

NOTE

ERIC VOEGELIN: ORDER AND HISTORY¹

As the successive volumes of Eric Voegelin's work are published, it becomes clear that *Order and History* is a major undertaking, worthy of a place beside the ten volumes of Arnold Toynbee's *A Study of History*. We shall have to include the first chapters of Vol. 2, as well as the whole of Vol. 1, with which we are especially concerned in this article, in the scope of this analysis, since Voegelin's philosophical underpinning is nowhere so clearly stated as in the former.

PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS

The author's eclectic philosophy consists of three main strands: a modified Hegelianism, an Augustinianism, and an existentialism of rather indefinite type. These are certainly not the only sources of his thinking, but they are the most obvious and probably the decisive elements.

After becoming more and more convinced of the basically Hegelian character of Voegelin's thought while studying Vol. 1, I found it explicitly stated in the Introduction to Vol. 2, where he describes the relation between Hegel and his own point of view. Voegelin does not, however, fully succeed in clarifying this relation, since in trying to explain it he resorts to some highly obscure expressions, such as "the Eros of the transcendent Sophon." He should have started with his own surrogate for the *Geist* of Hegel, namely "order"²—order as the guiding principle of history, as well as the form taken by individual societies participating "in the order of being that has its origin in world-transcendent divine Being."³ By substituting "order" for Hegel's *Geist*, Voegelin has avoided much of the vagueness and ambivalence

¹ Three years before this review article was written, I accepted a request from THEOLOGICAL STUDIES to review this work. Owing to heavy pressure of work during my last active year at Johns Hopkins and the first two years of "retirement," I found it impossible to meet this obligation. Having accepted an invitation from the American Political Science Association to present a paper on the first volume of *Order and History* at a symposium held at the Association's annual meeting in September, 1960, I have combined the two assignments. The above paper was presented at the Voegelin Symposium on Sept. 9; a few words have been altered and the notes have been added subsequently. The first volume is entitled *Israel and Revelation* (Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1956; pp. xxv + 533).

² Cf. Harald Höffding, *A History of Modern Philosophy 2* (translated by E. E. Meyer) 179: "At this point Hegel is close to the so-called historical school which regards the ordering of rights as the work of history, exalted above all individual reflection and will."

³ Voegelin 2, 2.

attached to the German word, at the same time that he keeps the essential historical feature of *Geist* as the ordering principle underlying the evolution of human societies. There is a striking superficial resemblance between Hegel and Voegelin when they try to define the relation of organized society to the basic principle of historical evolution. Hegel wrote, for instance: "The state is the idea of *Geist* in the external manifestation of human will and its freedom. . . . History is the exhibition of the divine, absolute development of *Geist* to its highest forms."⁴ Voegelin writes: "Human existence in society has history because it has a dimension of spirit and freedom . . . because social order is an attunement of man with the order of being, and because this order . . . can be realized in society with increasing approximations to its truth."⁵ Yet there is a real difference between Hegel and Voegelin: the former fails to distinguish between the *Geist* as working in history and the transcendent spirit of Christian theology, while the latter generally makes a sharp distinction between the historical order of being and the divine Being. On the other hand, one may question whether Voegelin's tendency to combine religious and political manifestations of cosmic order will not lead to an essentially Hegelian historicism in the work of followers who disregard his theistic emphasis.

Another pronounced difference between Hegel and Voegelin is the latter's implicit rejection of the Hegelian dialectic, for which he substitutes such principles as the Kierkegaardian "leap of being,"⁶ the concept of stimulus and response, and the transformation of historical experience into symbolical forms. The "leap of being" is a concept of questionable utility, especially since it must have originated in some sort of fusion of the Augustinian "leap of faith" with Hegelian notions. The idea of "stimulus and response" is again a kind of blending of Hegel's "thesis and antithesis" with Toynbee's "challenge and response." The survival of already experienced history in symbolic form is evidently influenced by the thinking of Ernst Cassirer, though by no means identical with it.

In this reviewer's opinion, Voegelin's strong espousal of an Augustinian approach to history helps greatly to save him from falling into the trap of historicism. Every exponent of this many-sided attitude to history inevitably rewrites empirical history to suit his particular principle of evolution, whether it is Hegelian, positivistic, or something else. In general, Voegelin

⁴ Translated from Hegel's sentence in his *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (ed. Glockner 11 [1949] 80).

