Modes of Experience–On Eric Voegelin's
Theory of Governance

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Abstract: Whereas Eric Voegelin's main works from the 1950s to the 1980s are well known and have been widely discussed, his early work has gained academic attention only recently. Voegelin scholars have now entered into a wide-ranging discussion of the specific nature of those early writings. The following reflections seek to contribute to this general discussion by focusing on one of the most interesting—and, at the same time, the most puzzling—of Voegelin's early unpublished texts. Concentrating on the fragment entitled the *Theory of Governance*, this article will also present certain sources that have not yet appeared in English. Its aim will be to clarify some of the crucial questions and principles of Voegelin's early conception of political science in general. After presenting that conception, the article will indicate that Voegelin's later critique of the modern ideologies of political collectivism has not yet come into focus in this early text.

The recently published volume 32 of the *Collected Works of Eric Voegelin* presents a number of manuscripts—ones that were originally unpublished and mostly fragmentary—from Voegelin's early period.[1] A reading of these texts of the 1920s and 1930s renders a picture of Voegelin's early philosophical endeavor. Although that picture is rich with new aspects regarding his major concerns and questions, it is also quite complex and does not always seem coherent. It reveals a young scholar reflecting on certain basic problems of political science—a scholar who seems very similar to

[1]Eric Voegelin, *The Theory of Governance and Other Miscellaneous Papers, 1921–1938*, vol. 32 of *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited with an introduction by William Petropulos and Gilbert Weiss (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2003). Volumes from the *Collected Works* series will hereafter be indicated with *CW* and the number of the volume. For a discussion of the *Theory of Governance*, see also William Petropulos, "Cognitive and Existential Truth in the Theory of Governance," Conference paper presented at the Annual Meeting 2004 of the APSA, at: http://www.artsci.lsu.edu/voegelin/EVS/2004%20Papers/Petropulos2004.htm (February 3, 2005).

the renowned Voegelin of the *New Science of Politics* and *Order and History* in some senses, but quite different in others. These early texts suggest both substantial continuities within Voegelin's intellectual biography as well as differences and dynamic changes.[2] In this essay I will focus on the *Theory of Governance*,[3] a piece that is at once one of the most interesting and one of the most puzzling within the volume. In doing so, I will suggest some of the crucial questions that should be considered in reading this early material. In particular, I would wish to indicate that the question of the intricate and tensional relationship between the individual person, on the one hand, and the "meaningful superpersonal entity of the political community" (as Voegelin puts it), on the other, marks one of the crucial and abiding themes of his early political thought. Voegelin's various, highly original attempts to grasp this problem in theoretical terms determine the content of his early conception of political science.

This early conception, moreover, is significantly influenced by the central European (mostly German) discourse on Geisteswissenschaft and Staatslehre of the time. This influence can be discerned especially in the central concepts of Voegelin's Herrschaftslehre, for which the terms Herrschaft (rule) and Geist (spirit), for instance, have varying and even equivocal implications. As used in the *Theory of Governance*, the term Herrschaft means something like the mix of "dominion," "domination," "rule," and "governance." Although the term is one of the key concepts of the evolving Staatslehre (political theory) in the German intellectual context of the time, some of its implications are alien to such republican traditions of political thought as the American political tradition—one that had also exerted a significant influence on the early Voegelin. Further, not only does the meaning of the term Geist oscillate between "mind" and "spirit,"

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[2]See, in this respect, also the interesting remarks in Thomas W. Heilke and John von Heyking, editors' introduction to *CW* 7: 1 ff. Here, Heilke and von Heyking also intimate both the continuity and the dynamic changes within Voegelin's intellectual biography. On Voegelin's intellectual biography generally, see Ellis Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution: A Biographical Introduction* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2000); Barry Cooper, *Eric Voegelin and the Foundations of Modern Political Science*, Columbia and London (University of Missouri Press) 1999. On Voegelin's early intellectual biography in particular, see Jürgen Gebhardt, "Zwischen Wissenschaft und Religion. Zur intellektuellen Biographie Eric Voegelins in den 30er Jahren," in *Politisches Denken, Jahrbuch 1995/96*, 283–304; Sandro Chignola, "'Fetishism with the Norm' and Symbols of Politics: Eric Voegelin between Sociology and "Rechtswissenschaft (1924–1938)," vol. 10 of *Occasional Papers*, Munich (Eric Voegelin Archive) 1999; Hans-Jörg Sigwart, *Das Politische und die Wissenschaft. Intellektuell-biographische Studien zum Frühwerk Eric Voegelins* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2005).

[3]Eric Voegelin, *The Theory of Governance*, of *CW* 32: 224–372. For a general characterization of the text, see William Petropulos and Gilbert Weiss, editors' introduction to ibid., 1–16; here, 7 ff.

but Voegelin himself seems to use the concept in very different ways in different contexts. On the one hand, Geist as used by the early Voegelin, indeed, implies—at least in some cases—the same idea of a transcendent "ground of being" as the final source of reality that came to play a major role in Voegelin's later writings.[4] On the other hand, as the term is used in these early texts, it also has strong implications that are derived from the (predominantly German) traditions of cultural science and Diltheyian hermeneutical philosophy. Both traditions constituted a major part of the intellectual context in which Voegelin developed his early conceptions.[5] To the extent that Voegelin's concept absorbed elements of both traditions, his understanding of Geist would include the problem of transcendence and metaphysical speculation; yet it would also set this problem into a broader frame of reference, one in which Geist—i.e., "spirit" or "mind"—would mean primarily "human spirit" or "culture" in its entirety as it unfolds in history and society.[6]

In the following essay, I would first like to sketch certain elements of the broader theoretical background of Voegelin's early thinking—elements that might help to clarify the range of meanings of the concepts. Second, I would like to place the *Theory of Governance* within the more general framework of Voegelin's Staatslehre als Geisteswissenschaft. The aim here will be to demonstrate that the relationship between person and community, along with the question as to how the latter is constituted in the first place, are critical questions within Voegelin's early conception of "political science as human science." As a third step, I would like to suggest what may well be the central topic of the fragment in question—the specific "problem," in other words, that motivates Voegelin's development of a *Theory of Governance* as an integral part of his Staatslehre. This, in turn, will provide an occasion to draw out a major theoretical shortcoming of Voegelin's Herrschaftslehre, specifically, its failure to formulate a substantive and

[4]On such continuities, see Petropulos, "Cognitive and Existential Truth in the Theory of Governance." See also Petropulos, "The Person as 'Imago Dei,'" in *The Politics of the Soul*, ed. Glenn Hughes (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 87–115; and Barry Cooper's brief characterization of the "Theory of Governance" in "Surveying the Occasional Papers," in *Review of Politics* 62, no. 4 (2000): 727–51; here, 740 ff. Both Cooper and Petropulos place special emphasis on Voegelin's reading of Max Scheler and Augustine as a main source of continuity between his early and later work.

[5]See Jürgen Gebhardt and Barry Cooper, editors' introduction to *CW* 1: ix–xliii; here, ix ff. See also Gebhardt, *Zwischen Wissenschaft und Religion*.

[6]For such constitutive conceptions of spirit or culture, see, for instance, Wilhelm Dilthey's characterization of the "objective spirit" in *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981), 178 ff.; also Max Weber's concept of Kulturbedeutung in "Die Objektivität sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis," in: *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. Johannes Winckelmann (Tübingen: Mohr,[7] 1988), 146–214; here, particularly 165 ff.

critical concept of political authority. Finally, I will take a brief look forward to a further development in Voegelin's thought that is not yet clearly present in this early text: its increased emphasis on a critique of modern ideologies.

Towards a Personalistic Hermeneutical Philosophy

Any interpretation of the *Theory of Governance* must address the methodological problems posed by fragmentary text. Voegelin worked on the manuscript from 1930 to 1932[7] without finishing it or bringing it into an organized or coherent form. The paper is incomplete; it even breaks off several times. Voegelin's arguments are not as clearly developed here as they are in other writings. Upon first inspection, some of the text's passages seem to present a provisional collocation of relevant materials rather than a systematic and coherent line of argument. Finally, as far as I can see, the fragment does not reach a final conclusion concerning the central questions raised.

The same characteristics that make the *Theory of Governance* particularly difficult to understand, however, also make it particularly interesting. Here we gain direct insight into Voegelin's general method of hermeneutical interpretation. That method is presented in *On the Form of the American Mind* (1928), in which Voegelin sketches it as the attempt "at extracting the instruments of interpretation as well as the meaning from the material itself" (*aus dem Stoff selbst heraus die Mittel seiner Deutung und seinen Sinn zu entwickeln*).[8] As Voegelin emphasizes, the method of hermeneutical analysis (the criteria of relevance, categories of interpretation) is connected closely with its object, with the materials to be understood.[9] Further, not only is the method closely related to the object of hermeneutical inquiry, the two even determine each

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[7]See Petropulos and Weiss, 7.

