelmsen, 2 October 1970, Box 43, File 43.16, EVP.
51. Letter to Bishirjian, 21 October 1976, Box 8, File 8.18,

EVP.

52. *In Search of Order*, pp.13-18; CW 18, pp. 27-33.

53. *The Ecumenic Age*, p.75; CW 17, p. 125.

54. "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme," CW 12, p. 349.

55. Eric Voegelin, "The Meditative Origin of the Philosophical Knowledge of Order," (transl. by Frederick Lawrence), in Fred Lawrence (ed.), *The Beginning and the Beyond: Papers from the Gadamer and Voegelin Conferences*, Supplementary Issue of the Lonergan Workshop Vol.4, (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), pp. 43-51 (47-48).

56. "Was ist politische Realität?," p. 285; CW 6, p. 343.

57. *In Search of Order*, p. 39; CW 18, p. 53.

58. "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme," CW 12, p. 371.

59. "Was ist politische Realität?," pp. 318-319; CW 6, p. 377.

60. "Was ist politische Realität?," p. 285; CW 6, p. 343.

61. "Was ist politische Realität?," p. 319; CW 6, p. 377.

62. *In Search of Order*, pp. 16-17; CW 18, p. 32.

63. "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme," CW 12, pp. 349-351.

64. *In Search of Order*, p. 34; CW 18, pp. 48-49.

65. "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme," CW 12, p. 372.

66. "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme," CW 12, p. 349.

67. See the section on "Folly and Theology" in "The Beginning and the Beyond," CW 28, pp. 198-204.

68. "The Beginning and the Beyond," CW 28, p. 203.

69. For example, the mere study of a society with "pre-dogmatic symbols of order"—even if undertaken from within a society dominated by "dogmatic symbols"—requires a movement "towards noesis." See "Was ist politische Realität?," p. 332; CW 6, p. 390.

70. *In Search of Order*, p. 39; CW 18, p. 54.

71. *In Search of Order*, p. 37; CW 18, p. 51.

72. "The Beginning and the Beyond," CW 28, p. 199.

73. *In Search of Order*, p. 39; CW 18, p. 54.

74. "The Beginning and the Beyond," CW 28, p. 231. My emphasis.

75. "Was ist politische Realität?," pp.333-340; CW 6, pp. 391-398.

76. Letter to Friedrich von Engel-Janosi, 1 February 1943,

Box 11, File 11.7, EVP. It is interesting to note in this context that on at least two occasions Voegelin remarked that his interest in "problems of religious understanding" had first been provoked by Paul Deussen's lectures on the Upanishads in Vienna in 1918/19. See R. Eric O'Connor (ed.), *Conversations with Eric Voegelin*, Thomas More Institute Papers /76, (Montreal: Perry Printing Limited, 1980), pp. 153-154; Eric Voegelin, "Autobiographical Statement at Age 82," in Fred Lawrence (ed.), *The Beginning and the Beyond: Papers from the Gadamer and Voegelin Conferences*, pp. 111-120 (106). Deussen, a friend of Nietzsche's, was the translator of the Upanishads and a foremost expert on Indian philosophy. Voegelin's favorite text among the Upanishads was the Brihadaranyaka because, he explained, it was a beautiful example of the via negativa of "intellectual mysticism." Letter to Georg Jaffé, 26 February 1956, Box 20, File 20.7, EVP.

77. Letter to Karl Löwith, 17 December 1944, Box 24, File 24.4, EVP. My emphasis.

78. Jürgen Gebhardt, Barry Cooper (eds), *On the Form of the American Mind*, Volume 1 of *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin* (CW 1), (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), p. 3.

79 NSP, pp.28-29, and CW 5, p. 110.

80. NSP, p.30, CW 5, pp. 111-112.

81. Ioan P. Couliano quoted in Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 4.

82. CW 5, pp. 297-298.

83. Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*.

84. See e.g. Dimitri Obolensky, *The Bogomils: A Study in Balkan Neo-Manichaeism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), p. 19.

85. Nina G. Garsoïan, *The Paulician Heresy: A Study of the Origin and Development of Paulicianism in Armenia and the Eastern Provinces of the Byzantine Empire*, (The Hague: Mouton, 1967).