⁵ Voegelin 2, 2.

⁶ This is one of the author's favorite expressions; cf. the index to Vol. 1, pp. 522b and 528b.

tries very hard to follow the latest and best authorities in the successive fields of history through which he passes in his survey. As a philosophical theist, he does not try to find an ordering principle within history itself, but looks at it *sub specie aeternitatis*. It is precisely his theism which permits him to treat historical data as important in themselves. In other words, his recognition of the extrahistorical source of the ordering principle helps to give him a respect for the facts of history which is rarely, if ever, found among those students who try to derive an over-all principle of organization from the historical experience itself. A standard or measure of history outside of its own development helps greatly to avert a tendency to treat history as relative to the standpoint of a given thinker.

Voegelin's existentialism is rather hard to pinpoint; there is certainly much less existentialist terminology in Vol. 2 than in Vol. 1. At first he seems to have distinguished more or less systematically between "being" (*Sein*) and "existence" (*Dasein*), treating the former as basic and the latter as the situation of man in the phenomenal world, "immediate to God."⁷ However, this distinction scarcely suits his use of the term "leap of being" to describe a great advance in the intellectual and spiritual life of man. In the reviewer's opinion, the existentialism of the author's language has little or nothing to do with his historical synthesis as such. So far it has, in fact, proved virtually impossible to employ any form of the "philosophy of being"—least of all current existentialism—to interpret history. It is no accident that most existentialists neglect or misuse history, since their systems are predicated on an individual approach to the problem of finite man pitted against the infinite, whether God or nothing. Kierkegaard's use of history was fantastically arbitrary, and the more logical Heidegger has consistently disregarded it. Karl Jaspers uses historical data only scantily, and then for his own speculative purposes. Rudolf Bultmann's recent excursions into history have abandoned existential philosophy almost completely, substituting the "Neo-Kantian" relativist Wilhelm Dilthey and the Neo-Hegelian R. G. Collingwood for Heidegger and Jaspers.⁸ Paul Tillich treats historical data with sovereign arbitrariness. In short, existentialism and history are just as contradictory in practice as are phenomenology and natural science, however much each pair may seem superficially to have in common.

⁷ See especially Voegelin 1, 1 ff. E.g., on p. 1 he says: "Participation in being, however, is not a partial involvement of man; he is engaged with the whole of his existence." Here "existence" is "created being"—a typical existentialist distinction between "pure Being" (*Sein*) and "empirical being" (*Dasein*).

⁸ See the reviewer's discussion of Bultmann's *In the Presence of Eternity*, in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 78 (1958) 244-48; especially pp. 244 f.

COMPARISON AND CONTRAST BETWEEN VOEGELIN AND TOYNBEE

The two leading philosophical historians of today balance each other remarkably well. In the reviewer's opinion, Voegelin is superior to Toynbee in having a much wider and deeper philosophical background, in taking a greater interest in the history of ideas, and in showing a far profounder sympathy with the Judeo-Christian tradition, which lies at the heart of Western civilization—however much some may resent this fact or try to conceal it. On the other hand, Toynbee seems superior in the vast sweep of his historical horizon in time and space; he makes more of an effort to be up-to-date in his information; he is much more precise in his language, not having Voegelin's conflict between underlying German idiom and the semantics of English. As a phenomenology of history Toynbee's work is superior, but he too often appears to marshal data to prove his theories rather than permit the principles to establish themselves. When Toynbee goes astray, his errors are thus compounded until they reach monumental proportions; so far, on the whole, Voegelin seems to have avoided this particular danger quite successfully.

THE ROLE OF EMPIRICAL DATA IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

In view of the tremendous sweep of Voegelin's own survey, it would be absurd to expect him to be up-to-date throughout. He himself believed at the outset of his work that there were facts enough at his disposal to make such a majestic synthesis quite feasible. In fact, he wrote in the Preface to Vol. 1:

The work could be undertaken in our time. . . . The sources are ready to hand; and the convergent interpretations by orientalists and semitologists, by classical philologists and historians of antiquity, by theologians and medievalists, facilitate and invite the attempt to use the primary sources as the basis for a philosophical study of order. The state of science in the various disciplines, as well as my own position with regard to fundamental questions, will be set forth in the course of the study.