[8]Eric Voegelin, *On the Form of the American Mind*, CW 1: 3.

[9]Ibid., 2. These methodological reflections are aimed against the neo-Kantian idea of Methodenreinheit (purity of methods), which assumes that the object of scientific inquiry is constituted, becomes meaningful and ordered solely by the method of inquiry itself. See on this point the following remark by Voegelin in "Die Verfassunglehre von Carl Schmitt," (*Zeitschrift für öffentliches Recht*, Band 11, Heft 1, 1931, 89–109; here, 90): "Transfer of the principle of Methodenreinheit into the subject area of a human science (Geisteswissenschaft) like political science (Staatslehre) is not possible in my opinion because the subject area itself . . ., independently of its analysis (*unabhängig vom Erkenntniszusammenhang*), is characterized by self-constitutive traits (*Züge der Eigenkonstitution*). Formation of the scientific object, therefore, cannot be carried out independently simply on its own principles, but must be an after-image (Nach-Bild) of the pattern (Vor-Bild) within the material" [my own translation]. (An English translation of this article is published in Voegelin, CW 13: 42–66.) See also Voegelin's later critique of positivism in *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 4 ff.

other in a sense. The method both reflects and clarifies the "lines of meaning" (Sinnlinien) that run through the material itself. These "lines of meaning," in turn, become discernable—that is, the material becomes meaningful—only through such reflection and clarification.[10] The categories of meaning are not given a priori, but evolve gradually in the process of interpretation. Thus, does human science become, in Voegelin's view, a dialectical and open process of hermeneutical clarification.[11]

Read against this background, the fragmentary texts published in volume 32 of the *Collected Works*—one of which is the *Theory of Governance*—make their own contribution to our understanding of Voegelin's thought. Although these texts are less clear and their arguments less defined than those of the published texts, they are more directly interwoven into the open process of thinking. Here, we can observe Voegelin's hermeneutical science in the making, so to speak. Yet because such a perspective is better capable of revealing the movements and dynamics of Voegelin's intellectual development, it might also entail a clearer revelation of the experiences and motivations from which his work evolved.

Even the opening passages of the *Theory of Governance* evince the fragmentary character of the text. Indeed, they might leave the reader somewhat bewildered—a reader, at least, who expects a treatise on governance, politics, and power focused on the questions that are usually associated with these terms. Neither introducing the reader to the subject nor justifying its rather remote point of departure, the text begins with a definition of the human person. This, apparently, for Voegelin is the concept upon which any theory of governance must be founded. Beginning with an interpretation of St. Augustine's meditation on memory and time in the tenth and eleventh books of his *Confessions*, the treatise progresses to discussions of Rene Descartes and Edmund Husserl. Beyond the specific content of Augustine's inquiry, Voegelin is primarily interested in its particular form of meditation:

> The determination [Bestimmung] of that which a person essentially is [*in ihrem Kerne sei*] occurs if the attempt is made with adequate means in a fundamental form of philosophical thinking that, following the name given to it by Descartes, we will call meditation. Before we introduce a concept of meditation that will suffice for our purposes, we shall demonstrate with an example what takes place during a meditation and what its essential characteristics are.[12]

Voegelin presents St. Augustine's mystic meditation as the preeminent classical example of this type of philosophical inquiry. Its form became, he

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[10]Ibid. 6.

[11]See also the interesting methodological reflections that are to be found in Eric Voegelin, *On Max Weber* (1925), in *CW* 7: 100–117. In his hermeneutical interpretation of the work of Max Weber, Voegelin addresses the question as to how method and object of investigation are closely interrelated.

[12]Voegelin, *The Theory of Governance*, 226.

suggests, "the basis of all more recent meditations."[13] Voegelin demonstrates the various "essential characteristics" of any "genuine meditation" on the classical example of Augustine's meditative search for God. Among those essential characteristics is its two-fold structure, which differentiates into an ontological speculation on being and a speculation on becoming, or time. As the most important characteristic of the meditative form, however, Voegelin emphasizes the peculiar existential motivation and the accompanying orientation from which it issues. As with any genuine meditation, Augustine's

> has a direction, but no rational notations with which to describe its goal. Saint Augustine seeks, not God, of whom he might have a definite concept, but that point in the movement of his soul at which his soul finds peace. This point is found when no driving impulse remains in the meditative course.[14]

From this particularly meditative motivation and the peculiarly self-reflective orientation that results from it, the *via negationis* of the Christian mystic is said to evolve. In terms of orientation, a parallel to this path (in both motivational and formal terms) can be found in Descartes' "methodological doubt" as well as in Husserl's phenomenological procedure of the *epoché*. Passing over the further details of Voegelin's interpretation, I will move to his conclusion as to "what Saint Augustine's meditation achieved, and what it could not."[15] Voegelin first summarizes Augustine's existential goal as follows:

> Both meditative ways, that of being and that of becoming, lead back to the same goal: the meditating person to God and therewith the understanding person to insight into the essence of the human person, who can be characterized by his openness to a transcendent being, by his being a frontier between the world, with its being and becoming, and a superworld.[16]

As it reveals itself in the meditative process, the essence of the human person is its open structure. The person, by becoming conscious of himself, becomes at once aware that he transcends himself to approach a supra-personal dimension. The experience of the person is that of being "in-between" (to use Voegelin's term by which he describes this crucial insight in his later writings).[17] It is the experience that, on an ultimate level, one is not integrated into a self-enclosed and autonomous whole; one is, rather, open towards and to a certain degree determined by all the

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[13]Ibid., 236.
[14]Ibid., 227.
[15]Ibid., 235.
[16]Ibid., 236.
[17]See, for instance, Eric Voegelin, *Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History*, in *CW* 12: 119 ff.

dimensions of reality that lay beyond oneself. This experience of the person as an experience of transcendence is a "border experience."[18]

As we will see presently, the conclusions that Voegelin draws from his reading of St. Augustine become critical to his further line of argumentation. The passages that follow, however, make it clear that Voegelin's understanding both of the term "transcendence" and of the concept of the person is broader—if you will, more modern—than his reliance on the classical Christian example would suggest. Continuing his investigation with interpretations of Descartes and Husserl, Voegelin justifies this move with the following reason:

> Saint Augustine's meditation is the basis of all more recent meditations. But it does not achieve everything that the new theory of the person (Personslehre) needs. For Augustine the problem of the person is not the focus, but is treated obliquely in the question of the dualism between creator and creatura. For the modern philosophy of the person, the primary focus is the difference between person and world; for Augustine it was between God and the world. For him the whole of creation is given objectively and within it the person.[19]

Apparently, Voegelin's theory of governance requires the presence of a modern ingredient in its theory of the person.[20] The final sentence of the passage that was just cited indicates one crucial aspect of what this means in theoretical terms. The notion of "the whole of creation . . . given objectively"—or stated otherwise, classical "ontology" in the traditional sense of the term—must be scrutinized epistemologically.[21] This, at least, seems to be Voegelin's position in this early fragment. (I leave standing here the

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[18]See particularly Voegelin's description of such "border experiences" and their historical variations in Voegelin, *The Theory of Governance*, 288–90.

[19]Ibid., 236 f.

[20]The question of the classical versus modern character of Voegelin's thinking has been the subject of a far-ranging discussion among Voegelin scholars. See, for instance, Manfred Henningsen, editor's introduction to *CW* 5: 1–17; Jürgen Gebhardt, "Interpreting the Modern World–Voegelin's Unfinished Story of the Predicament of Modernity," editor's introduction to *CW* 25: 1 ff.; Thomas Hollweck, "Wie legitim ist die Moderne? Gedanken zu Eric Voegelins Begriff der Moderne und Hans Blumenbergs Begriff der Neuzeit," *Occasional Papers* 32, Munich (Eric Voegelin Archive) 2003; Ted V. McAllister, *Revolt against Modernity. Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, and the Search for a Postliberal Order* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1996); Hermann Lübbe, "Zustimmungsfähige Modernität. Gründe einer marginal verbliebenen Rezeption Eric Voegelins," *Occasional Papers* 34 (Munich: Eric Voegelin Archive, 2003); Volker Gerhardt, "Politik und Existenz. Eric Voegelins Suche nach der Ordnung in uns selbst," in: *Philosophische Rundschau* 48 (2001): 177–95.

