Political theorists are apt to skim chapters 4 and 5 where Ferguson pays considerable attention to the current rift in philosophy between the analytical and Continental traditions. These chapters distract somewhat from the overall political thesis even though they provide philosophical examples of the pluralist ethic. Ferguson believes that the fruitful philosophical collaboration of the American James and the French philosopher Herni Bergson—whose writing James said "has made me bold" and provoked him to write *A Pluralistic Universe*—points a way toward a proper philosophical appreciation of our "pluriverse," which requires the cooperative efforts of analytical philosophers and existentialists, empiricists and rationalists, realists and idealists. Ferguson starts what is surely a provocative argument of interest to philosophers, suggesting that the future of philosophy may require going back to thinkers such as James and Bergson who were not infected by either the analytical or the linguistic turn in philosophy and who blazed interesting philosophical paths that should be reconsidered. However, this project is for another book and a different audience.

It may well be the lasting contribution of this book to encourage contemporary liberalism to reconnect itself to the authentic version of pluralism of its forgotten father, William James. Ferguson has given this conversation a strong start that others will surely be inspired to continue.

–Jason Boffetti

THE TENSION OF EXISTENCE

Jeffrey C. Herndon: *Eric Voegelin and the Problem of Christian Political Order* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007. Pp. xiii, 189. $39.95.)

doi:10.1017/S0034670508000636

Throughout Eric Voegelin's work runs the constant theme of the "tension of existence"—of man's precarious position between beast and god, human and divine. The danger, as Voegelin perceives it, is that human beings are tempted to run from this tension, resolving it by taking refuge in ideology or immanentist projects of various kinds. Many, however, solve the tension in a different way, declaring themselves members of a "city of God," which they perceive as purer and more sincerely religious than the institutional church. This impulse toward perfectionism, Voegelin believes, has led to the current crisis of modernity.

Jeffrey C. Herndon's new book, *Eric Voegelin and the Problem of Christian Political Order*, sets out the details of this theory, with attention to both the psychological and historical evidence that Voegelin provides in support of it. His analysis is noteworthy because it addresses directly the controversy about Voegelin and Christianity, with the added benefit of having considered

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670508000636 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Voegelin's early writings in the *History of Political Ideas*, long unavailable to scholars. To explain this controversy quite briefly, Voegelin has endured much criticism from those who find his treatment of Christianity inadequate. Some have seen his lack of focus on the person of Jesus as a way of avoiding the essence of Christian experience. According to other critics, Voegelin assimilated Christian experience of the divine to the noetic impulses of Plato and Aristotle, entirely neglecting the Incarnation. Moreover, his continued focus on Paul (rather than Christ) was simply baffling to many readers.

Herndon's book focuses on one of the most interesting of these criticisms, namely, Why Paul? In answering this question, he gives a lucid explanation of Voegelin's aversion to the "historical Jesus" school, arguing that his emphasis on the importance of primary, lived experiences led Voegelin away from critical analysis of the historicity of the Gospels. Instead, realizing that the Gospels were never meant to be read as history, Voegelin focused on the person he believed had the most immediate experience of Christ, and who (importantly) wrote down his experiences for others to read.

But Paul is significant not only for his personal experience of the divine. Paul, Voegelin argued in his *History of Political Ideas*, forged the "compromises with the world" that allowed Christianity to emerge as the ordering force of western civilization. What precisely are these compromises? They are, in a sense, ways of moderating and calming the perfectionist impulse in human beings. Because the tension of existence is so unsettling, religious people have again and again tried either to escape the world or to reform it in their particular image of Christianity. Paul, however, recognized the danger of such enterprises. Thus, he established "compromises" between the exhortations to perfection found in the Sermon on the Mount, on the one hand, and fallen human nature, on the other. In his construction of a "mystical body of Christ," for instance, Paul emphasizes the diversity of gifts that are distributed throughout a community, but whose members, nevertheless, are joined in a kind of *homonoia* (like-mindedness) through the sacrament of baptism. Herndon discusses this and the other "Pauline compromises" at some length, arguing that each was essential to making possible the flourishing of Christianity.

Indeed, Christianity not only flourished under these compromises but expanded into what Voegelin calls the *sacrum imperium* (holy empire). In the *sacrum imperium* the institutional church, having absorbed the Pauline compromises, became the "representative of transcendent order and the conduit by which one entered into the community of the faithful" (70). The empire was, in the best sense, communal: "bound together by the spirit of Christ" (95). As Herndon points out, Voegelin did not think that the ideal of the *sacrum imperium* had been (or ever could be) fully attained. Nevertheless, to the extent that this holy empire took adequate account of both the imperatives of Christianity and the realities of the world, it offered a way of living that preserved the balance between human and divine.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670508000636 Published online by Cambridge University Press

But the story, of course, does not end here. Certain intellectual and spiritual leaders—among them Joachim of Flora and St. Francis of Assisi—insisted on upsetting this balance so that the spiritual equality of diverse individuals in the *sacrum imperium* was transformed into a kind of homogeneous collectivism. At the same time, popes and political leaders elevated and transformed their roles as rulers in the interest of standing above and outside the community, governing "subjects" rather than free citizens. Society was no longer conceived in the image of a *corpus mysticum*, but rather as a "system of competing powers" subject to "the demands of *realpolitik*" (95). But the final disintegration of the *sacrum imperium* was not accomplished until the "Great Reformation," as Voegelin termed it. Luther and Calvin represented, for Voegelin, extreme examples of the tendency toward perfectionist reform, but their efforts led only to the rise of sectarianism and the decline of any real spiritual community.

The great virtues of this book are its presentation of material that has been largely overlooked in Voegelin scholarship and its contribution to the debate about Voegelin and Christianity. As David Walsh has observed elsewhere, the *History of Political Ideas* is "one of the best points of entry into the theoretical depth of the later Voegelin," and this is precisely the viewpoint Herndon has afforded his readers (in *Eric Voegelin, History of Political Ideas, vol. III, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, Vol. 21*. Edited with an introduction by David Walsh, 1–26. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997).

And yet one line of inquiry remains—perhaps unavoidably—unresolved. This is the question of the relationship between Voegelin's early theory and his later, more famous published work. Readers of Voegelin will want to know, for instance, how his early praise of Paul as the great compromiser squares with his portrayal of Paul in "The Gospel and Culture." In that essay, Voegelin maintains that "Paul is a quite impatient man. He wants the divine reality of the primary experience of the cosmos right away differentiated as the world-transcendent divinity that has become incarnate in Christ" (in *Faith and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin*, ed. Emberley and Cooper, Missouri, 2004, p. 159). What, precisely, has caused Voegelin to modify his assessment of Paul in the later essay? This, of course, raises the larger question of the relationship between Voegelin's early work in the abandoned *History of Political Ideas* and his more famous later work in *Order and History*—admittedly, a difficult and complex issue. Nevertheless, some speculation about the relationship of the early to the later work would bring Voegelin's theory in the *History of Political Ideas* into even sharper relief. This mild qualification, however, ought not to detract from the significance of this book's achievement, and it comes recommended to anyone who thinks seriously about Christianity and philosophy.

–Elizabeth Corey

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670508000636 Published online by Cambridge University Press