These are brave words, and the author has done his best to justify them. But he is much too optimistic; neither the state of knowledge in our time nor the convergence of interpretations is as great as the author suggests. This statement is not intended as a criticism of his effort, which is well worth while even though one may disagree in detail. Unless we have such syntheses from time to time, our historical thinking is immeasurably poorer.

Owing to lack of space, the reviewer will limit himself to a few examples,

grouped under three heads: (1) the author's use of the term "cosmological order" with reference to the pre-Israelite and pre-Hellenic civilizations of the Near East; (2) his treatment of Israelite faith as paradigmatic and symbolical; (3) his view of the evolution of Greek philosophical thought from earlier Hellenic mythology. The reviewer's criticisms are throughout based primarily on archeological discoveries and their interpretation in publications which were either unknown to the author or were passed over by him in silence.

COSMOLOGICAL ORDER

It is scarcely likely that Voegelin would have employed such a term as "cosmological" of the civilizations of the ancient East if he had been aware of the extent to which Pan-Babylonian speculation has been discredited by recent research. While he cannot be called a follower of this school, in view of his frequent use of the work of more recent scholars who had discarded the views of Winckler and Jeremias over a generation ago, he unfortunately does follow Jeremias and other members of the Pan-Babylonian school repeatedly.⁹ According to these views, which he quotes without criticism, Babylonian astral symbolism had already developed into an elaborate astrology in early Babylonian times, and the other peoples of the ancient East, in particular the Hebrews, had been strongly influenced by it. This position has been shown by Otto Neugebauer of Brown University (who is never quoted) to be completely baseless.¹⁰ In fact, astrology was much less important than half a dozen other forms of divination, all quite without astral significance, in early Babylonian times. It was not until the Persian and Hellenistic periods that astrology became paramount in Babylonia, and its development into the elaborate structure which we know today did not take place until the second century B.C.—in Egypt.¹¹

It is, to be sure, correct to stress the importance of cosmic myths in the mythology of all ancient nations, but the cosmos is here simply part of the environment in which man was involved. All parts of it were necessary to

⁹ See especially p. 15, n. 1, and pp. 29 ff.

¹⁰ There is no reference to the epoch-making work of Neugebauer; see especially the latter's book, *The Exact Sciences in Antiquity* (1951), and his more detailed papers: "The History of Ancient Astronomy: Problems and Methods," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 4 (1945) 1-38; "The Alleged Babylonian Discovery of the Precession of the Equinoxes," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 70 (1950) 1-8; and "Babylonian Planetary Theory," *American Philosophical Society, Proceedings* 98 (1954) 60-89. Since there is not the slightest concrete evidence for the twelve signs of the zodiac before Neo-Babylonian times, most of Jeremias' speculations are automatically refuted. The real value of the Pan-Babylonian movement lay in quite another direction.

¹¹ As demonstrated by F. Cumont, *L'Egypte des astrologues* (1937).

man's supply of food and his security as a social being. The reviewer would suggest some such term as "physiocentric," centered in nature, as more appropriate to ancient Near Eastern higher culture and religion. In any case, there was at best only a cosmography, not a cosmology, before the rise of Greek science after the sixth century B.C. (It may be observed, in passing, that the true cosmological age may have begun in A.D. 1957.)

ISRAELITE FAITH

The four hundred pages in which Voegelin discusses the role of Israel in world history show very careful study of the available material. His use of Hebrew is almost impeccable, and he is extremely well informed on German Old Testament scholarship. Many of his own contributions are original and penetrating. And yet he is definitely wrong in following the Alt-Noth-von Rad school so closely. He cannot be blamed, since Albrecht Alt was a great scholar,¹² and his pupils Martin Noth and Gerhard von Rad are first-class men, whose work shows learning and acumen. Alt and Noth have made very important historical contributions, and von Rad is surpassed by no one in his insight into certain problems of Old Testament religion. But after the middle thirties Alt himself was cut off almost completely from direct contact with Palestine as well as from non-German research. His pupils were in much the same situation, and the attempt to replace the influx of empirical data from Palestine and the ancient Near East by systematic research along a priori lines led to increasing loss of touch with archeological and philological fact. Today there is a very sharp cleavage between the dominant German school and the archeological school, best represented in America and Israel. In order to avoid the necessity of citing chapter and verse, the reviewer will mention the two most significant histories of Israel, Noth's *Geschichte Israels* (now available in English as *The History of Israel*) and John Bright's *A History of Israel* (1959), which reflect the opposing positions most ably.¹³