[21]See also Voegelin, *The Theory of Governance*, 282. Voegelin distinguishes his own perspective from that of Othmar Spann. Spann's perspective, according to Voegelin, is more obviously based on ontological speculation.

complex question as to whether his interpretation does justice to Augustine's meditation on this point.[22]) Voegelin argues that Augustine's traditional ontological perspective must be replaced by what he calls the "existentiality of procedure" (Existentialität des Verfahrens).[23] He finds this theoretical principle attained—in part, at least—in the more recent meditations of Descartes and Husserl. The principle might best be described as a radicalization of the meditative mode of the inquiry. Or, as Voegelin argues, "the thoroughly personal existential character attains greater clarity in Descartes than it did in Augustine."[24] He explains further:

> The meditation [in Descartes, H.S.] is the life of the person in which the person becomes aware of his own uniquely individual being (Eigenwesen). The person is both the subject of the meditation as well as its object; in the meditation as a succession of acts of the person the person is itself given, not the person in the abstract, nor the universal essence of the person, but the concrete essence of the person engaged in the actual meditation that brings the person to himself.... The process of meditation does not define the person as an object is defined, which can be alternately looked at and turned away from, but as an intensive self-possession, or more precisely—since the term still too strongly suggests the dualism of subject and object—as an intensive "being-with-one's-own-self" (das Bei-sich-selbst-sein).[25]

The meditation on the concept of the person must assume a more radically self-reflective form of speculation than it does with St. Augustine in order better to accentuate the point of particular interest to Voegelin here. This is the point at which the human person and the structure of its experience (Erfahrung, Erlebnis) encounter a kind of "being [that is] external to the person."[26] Without yet being able to describe the problem clearly, Voegelin reflects here upon the general structure or form of human experience as a participation in reality.[27] It is a form for which

[22]Voegelin's own reading of Augustine in this respect changes conspicuously in his later writings. See the interesting reflections and sources on this question in the epilogue to Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution*, 273 ff. (footnote 23).

[23]Voegelin, *The Theory of Governance*, 239 [my own, slightly different, translation. The translation of "Existentialität des Verfahrens" in *CW* 32 is "the existential nature of the process"].

[24]Ibid., 239 [my own, slightly different translation].

[25]Ibid., 239 f.; see also the similar passage on Husserl's existential meditation, ibid., 254 f.

[26]Ibid., 242. Voegelin emphasizes that Descartes focuses more clearly than Augustine on the question of the experience of external reality in general. Descartes' goal, as Voegelin stresses, is "the gaining of certainty of a thing beyond his own self" (Ibid., 241).

[27]On Voegelin's conception of experience as participation as he later developed it relying heavily on the work of Henri Bergson and William James, see particularly his early reflections from the 1940s in Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis, CW* 6: 62 ff.

subject (in other words, the core experience of the person) and object (experience of the world in all its different aspects) are drawn together into a single dialectical and tensional reality of human experience. Thus, the frame of reference—more precisely, the medium of Voegelin's scientific, philosophical inquiry—is not "the whole of creation ... given objectively," but the order of reality as given in experience. The concept of experience is crucial in this respect. Even in this early text, it appears to occupy the centre of Voegelin's reflections.

This concept of experience is directly linked to some especially significant intellectual influences on Voegelin's early thought. His reading of Max Weber is important in this respect, as is his early reception of the German tradition of hermeneutical philosophy—particularly the work of Wilhelm Dilthey.[28] His reading of William James marked a further major influence.[29] In several passages of his early writings, Voegelin raises the questions of experience and the person, addressing them in the form of his own existential meditative speculations.[30] Although it cannot be demonstrated in detail here, these early meditative texts reveal one aspect of what I would like to call Voegelin's "personalistic principle"—that is of special significance to the subject at hand. Voegelin's meditations on the human person entail very broad and multi-dimensional meanings used for the terms "border," "openness," and "transcendence"—all of which are used to characterize the core of the human person. Yet this notion of the multi-dimensional openness of the person is the most significant result of Voegelin's radicalization of Augustine's meditation in the direction of a more comprehensive existentiality of procedure. The radicalization was accomplished, in turn, by relying on Descartes and Husserl.

The passages on Husserl, unfortunately, are incomplete. Here Voegelin refers to the concept of the "transcendental ego" and understands the specific dialectic formula of the immanence of the transcendence to be the key existential concept through which Husserl describes his own basic experience of the person:

[28]This influence can be detected in *On the Form of the American Mind* especially, even though the early Voegelin very rarely refers to Dilthey explicitly. See Gebhardt and Cooper, editor's introduction, xii ff. Among Voegelin's "Working Material on Max Weber" in the Voegelin Archive can be found a forty-page excerpt of volume 5 of Dilthey's *Collected Works* (see Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution, Box 50, Folder 12.)

[29]See Voegelin, *On the Form of the American Mind*: 36 ff. and 49 ff., particularly; and Voegelin, *The Political Religions*, in *CW* 5: 72.

[30]See, for instance, Voegelin, *On the Form of the American Mind*, 9 ff. and 62 ff.; Voegelin, *Individuum und Chaos*, in Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution, Box 47, Folder 10; Voegelin, *On Max Weber* (1925), in *CW* 7: 100–117. Of further special interest in this respect is an early fragment entitled "Vorüberlegung" (preliminary reflection) that is to be found in Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution, Box 50, Folder 12 (see also Hans-Jörg Sigwart, Zwischen Abschluss und Neubeginn. Eric Voegelin und Max Weber," *Occasional Papers* 41 (Munich: Eric-Voegelin-Archiv, 2003): 20 ff.

> [The] pure Ego presents "a unique transcendence—not a construed one—a transcendence within immanence"—which differs from other transcendences, such as God and the world, which exist in reality beyond consciousness and its purified stream.[31]

Leaving aside its broader implications for Husserl's theory, this sentence indicates one central aspect of Voegelin's own perspective. Apparently, there are different types of transcendences, whether God, the world, the other person, or even immanent transcendence—a paradoxical concept that denotes the core of the person as experienced by the person himself. In this context, the term "transcendent" clearly does not refer primarily to an intra-mundane order of things and a world-transcendent ground of being. It refers, instead, to the person itself, to the concrete human consciousness and its experience of reality in general. The openness of the person in this context must be understood phenomenologically, even—better, perhaps—epistemologically. It must be understood, then, in a multidimensional way.

That Voegelin's early reception of Husserl's phenomenology was an eager one can also be discerned in his dissertation of 1922.[32] As we know, this early reception would give way to a thoroughgoing critique of phenomenology and of the notion of a transcendental ego in particular.[33] The peculiarly epistemological meaning of the term "transcendent," however, persists in Voegelin's later writings as well. In fact, the meaning of the term seems to oscillate in Voegelin's work between its classical, ontological sense and an epistemological one.[34] One might say that it is an epistemo-ontological concept. Even in this early text, there are intimations that Voegelin sees these two meanings of the term to be closely related. The existentiality of the more recent forms of personalistic meditation seems to have resulted in a detachment of the problem of the in-between from its traditional location at the deepest level of mystic speculation. Without utterly abandoning or excluding the traditional religious emphasis, the problem is expanded to encompass the fundamental structures of the human person and of human experience in general. The experience of the person as a border, as an in-between, does not only appear in man's relationship to a transcendent ground of being, but seems to appear in other experiences as well—albeit in different modes. Openness in this sense is the fundamental character of human consciousness, just as the in-between is the fundamental structure of human experience. The person experiences himself as a border, as open, as transcending himself in his experience both of other persons[35] and of

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[31]Voegelin, *The Theory of Governance*, 248.

[32]Ibid., 20, 37 ff., 48 ff.

[33]See, for instance, the thoroughgoing critique of Husserl in Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, 45 ff.

[34]The use of the term in *Anamnesis*, for instance, is primarily epistemological in the sense outlined here. See ibid., particularly 62 ff. and 341 ff.

[35]See on this question Sigwart, *Das Politische und die Wissenschaft*, 59 ff., 94 ff.

the world in general. Most important for the further line of the argument, the person experiences himself as open in his experiences of experiences, so to speak—in his perception of the various articulations, expressions, and symbolizations of human experience that constitute human society, culture, and history. Such articulations, expressions, and symbolizations are captured collectively in the concept of objective spirit (objektiver Geist).