86. NSP, p. 124, CW 5, p. 189.

87. NSP, p. 128, CW 5, p. 192.

88. Henri-Charles Puech, *Le Manichéisme: Son fondateur, sa doctrine*, (Paris: Guimet, 1949); Hans Söderberg, *La Religion de Cathares. Étude sur le Gnosticisme de la basse antiquité et du moyen âge*, (Uppsala, 1949).

89. *Autobiographical Reflections*, p. 64.

90. NSP, pp.9-10. In his criticism Voegelin does point out, however, that “in cases of this class the damage is not due to an accumulation of worthless material; on the contrary, the treatises of this type frequently are still indispensable because of their reliable informations concerning facts (bibliographical references, critical establishment of texts, etc.). The damage is rather done through interpretation.” Moreover, some of Voegelin’s readers may argue that he later developed the method required to advance the arguments made in NSP, especially in his work on “The Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History,” first published in 1970, and now available in CW 12, pp. 115-133. But it is important to note that these developments took place in the 1960s and 1970s, more than ten years after the publication of NSP.

91. Letter to Dante Germino, 13 May 1970, Box 14, File 14.14, EVP.

92. Gregor Sebba, “History, Modernity and Gnosticism,” in Peter J. Opitz, Gregor Sebba (eds), *The Philosophy of Order: Essays on History, Consciousness and Politics*, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), pp. 190-241. Sebba’s essay was reprinted in H. Sebba (ed.), *The Collected Essays of Gregor Sebba*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), pp. 51-111.

93. Letter to Gregor Sebba, 20 October 1978, Box 35, File 35.7, EVP.

94. “I always like Sebba writing about my work.” Letter to Donald E. Stanford, 24 January 1975, Box 36, File 36.34; for similar statements see Letter to Robert Heilman, 19 June 1966, Box 17, File 17.9; also Letter to Gregor Sebba, 21 April 1966, Box 35, File 35.5, all in EVP.

95. Sebba, “History, Modernity and Gnosticism,” p. 191; *The Collected Essays of Gregor Sebba*, p. 52.

96. From “Autobiographical Statement at Age 82,” p. 127.

97. Voegelin calls NSP a "livre de circonstance" in a letter to Elizabeth Scott, 17 December 1959, Box 38, File 38.1, EVP.

98. The term "Zutat" is an allusion to Voegelin's criticism of Hegel's use of "unsere Zutat" in the Einleitung of the *Phenomenology*. See *In Search of Order*, p. 57; CW 18, p. 71.

99. Letter to Carl W. Ernst, 9 October 1977, Box 12, File 12.1, EVP.

100. Letter to John East, 18 July 1977, Box 10, File 10.23, EVP.

101. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (London: Tavistock, 1974), p. 17.

102. Letter to Robert Heilman, 23 February 1957, Box 17, File 17.9, EVP.

103. See letter from Karl Corino, Robert-Musil-Archiv, April 12, 1974, Box 5, File 5.1, EVP, as well as the correspondence with K.-H. Danner, Box 19, File 19.7, EVP.

104. Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*, transl. By Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1960), Volume 3, p. 127.

105. Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Editor's Introduction," in Martin Buber, *Ecstatic Confessions: The Heart of Mysticism*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), pp.xix-xxii.

106. Eithne Wilkins, foreword to Musil, p. 14.

107. Nietzsche quoted in Mendes-Flohr, p. xiv.

108. Eric Voegelin, *Über die Form des amerikanischen Geistes*, (Tübingen: Mohr, 1928), p. 14. CW 1 translates "zärtliche Skepsis" as "a tinge of skepticism" (p. 17), neglecting the adjective "zärtliche." I am grateful to Paul Caringella, who drew my attention to this expression as well as to its mistranslation in CW 1.

109. *In Search of Order*, p. 37; CW 18, p. 51.

110. *In Search of Order*, p. 33; CW 18, p. 47.

111. CW 5, p. 25.

112. Gregor Sebba to Voegelin, 30 September 1978, Box 35, File 35.7, EVP.

113. Letter to Jakob Taubes, 15 May 1953, Box 37, File 37.10, EVP. My translation.

114. "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme," CW 12, p. 335.