As one of the key concepts of the *Theory of Governance* Voegelin's concept of objective spirit is one of the reasons why his use of the term Geist has such varied connotations. Voegelin appears to have adopted the concept from Wilhelm Dilthey and Max Scheler primarily, but also from his reading of the German cultural philosophers Hans Freyer and Theodor Litt.[36] Jürgen Gebhardt and Barry Cooper have formulated the meaning of objective spirit as follows:

> The fundamental experience of a common intellectual world of mutual understanding evolves from the specific human awareness of reality. Dilthey designated this sphere of community as the realm of the objective spirit (Geist) comprising all manifestations of life in the mode of objectifications of the spirit. This world of the spirit is an interrelation of effects (Wirkungszusammenhang) permanently generating values, realizing goals, and producing goods by the interaction of individuals, communities, and cultural systems. The intellectual world constitutes the sociohistorical world in terms of these structural units in time and space.[37]

The human person moves and interprets himself within a common world of symbols, articulations, and objectifications. Determined by this world, he simultaneously contributes to its creation. The person's experience of himself is always interwoven into and open toward that plurality of articulations of experiences that is given as the shared world of society and history. The notion of spiritual openness of man in this sense—as a pivotal existential condition of human life—serves as the general basis for Voegelin's Staatslehre, understood as a human science.[38]

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[36]See Voegelin's discussion of the concept of spirit in the tradition of German cultural and social sciences in Voegelin, *Political Theory as Human Science*, in *CW* 32: 414–29; 417 ff., particularly p. 420 ff.; regarding the concept of the objective spirit of Litt, see also Voegelin's dissertation, *Interaction and Spiritual Community: A Methodological Investigation*, in *CW* 32: 19–140; 130 f.

[37]Gebhardt and Cooper, editors' introduction, xvi.

[38]See also Voegelin, *The Theory of Governance*, 288. "If we are to address the problem of open existence and the realization of the superpersonal whole at all, and we must ... when we speak of domination as the fundamental phenomenon of the state, we must also adopt the metaphysical assumption of the objective spirit, in the same sense in which the natural scientist must adopt the metaphysical assumption of 'nature'."

A closer look at the concept of objective spirit might help us clarify the dialectic significance of Voegelin's epistemo-ontological concepts in general. The term "objective" can be misleading in two ways. Voegelin stresses that the objective spirit is never given as a completed whole. Its reality—in terms of human experience—is never entire or essential, but inheres solely in the concrete forms or structures of its various historical realizations.[39] Furthermore, such concrete structures are superpersonal (*überpersonale*), objectively given as conditions of human existence that exist independently of the individual person. Despite this, though, they are still always derived from human consciousness in its concrete personal form. Although spiritual structures are superpersonal, then, they are always personal in terms of origin.[40]

These general reflections on the concept of objective spirit and the nature of spiritual structures have important political implications. Indeed, they even raise the question as to the core meaning of the political. With the origin of spiritual structures in concrete persons in particular, this premise raises the question as to how we should understand the process through which objective, superpersonal structures emerge. As Voegelin puts it in his critique of Carl Schmitt's collectivistic approach to political reality: the human individual taken as a person is the decisive, the sole "real entity." The person, that is, is the only genuine source from which social, cultural, and political reality can ultimately derive its existence.[41] Although a state, for instance, is a superpersonal reality,[42] it is not a real entity that is given as an a priori, but solely a meaningful unit that is continuously constituted by an intricate interpersonal process.[43] Voegelin's early political science attempts to clarify this very notion of the nature of political communities as meaningful units.[44]

[39]Ibid.

[40]Ibid., 298; see also Voegelin, *On the Form of the American Mind*, 17.

[41]Voegelin, *Die Verfassungslehre von Carl Schmitt*.

[42]Voegelin, *The Theory of Governance*, 291.

[43]Voegelin, *Die Verfassungslehre von Carl Schmitt*, 100 f.

[44]Voegelin's conception of a *Staatslehre als Geisteswissenschaft*–like his theory of governance–has remained unfinished. Voegelin worked on the articulation of this conception as a system until the mid 1930s. The outline of a political theory of constitutions in the first chapter of *The Authoritarian State* from 1936 might be seen as his last attempt to realize the system of Staatslehre that he had projected in the early 1930s. (Eric Voegelin, *The Authoritarian State*, CW 4: 57 ff.). Voegelin only realized a fragmentary introduction to a systematic conception with his the *Theory of Governance* and the *Theory of Law* (both in *CW* 32: 373–413), as well as with a table of contents that indicates the various parts of which Voegelin's early science of politics was supposed to consist. See Voegelin's general outline to "Staatslehre als Geisteswissenschaft" in *CW* 32: 414 ff.

Political Science as Human Science

Beginning with the personalistic principle of his general hermeneutical theory, Voegelin's *Staatslehre als Geisteswissenschaft* (political science as human science) attempts to develop the implications of that principle into a system of political science.[45] Societies, as political communities, are objectifications like any other: as concrete, historical mental forms or meaningful units, they are at once creations and determinations of the mind understood as objective spirit. For all the fundamental similarities with other forms, however, political mental forms are of a very specific quality in Voegelin's view. At the Seventh German Conference of Sociology (Deutscher Soziologentag) held in Berlin in 1930, Voegelin drew attention to a complex of problems (Problemkreis) that, in his opinion, would have to be considered if the essentially social nature of any spiritual objectification were to be extracted. Voegelin argued that any understanding of society that regards it as a comprehensive structure integrating the various kinds of spiritual forms into one meaningful entity—the basic assumption of any sociological conception—necessarily entails the question as to how this process of integration can be described analytically. At this point, however, a number of theoretical questions arise:

> [These questions] in sum, can be indicated as those of the sociality of the spirit. Spiritual entities are created, not only by single persons, but also by pluralities of persons; these simultaneously and successively unfold the meaning of such an entity in the course of centuries. It is necessary to examine how spiritual creations that are always shaped in a personal manner *(als persönliche geprägt sind)* can bind *(zusammenfügen)* to form superpersonal entities in the first place.[46]

In Voegelin's view, the complex of problems[47] that surrounds the "sociality of the spirit in its unfolding" (*Gesellschaftlichkeit des Geistes in seiner*

[45]Voegelin's conception attempts to overcome the formalistic perspective of the Staatslehre that predominated at the time. See in this context Michael Henkel, "Positivismuskritik und autoritärer Staat. Die Grundlagendebatte in der Weimarer Staatsrechtslehre und Eric Voegelins Weg zu einer neuen Wissenschaft der Politik (bis 1938)," *Occasional Papers* 36 (Munich: Eric Voegelin Archive, 2003); Dietmar Herz, "Das Ideal einer objektiven Wissenschaft von Recht und Staat. Zu Eric Voegelins Kritik an Hans Kelsen," *Occasional Papers* 3 (Munich: Eric Voegelin Archive, 1996).

[46]See *Verhandlungen des 7. Deutschen Soziologentages vom 28. September bis 1. Oktober 1930 in Berlin*, vol. 7 of the *Schriften der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie*, (Tübingen: Mohr 1931): 182 [my translation].

[47]The questions upon which Voegelin focuses here resemble the questions raised by Alfred Schütz' phenomenological sociology and by the classical conceptions of a sociology of knowledge that were developed, for instance, by Karl Mannheim and Max Scheler.

Entfaltung)[48] should become the central concern of sociology as a human science. And indeed, it became the major concern of Voegelin's conception of his science—albeit one he came to understand, not primarily as sociology, but as a Staatslehre. For this complex of problems turned out to represent the very political dimension of social existence. The "state," as a "superpersonal entity," is a "spiritual creation of a concurrent and successive plurality of persons".[49]

In the *Theory of Governance*, Voegelin makes an aside on the character of a science that would be concerned with works of art and music. He opposes its central questions to the problems specific to political science, which is concerned with a different type of spiritual structure.

> For example, the objective spirit of "romantic music" can be realized in the following way: each individual person contributes to its realization by creating a spiritual work that in itself is a closed whole. Perhaps the persons engaged in this realization constitute a community and perhaps it is possible to realize the commonly held objective spirit in concrete works only through this community. But the works stand side-by-side, independent of one another, each for itself .... In a science that deals with such spiritual structures as works of art, the problem of open existence and its being anchored in a superpersonal spirit can be separated from the analysis of the work itself, even if the fundamental fact of the openness of existence—which can be attributed in part to the artist himself, in part to the superpersonal spiritual reality—becomes manifest in the various layers of the work.[50]

More than in a work of art, the superpersonal nature of spiritual structures—and along with it, an important aspect of the fact of the openness of existence—comes to the fore in political reality. This is because the state is a very specific type of spiritual structure:

> In the case of a spiritual structure such as the state, there are no objectifications created by persons that could be compared to the closed work of art. Rather, the realized actions themselves are part of the spiritual connection "state," which only as a whole could be compared to a work of art. The work of art is not a self-creation; its creator lies outside the work in the person of the artist. The state, on the other hand, is never finished, but always in the condition of becoming, realizing itself in its own self-structuring acts.[51]

[48]Voegelin's table of contents for the projected systematic book, *Staatslehre als Geisteswissenschaft*, indicates this fundamental problem in chapter 4.1 and 4.2. See *CW* 32: 415.

[49]Voegelin, *Political Theory as Human Science*, 415 [my own, slightly different translation].

[50]Voegelin, *The Theory of Governance*, 290 f.

[51]Ibid.; see also Voegelin, *Political Theory as Human Science*, 417.

As meaningful units comprised of an ordered cluster of political ideas, beliefs and symbolic expressions, political communities or states, are self-creations. Political ideas[52] are creations of superpersonal entities in a dual and reciprocal sense. Created not by single persons but by the plurality of persons included within the meaningful structure called the "state," these ideas create and recreate the transpersonal entity in turn. They do this by evoking, maintaining, renewing, and possibly even altering the concrete historical notion of meaningful community.

How can such superpersonal entities as nations and societies exist at all? This is possible both because the human person is open towards the common world of objective spirit and because this experiential openness can assume an evocative mode for which both the individual experience of community and the superpersonal objective reality of community relate dialectically and constitute each other. A genuine conception of the political underlying Voegelin's theoretical approach emerges here, both in the notion of the peculiarity of political mental structures as self creations and in that of the evocative power of political ideas. Described on the fundamental level of Voegelin's Geisteswissenschaft, politics is none other than the peculiar mode of the human spirit (i.e., of human experiential openness) that creates superpersonal entities. To state it differently: the political, in Voegelin's view, could be described as a particular mode of spiritual structure derived from a corresponding mode of experience. The political mode is derived, specifically, from the experience of the existential meaningfulness of a political community, the experience by a plurality of persons of a commonly held whole. Together with its articulation, this experience develops the evocative power to create and maintain this commonly held whole, to bring it into and hold it in existence as a concrete political community.

The Experiences of Power and Obedience

In the "Theory of Governance," therefore, Voegelin not only explains the personalistic principle of his hermeneutical perspective, but he also argues that political societies are to be treated as meaningful entities. He refers explicitly, moreover, to the existence of transpersonal or superpersonal (*überpersonale*) meaningful units (Sinneinheiten) as empirical facts. This broader background must be taken into account if we are properly to understand the concepts that are used in the *Theory of Governance*. Here, Voegelin focuses on the inner structure of these entities, a structure that is comprised of the relations between single persons within the meaningful unit. Of particular interest to Voegelin is a certain type of relation between individuals: the asymmetrical relation between rulers and the ruled. Voegelin's

[52]See Voegelin's introduction to the *History of Political Ideas*, in *CW* 19: 225–37.

investigation begins with the empirical fact that the internal structure of political spiritual entities always entails the phenomena of power and authority.

The central topic of the *Theory of Governance*, therefore, is the problem of dominion or domination and obedience. To put it in more republican terms, it is the problem of ruling and being ruled. For Voegelin, this problem must ultimately be traced back to the classical question of authority. In a way, his theory attempts to rehabilitate this classical question[53] as a counter to the Weberian reduction of the theory of governance to a mere theory of dominion. The attempt is made via his *geisteswissenschaftliche* interpretation, one according to which relations of command and obedience must be understood not merely as compulsory institutions or habits of action that have been imposed externally but as relations embedded within the meaningful, spiritual structure of the same state from which they attain their meaning and legitimacy. Further, such relations must be understood as functions occurring within the successive process of the self-creation of the political community. Dominion and obedience, as Voegelin frequently formulates it, are partial realizations of the supra-personal, commonly held, spiritual whole[54] of the political community.[55]

In order to penetrate to this *geisteswissenschaftliche* core of the problem, it is necessary to exclude the more superficial characteristics of power and domination as comprehensive explanations:

> It is our intention to try to find out what can be rationally said concerning the phenomenon of governance by human beings over other human beings and about the corresponding acts of obedience. The possession of the means of force and the threat of its use in an attempt to motivate others by fear of injury will be excluded from our study. We will also exclude from consideration governments whose power is rooted in custom, ideology, or institutions. We intend to penetrate to the core of the foundation of governance in the superiority of one person over another.[56]

[53]See also Petropulos and Weiss, editors' introduction, 11: "The *Theory of Governance* is a major attempt to restore political science to first principles." As we will see below, however, Voegelin's early Geisteswissenschaft ultimately does not succeed, neither in reestablishing the classical question of authority nor in incorporating the classical republican issues of political friendship and consent into his Herrschaftslehre.

[54]Voegelin, *The Theory of Governance*, 277, 280, 296, 297.

[55]Again, the dialectic or reciprocal form we already encountered in Voegelin's characterizations of the problem of the person as well as of the peculiarity of the political mode of human spirit, recurs here on the level of power and domination: the "state as a superpersonal reality" constitutes domination, is "the source of domination, the origin of power" (Ibid., 291), and at the same time domination and obedience constitute the state insofar as they are partial realizations of the process of self-creation (ibid., 290).

[56]Ibid., 255.

Voegelin is interested in the experience of the superiority of another person. This is why his *Theory of Governance*—like Max Weber's *Theory of Governance*—emphasizes the question of being ruled alongside the questions of power and authority. An important undercurrent of the fragment seems to me to be Voegelin's critical reading of Weber's theory. Like Weber, Voegelin sees one of the critical questions to be the motivations of the ruled to accept the rule of others.[57] But Voegelin excludes the major concerns of Weber's sociology of dominion from his reflections on the core meaning of the political because he finds Weber's answer to the question to be dissatisfying. The "means of force and the threat of its use" indeed allude to Weber's concept of political power and his definition of the state as the entity that holds the monopoly of legitimate physical force.[58] Further, the "power that is rooted in custom" alludes to Weber's notion of traditional dominion. Yet Voegelin then excludes, in a long passage devoted to a discussion of the sociologist's theory of power, Weber's legal dominion as the final source of power and authority.[59] Finally, even though he treats it only incidentally in the fragment,[60] Voegelin is especially interested in Weber's idea of charismatic dominion—the most personalistic, if you will, of Weber's three forms of legitimacy (as motives of obedience). Seeking to penetrate to the core meaning of dominion and obedience, Voegelin focuses on the personal dimension of political rule. He takes up the question of Herrschaft at the point Weber's theory of charisma left it off. For Voegelin, a *Herrschaftslehre als Daseinslehre* (theory of rule as a theory of existence) must begin its analysis of the problem precisely where Weber had drawn the line beyond which rational understanding cannot penetrate. Weber had ended his analysis with the opaque concept of charisma—a concept that is substantively impenetrable, not only for the ruled that are affected by it but also for the scientist observing the phenomenon. Yet it is at precisely this point that Voegelin raises his genuinely *geisteswissenschaftliche* question: How can the phenomena of power and obedience be grasped in terms of experience? What is the experience that binds both ruler and ruled to the commonly held spiritual whole that is to be realized? The two types or modes of political experience Voegelin is seeking here are distinct in terms of their substance: the experience of power as derived from a superpersonal spiritual entity on the one hand and the experience of being ruled on this basis, the phenomenon of personal authority experienced from below, on the other.

[57]For Weber's emphasis on the motives of obedience, see, for instance, Max Weber, *Politik als Beruf*, in *Gesammelte politische Schriften* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1988), 507 ff.; Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1956), 551–58.

[58]Weber, *Politik als Beruf*, 505 f.

[59]Voegelin, *The Theory of Governance*, 290 ff.; see also Voegelin, *The Authoritarian State*, 218 ff.

[60]Voegelin, *The Theory of Governance*, 321 f.

In the chapters that follow, Voegelin seeks to improve on Weber's concept of charisma by moving it towards experiential concepts of power, dominion, and obedience. To this end, he considers the ideas of a number of different thinkers. Voegelin finds a concept of power and rulership that seems to approach what he seeks in the work of Eduard Spranger, a *geisteswissenschaftliche* German psychologist. With Spranger's theory of power, Voegelin writes, "we have in fact arrived at the conception of the primeval phenomenon of power that we believe to have found [in chapter 1, H.S.] in the structure of the person." Voegelin describes the crucial point as follows:

> When a person is at one with himself [*ganz bei sich selbst*], he is simultaneously open to a superpersonal sphere. When one is in possession of one's self, one possesses simultaneously more than oneself. In manifesting one's self, one also manifests what transcends the self. Those persons are powerful who manage to live in self-possession [*bei sich*] and thus transcend themselves. Personal power is a fullness of personal being [*das Person-sein*]. This content of the experience of the person [*die Personserfahrung*], which can only be formulated dialectically, appears to me to be the utmost that we can say in the analysis of power.[61]

The full realization of the openness of the person is the source of personal power. A corresponding personalistic idea of obedience also resonates in Voegelin's interpretation of Max Scheler. Here, he sees the substantive source of dominion in the experience of a mediated insight into a value-whole (*das Wertganze*): "Obedience in the genuine sense is not blind, but based on insight; however, it is not immediate, but is mediated by the fully adequate insight on the part of the ruler." [62] To summarize, then, the political experience (in the existential sense) possesses two different modes. First, there is power, or an immediate experience of spiritual order in the core idea of the community (the experience of the *idée directrice*, as Voegelin puts it in the *Authoritarian State*, referring to the French theorist Maurice Hauriou).[63] Second, there is obedience, which is a mediated experience of this core idea, an experience mediated by the authoritative, representative personality of the ruler.

These formulas, in fact, are the provisional conclusions that are reached by Voegelin in his attempt to reformulate the problem of governance on the basis of his Geisteswissenschaft. Where the *Theory of Governance* remained unfinished, however, the political thinker appears not to have found these conclusions satisfying. The fragment's important questions were left open; its conceptual problems remained unsolved. Seen within the context of Voegelin's other early writings, the general conception of the *Theory of Governance* leaves quite a one-sided impression. Its intellectual background

[61]Ibid., 261.
[62]Ibid., 265.
[63]Voegelin, *The Authoritarian State*, 222 f.

is overwhelmingly the central-European—particularly German—intellectual scene of the time, with all its ambivalent implications. Indeed, in some passages of the text, it seems that Voegelin quite uncritically reproduces ideas that are remarkably like the collectivistic conceptions of the central-European political ideas of the time. The chapter on Carl Schmitt[64] and especially the one on Friedrich Wolters (a historian and cultural philosopher belonging to the circle around Stefan George) offer striking examples in this respect.[65] Surprisingly absent here is any evidence of a clear influence of Voegelin's early American experience,[66] an experience that had made a palpable impact on most of his other early writings. This might be why the fragment makes no attempt to develop a theory of citizenship: such a theory would be based on Voegelin's reflections in other contexts on the American notion of likemindedness,[67] or upon classical ideas of political friendship, consent, and similar republican forms of political relations. Although such questions would certainly belong within a systematic theory of governance, they are not addressed here. That they are not addressed[68] is even more surprising if we consider that similar ideas are discussed extensively in Eduard Spranger's *Lebensformen*—the book from which Voegelin had found the most convincing *geisteswissenschaftliche* concept of power. For Spranger, power is only one of two fundamental modes by which superpersonal spiritual entities are formed. The second, equally important, mode is what Spranger—referring to Max Scheler—calls "sympathy."[69]

Second, the *Theory of Governance* lacks—or at best only intimates—any basis for a substantive distinction between the various spiritual sources of dominion and political rule. As a result, the concept of authority remains ambiguous. This may be one reason why Voegelin eventually abandoned his original plan for a *Staatslehre als Geisteswissenschaft* altogether. "[I]n its core domination can only be maintained by 'authority.' The acts of those dominating and those dominated must be experienced as 'correct' partial realizations of a commonly held whole." Authority requires "a positive core of corresponding substance (Gehalt)."[70] It is founded on the common experience of ruler and ruled of being "anchored in a superpersonal spirit."[71] Yet, depending on the specific historical form a spiritual

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[64]Voegelin, *The Theory of Governance*, 360 ff.

[65]Ibid., 333 ff.

[66]See Voeglin, "American Influence" in *Autobiographical Reflections*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 28 ff.

[67]See particularly Voegelin, *On the Form of the American Mind*, 217 ff. and 275 ff.

[68]Voegelin's table of content, however, indicates that the treatment of more republican and democratic ideas of governance was a planned, yet not a realized part of his theory of governance (Voegelin, *Political Theory as Human Science*, 415).

[69]See Eduard Spranger, *Lebensformen* (Halle: Max Niemeyer Verlag,[7] 1930), 63.

[70]Voegelin, *The Theory of Governance*, 296.

[71]Ibid., 291.

community takes, depending on its specific national type of mind,[72] its substance might differ greatly. As Voegelin notes in the *Authoritarian State* a few years later, human communities can be the "source of evil as well as good."[73] Here, good and evil are meant as concepts that transcend the value-whole of a specific historical political community; they would, thereby, transcend the horizon of any civil theology, understood as the common horizon of meaning of the ruled and the ruler. In the *Theory of Governance*, Voegelin's political science does not yet reach any substantive distinction between good and evil in this sense: "It is not the scholar who knows what is objectively valid, but those participating in social reality at concrete points in the course of history."[74] In the *Theory of Governance*, Voegelin not only hesitates, but even ultimately refuses to formulate substantive categories according to which a critical distinction between good and evil types of civil theologies could be made.

Political Collectivism and Religion

Eventually, the ambivalent implications of Voegelin's *geisteswissenschaftliche* concept of political authority point toward the problem of a substantive critique of ideologies. As I indicated above, these ambivalent implications had not yet been fully developed in the fragment in question. They were at least intimated, however, in Voegelin's reflections on the problem of the "evil that

[72]See Voegelin's interesting fragment on the question of a science of national types of mind in *CW* 32: 430 ff.

[73]Voegelin, *The Authoritarian State*, 122.

[74]Voegelin, *The Theory of Governance*, 313. This Weberian neutrality still determines to a great extend Voegelin's perspective in his books on the race problem published in 1933 (see Eric Voegelin, *Race and State*, *CW* 2 and Eric Voegelin, *The History of the Race Idea: From Ray to Carus*, *CW* 3). Although he provides a content-based critique of the claim of the various central European race ideas to be theoretically or scientifically founded, Voegelin does not formulate his critique of the political race ideas in terms of a critique of ideologies. "A sociologist ought not to judge but to understand." Helmuth Plessner, one of the leading representatives of philosophical anthropology in Germany at the time, offers this affirmative characterization of Voegelin's perspective in his 1933 review of *Race and State*. This statement accurately describes Voegelin's general attitude toward political ideas at the time. (See Helmuth Plessner, "Review on Eric Voegelin, Rasse und Staat," in: *Zeitschrift für öffentliches Recht*, Bd. 14, Heft 3, 1933, 407–14; here, 411.) For an interpretation that emphasizes the role of Voegelin's studies on the race problem in his development of a substantive critique of ideologies, see Thomas Heilke, *Voegelin on the Idea of Race. An Analysis of Modern European Racism* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1990). See on this question also Manfred Henningsen's interesting review of Heilke's study in: *Review of Politics* 54 (1992): 70–7; and Klaus Vondung, editor's introduction to *CW* 2: 1 ff.

clings to all power." Voegelin's interpretation of Max Scheler in the *Theory of Governance* closes with the following reflection:

> [O]ne question, which Scheler does not address, remains obscure: How is the superpersonal moral reality—which, in accordance with the way it enters into the relationship of ruling and being ruled, is ethical, manifesting itself existentially in the person of the ruler—compatible with the assumed uniqueness of the individual, also the uniqueness of those individuals who are ruled? But I fear that the answer to this question will remain obscure, for here lies the seed of evil that clings to all power.[75]

Voegelin returns to the problem of the evil that clings to all power later in the text.[76] The problem becomes manifest in the fact that physical force and compulsion is always a necessary prerequisite of all political power. It becomes even more profoundly manifest in the fact that every political community, as a meaningful spiritual structure, necessarily develops exclusive tendencies. To a certain degree, that is, the ideas and beliefs that provide the meaningful basis of a political community claim a monopoly of meaning within society and tend to suppress all alternative spiritual evocations.[77] Voegelin reaches the deepest level of his analysis of the intrinsic evil of all dominion in his discussion of the passage on Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor.[78] Claiming not merely to govern the masses, but to give them "something to live for" by governing them,[79] the Grand Inquisitor is said to be the paradigmatic figure of the authoritarian ruler. His claim, Voegelin argues, must ultimately be understood as the claim to correct or solve the religious predicaments of human existence,[80] to provide through political means an escape from the burden of existential openness:

> Herein lies the "mystery," as Dostoevsky calls it, which must remain obscure; here is the source of evil in governance that becomes evil at the very moment when it tries to do its best for the weak by giving them the happiness they are capable of receiving. Here we reach the theme at the root of the problem of governance: the ultimate fact of the closeness to or distance from God, which is ours by no action of our

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[75]Voegelin, *The Theory of Governance*, 268.

[76]See particularly ibid., 312 ff.

[77]See also Voegelin, *National Types of Mind*, 466, and *Introduction to the History of Political Ideas*, 225.

[78]Voegelin, "The Theory of Governance," 326 ff. Regarding Dostoevsky's "Grand Inquisitor" see the extensive study by Ellis Sandoz, *Political Apocalypse: A Study of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor* (Wilmington, Delaware: Isi Books,[2] 2000). Sandoz's interpretation of Dostoevsky, following lines similar to those implied in Voegelin's early text, also emphasizes the significance of the idea of metaphysical rebellion in its characterization of the Grand Inquisitor (see ibid., 110 ff. and 127 ff.).

[79]Voegelin, *The Theory of Governance*, 328.

[80]"We have corrected Thy [Christ's, H.S.] work and have founded it upon miracle, mystery, and authority." (Ibid., 329).

own; or, in our terminology, to the human being's closeness to or
distance from the spirit. It is one of the human experiences that make a
theodicy necessary.[81]

At its core, the political experience—the experience of the meaningful-
ness of the political community—is directly linked to the fundamental
experience of human existence as openness. Each spiritual structure of
the political type, therefore, tends intrinsically to claim not only that it
has created a community, but that it has solved the problem of human
existence as such by doing so. Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor formulates
this claim to "domination over the consciences" of the ruled[82] from the
perspective of the authoritarian ruler. Yet this claim is an inherent ten-
dency or possibility of political spiritual structures in general. It is
inherent to the logic of the human spirit in its political mode. In a way,
the evocative creation of a political community marks an attempt—as
Voegelin formulates it elsewhere—to escape the existential question, the
problem of dialectic or of the in-between and the fundamental openness
of the person.[83] A vestige of this notion is an ingredient of every political
creed. Every political spiritual structure, every civil theology must try to a
certain degree to finalize, complete, round out the existential openness of
human existence symbolically. Herein ultimately lies the source of the evil
that clings to all power. As Voegelin remarks at the end of the *Political
Religions* in 1938: "[T]he order of the community is built upon hate and
blood, with misery" and "the apostasy of God."[84]

This inherent danger of the political spirit can attain its full strength,
however, only if the community actually assumes the status of the final
source of meaning. It can do so only if the idea of the political community
has eclipsed not merely the significance and dignity of the individual
person but its openness to transcendence as well.[85] At the time he wrote
the *Theory of Governance*, Voegelin's reading of Schmitt and Wolters was
still surprisingly uncritical. By the end of the 1930s, though, Voegelin's pers-
pective had changed remarkably in this respect. Having been confronted—
through the anti-personal and anti-religious nature of political collectivism
in central Europe—with the problem of evil in political reality, Voegelin's
focus was now trained on a problem that had been merely implied in the
Theory of Governance. The problem that had become the problem of the

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[81]Ibid., 330.

[82]Ibid., 329 [my own, slightly different translation].

[83]See Voegelin, *On the Form of the American Mind*, 9; see also Voegelin, *Introduction to
the History of Political Ideas*, 227.

[84]Voegelin, *The Political Religions*, 71.

[85]See, in this respect, Voegelin's distinction of two historical types of peoples, that
of the Western nation-state and that of the central European imperial people. The
latter rests upon particular anti-personal political ideas of the nineteenth century.
(Eric Voegelin, *Race and State* [1935], in *CW* 9: 40–53, here, 47 ff.)

era, in Voegelin's view, turned out to be connected directly to the question of politics and religion. Left to itself, so to speak, the human spirit in its political mode is in danger of becoming collectivistic, of radically and totally realizing its inner logic and of incorporating, even engulfing the individual person and all metapolitical forms of the human spirit along with it. Whether science, philosophy, or religion, each is now subsumed to the single idea of the commonly held spiritual whole of the political community.[86] The civil theology of the political community tends to become a political religion. The evil that clings to all power does not cling to all types of political power equally, but to its anti-personal and anti-religious collectivistic variant in particular. Left to unfold its full potential, this variant ultimately leads to totalitarianism. Voegelin's first decisive critique of National Socialism is formulated in the *Political Religions*. In the foreword to the second edition of that book, Voegelin writes on the problem of evil in political collectivism:

> Political collectivism is not only a political and moral phenomenon. To me its religious elements seem much more significant. Choosing to take up the struggle with literary means in the form of ethical counter-propaganda is important, but such a struggle will become questionable when it hides the essential. . . . Thus, although I do not mean to imply that the struggle against National Socialism should not also be an ethical one, it is, in my opinion, not conducted radically enough, because the *radix*, the root in religiousness is missing.[87]

By 1938, Voegelin's focus had shifted from the problem of the evil that clings to all power to the concrete problem of the evil that clings to particular twentieth-century political phenomena: to political religions of the type of National Socialism.[88] During the process of reorientation that had preceded this shift, not only classical Greek and Christian philosophy but also the problem of religion in general gained a significance that it had not enjoyed earlier for Voegelin. Precisely because political collectivism is not only a political and moral phenomenon, but primarily a religious phenomenon, the problem of religion now becomes most pressing. Because the evil of political collectivism entails a religious dimension, any analysis of it must likewise be

[86]Voegelin, *The Political Religions*, 29: "Now we feel more distinctly what is at stake: The issue is not the correctness of a definition; the issue is a matter of life and death. And even more so, the issue is the question as to whether man may exist personally or has to blend into a suprapersonal realissimum."

[87]Ibid., 23 f.

[88]Beginning in the late 1930s, this question as to the roots of modern ideologies became one of the most prominent concerns of Voegelin's thought. For a thorough and insightful presentation of Voegelin's highly interesting later theoretical achievements in this respect, see Michael Franz, *Eric Voegelin and the Politics of Spiritual Revolt: The Roots of Modern Ideology* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).

founded on a discussion "of the basic religious issues of our times." Yet, in Voegelin's view, not only the mere analysis of political collectivism, but above all, the critique of it and fight against it necessarily involves religion:

> There is no distinguished philosopher or thinker in the Western world today who, firstly, is not aware—and has not also expressed this sentiment—that the world is experiencing a serious crisis, is undergoing a process of withering, which has its origin in the secularization of the soul and in the ensuing severance of a consequently purely secular soul from its roots in religiousness, and secondly, does not know that recovery can only be achieved through religious renewal, be it within the framework of the historical churches, be it outside this framework. Such renewal, to a large extent, can only be initiated by great religious personalities, but everyone can be ready and willing to do his share in paving the way for resistance to rise up against the evil.[89]

The question of religion, therefore, is intimately tied to the problems of critique and resistance. In the late 1930s, both religion in general and the critique of certain forms of it simultaneously gained a new significance for Voegelin. A conception of human science that had been mainly descriptive and analytical now gave way to a much clearer emphasis on the existential need for critique and intellectual resistance to the ideological movements of the time. That this new emphasis had indeed changed Voegelin's perspective was the impression of some of his contemporary observers. Particularly interesting in this respect is Voegelin's correspondence of 1938 and 1939 with Ruthild and Karsten Lemche—a former Viennesse student of Voegelin and her Danish husband. Voegelin discussed with the couple both the political situation and the crucial theoretical questions that it had raised. After reading the foreword to the *Political Religions* Voegelin had sent them prior to its publication, the Lemches noted the significant change of Voegelin's perspective. Appearing to have been not merely surprised at the change but rather skeptical of it, Karsten Lemche wrote to Voegelin in 1939:

> I always thought of you, Doctor, I have to admit, as a relativist that described historical events from a perspective that is as unprejudiced as possible—albeit as one that, like a biologist, finds in the material a chronological order and evaluation of flourishing and decay. The way I read it, your view of religions [Ihre Religionenbetrachtung] still has this attitude, although one senses a living participation [lebendige Anteilnahme] together with the insights. All of the sudden, I was forced to recognize this impression of you as having been fundamentally incomplete; only now [after having read the foreword, H.S.] do I see the "absolutist."
> Yet it appears to me that, in the foreword, a leap is made—a leap from observing and describing the course of events to the prophetic

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[89]Voegelin, *The Political Religions*, 24.

establishment of values [*zum prophetischen Wertesetzen*], from the historian to the missionary, although this is not clearly emphasized.[90]

The Weberian connotations of Lemche's critical remark are evident. Lemche implicitly charges Voegelin with practicing "prophecy from the lecturer's podium"—a deadly sin for a scholar from Weber's point of view.[91] Voegelin's reaction to the accusation that he had abandoned the "observing and describing" perspective of the scholar is highly interesting. Although the following passage does not fully clarify Voegelin's perspective, it evinces some important elements of the questions that have been raised here. In a hitherto unknown letter of 1939, he reacts to Lemche's critique as follows:

> What, then, did I intend with the foreword? Certainly not to convert or proselytize anybody. It is the first time that I have said something about my personal views on certain questions in public. To this point, I have always only neutrally described; but this neutrality—which issues, not from some kind of relativism, but from a contemplation that (sympathetically) participates in reality—was so often and so embarrassingly misunderstood as partisanship for the NS [National Socialists, H.S.] that it appeared to me to be advisable to do away with these misunderstandings.[92]

The passage indicates a kind of dynamic development. Voegelin himself concedes a shift—of his public attitude, at least—during the 1930s. It is a shift for which he has abandoned a certain neutrality of perspective in favor of a more decisively critical language, particularly with regard to National Socialism.[93] Even more interesting, though, is Voegelin's

[90][my translation]. Karsten Lemche to Eric Voegelin, February 11, 1939. See Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution, box 23, folder 3. The folder only contains the letters of the Lemches; Voegelin's own letters are missing. Fortunately, some of Voegelin's letters can be found in the unpublished papers of Ruthild Lemche's mother, the Austrian feminist, Mathilde Hanzel-Hübner. These can be found at the archive of the Sammlung Frauennachlässe at the University of Vienna. (See below footnote 97.)

[91]See Max Weber, *Der Sinn der Wertfreiheit der soziologischen und ökonomischen Wissenschaften*, in: Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre* (Tübingen: Mohr,[7] 1988), 489–540; here, 492 f.

[92]Institut für Geschichte–Wien (IfG), Sammlung Frauennachlässe, NL III A/3, Eric Voegelin to Karsten Lemche, no date. I want to thank Einar Lemche in Kopenhagen, and Li Gerhalter in Vienna, for their help with finding this interesting source, as well as Gunvor Sramek and the Sammlung Frauennachlässe at the University of Vienna for his permission to publish it.

[93]See ibid.: "Thus, my personal attitude remains: you quite rightly remarked that I am an 'absolutist,' and what follows from the peculiar sort of my prejudices is that I have a particularly deep aversion against all sort of dishonesty, hypocrisy, denial of consequence, ill-treatment of weaker persons, ideological glossing over [*ideologische Verbrämung*] of naked economic interests, sadism, arbitrary cruelties etc…" [my translation].

characterization of his scholarly perspective as one based on what he calls "a contemplation that [sympathetically] participates in reality" (*einer an der Realität anteilnehmenden Kontemplation*). As far removed from any sort of missionary perspective as it is from relativism, this peculiar form of "contemplation" apparently characterizes Voegelin's perspective. And this perspective still is, as Voegelin claims, the perspective of the scholar. What is the significance of religion in this setting? Neither the letter nor the foreword to the *Political Religions* answers this question. To Ruthild Lemche, too, Voegelin's new critical perspective does not appear to be very clear and explicit on these matters. To her, Voegelin seems both especially resolute and especially reserved on the question of religion:

> In the book, you emphasize the character of religion as a primary senti-
> ment of metaphysical dependence—and even if one presumes that this
> [sentiment] can manifest itself with particular psychical types as an
> experience of good and evil, the position of the good still seems to me
> to be essential to determining the negative or the satanic. The former
> you leave to the religious geniuses; the latter you believe to be able to
> carry out yourself, as soon as a type that appears historically as a form
> of disintegration of a transcendent form of religion (*ein historisch als
> Verfallserscheinung einer überweltlichen Religionsform auftretender Typ*)
> evokes your logical, ethical—and, yes, you say—your religious indig-
> nation [Unwillen]. But where is the position from which the religious
> rejection can be made?[94]

In his reply—the letter is to be found in the *Archiv Frauennachlässe* at the University of Vienna[95]—Voegelin does not return to this point explicitly. Emphasizing the significance of a transnational comparative scholarly perspective concerning the problem of religion, he leaves Ruthild Lemche's main point unanswered. His most explicit statement on these matters in his letter of response to Karsten Lemche is a reference to a book:

> I cannot go into the religious question and into the radical evil of
> National Socialism here. That would take too long. But the experiences
> that have induced me to adopt the premise and attitude essentially
> coincide with the description of the NS that has recently been given by
> Rauschning (himself a National Socialist functionary for several years)
> in his *Revolution of Nihilism*. Perhaps you know the book? It is the first
> work on NS which appears to me to be really valuable as a document.[96]

Hermann Rauschning, a national-conservative politician, became an NSDAP party member in 1931/32. Until his break with the National Socialist regime in 1934, he was president of the senate of the city of

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[94]Ruthild Lemche to Voegelin, February 11, 1939 (Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution, box 23, folder 3) [my translation].
[95]See above, footnote No. 97.
[96]Ibid.

Danzig.[97] His book presents an emphatic critique of National Socialism.[98] Partly problematic,[99] partly brilliant, it emphasizes the utterly nihilistic nature of National Socialism. Its general thrust, therefore, is similar to that of Voegelin's *Political Religions*. Rauschning's analysis criticizes not only the revolutionary National Socialist movement but also the general political and cultural situation in Germany that had made the rise of National Socialism possible in the first place. As one of the crucial factors that had made the success of the totalitarian movements possible, Rauschning identified especially the reactionary and spiritually empty attitude of the nationalistic realism that predominated within German conservatism at the time.[100] Yet he also considered a coming true conservatism, one whose political, cultural, and spiritual foundations would be renewed. This, he thought, would be the only political and intellectual force that would be capable of defeating the "revolution of nihilism" in the near future.[101] Reacting to reviews of his book that had criticized its dearth of positive ideas, Rauschning introduced a planned sequel at the end of his foreword to the fifth edition. This sequel, he promised, would "complete a topic that has only been touched upon here: the renaissance of the Occident from the element of a Christian society."[102]

This kind of specifically German, self-critical Christian conservatism does not really—and certainly not exhaustively—describe Eric Voegelin's position at the time. In the 1930s, Voegelin clearly sympathized with some political ideas of Central-European authoritarian conservatism to a certain degree,[103] yet he refused on principle to adopt any particular political position on the party struggles of the time. His perspective was primarily

[97]On Rauschning's political and intellectual biography, see Jürgen Hense and Pia Nordbom, eds., *Hermann Rauschning. Materialien und Beiträge zu einer politischen Biographie* (Warsaw: Erich-Brost-Foundation, 2002).

[98]Voegelin was not alone with his appreciation of Rauschning's book at the time. Thomas Mann and others also expressed their high esteem for Rauschning's critique of National Socialism. See Pia Nordblom, "Wider die These von der bewussten Fälschung. Bemerkungen zu den Gesprächen mit Hitler," in: Hensel Nordblom, *Hermann Rauschning*, 151–74: 153 (footnote 8).

[99]See Hermann Rauschning, *Die Revolution des Nihilismus* (Zurich/New York: Europa Verlag,[5] 1938). The accusation, in particular, that Rauschning's arguments were based on sources that had been partly forged became the ground for a thoroughgoing critique of his work in general. See Eckhard Jesse, "Hermann Rauschning–Der fragwürdige Kronzeuge," in R. Smelser, E. Syring, and R. Zitelmann, eds., *Die braune Elite*, vol. 2: 21 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999), 193–205.

[100]Rauschning, *Die Revolution des Nihilismus*, 159 ff.

[101]Ibid., 183 ff. In terms of political institutions and forms of government, Rauschning argues in favor of a restoration of the monarchy (ibid., 186 ff.).

[102]Ibid., 6. The second part announced here was published as Hermann Rauschning, *Die Konservative Revolution. Versuch und Bruch mit Hitler* (New York: Freedom Publ., 1941).

[103]See Sigwart, *Das Politische und die Wissenschaft*, 190 ff.

that of the political scientist, one based upon "a contemplation that [sympathetically] participates in reality." Such contemplation, even as it participates in political reality, also seeks on principle to transcend the sphere of political ideas analytically and conceptually. A parallel might be drawn between Rauschning and Voegelin on the question of religion, however. As Voegelin's reference to Rauschning cited above indicates, the question of religion was as closely related to the experience of National Socialism for him as it was for Rauschning at that time. The experience of totalitarianism fully revealed the significance of religion—its significance to politics for Rauschning and to political theory for Voegelin. Yet it seems that this significance was primarily a critical one for Voegelin at that time. Political theory had to consider the problems of religion in order to identify, analyze, and criticize the substance of the new ideological movements of the era. For Voegelin, therefore, the question of religion indeed seems to have been directly related to experiences of political collectivism and revolutionary nihilism, as well as to the intellectual resistance against it. The impressions of his former Viennese student, therefore, seem plausible on this point. By the late 1930s the attempt to determine which political creeds and which forms of religion were evil—an attempt that had been absent not only in the *Theory of Governance* but also in his earliest writings in general—had, indeed, become Voegelin's primary concern. The question asking from which position these forms might be rejected in a scholarly way, however, had not yet been satisfactorily answered. The attempt to answer it would become the major concern of Voegelin's thought in the years to follow.