A few general remarks will serve to illustrate what is happening. Thanks to an unexampled flood of discoveries in Palestine and adjacent lands, we now have illustrative texts in many languages from every century of the second millennium B.C. We can now date Hebrew and early Israelite lists of names, individual events, and especially successive phases of Hebrew linguistic evolution. It is now quite certain that, whatever refraction and rearrangement of oral tradition may have taken place, the Patriarchal narratives of Genesis fit the first half of the second millennium B.C. very

¹² Cf. my sketch of his contributions in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 75 (1956) 169-73.

¹³ See the lucid discussion of the opposing positions by G. Ernest Wright, in *Journal of Bible and Religion* 28 (April, 1960) 182-93, and *Expository Times* 72 (July, 1960) 3-7.

well.¹⁴ Owing to the rapid progress of research and discovery during the past five years, we can be sure that the career of Moses and the subsequent Israelite occupation of Palestine are to be dated in the thirteenth century B.C. Furthermore, it is no longer possible to separate early Israelite religion sharply from that of later Israel; explicit, though non-philosophical, monotheism must go back to the age of Moses, and the other essential principles and institutions of biblical religion also go back to Israelite beginnings.¹⁵

In view of the fact that German scholars are inclined to discount the evidence of archeological stratigraphy and to close their eyes to linguistic arguments, it should be emphasized that we now possess direct *literary* evidence for the earliest period of Israelite religious history. This evidence consists of many poems and poetic quotations in the books of Exodus-Judges, Psalms, and occasionally elsewhere. These poems reflect vocabulary, grammar, and especially literary style characteristic of the Canaanite religious epics which have been recovered from Ugarit on the North-Syrian coast since 1929. These epics are now extant in copies from the fourteenth century B.C., several generations before Moses. Since it can also be shown that most of these peculiarities disappear rapidly in biblical literature dating from the tenth century B.C. or later, it should be obvious that the text of such early compositions is older than that of any later prose narratives from Israel, all of which date from the tenth century B.C. and later.¹⁶ But these poems and poetic quotations throughout presuppose a religious situation which is entirely monotheistic, though sometimes quite archaic in comparison to later literature.

Since the importance of historical analogy is often forgotten in the clash of exaggerated claims and counterclaims, the reviewer would like to recall the position taken by Herder, Ewald, Delitzsch, and other biblical scholars

¹⁴ The evidence will be presented again, with many new considerations, by the reviewer in his forthcoming series dealing with the *History of the Religion of Israel* (edited by Louis Finkelstein). Meanwhile, see especially G. Ernest Wright, *Biblical Archaeology* (1957) and John Bright, *A History of Israel* (1959). The most important fresh evidence comes from the mass of recently published personal and tribal names from Syria-Palestine, which extend from the late third millennium to the late second and help enormously to pinpoint the date of Patriarchal and Mosaic tradition.

¹⁵ To the literature emanating largely from the Baltimore school (including especially the forthcoming first volume of my projected *History of the Religion of Israel*) must be added particularly the notable—and wholly independent—work of Yehezkel Kaufmann, *Toldot ha-Emumah ha-Yisre'elit* (since 1937), now available in a superb translation and condensation by Moshe Greenberg, *The Religion of Israel* (Chicago, 1960).

¹⁶ My detailed study has not yet been published; cf. my paper on the Song of Moses in Dt 32, in *Vetus Testamentum* 9 (1959) 1-10, and especially p. 10, for the direction of my latest work, which has been strongly influenced by Otto Eissfeldt.

of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with regard to the age of biblical poetry. These scholars recognized that Hebrew poetry began before Hebrew prose, since verse is the natural style of oral tradition, which normally precedes the oldest prose literature. Parallels are innumerable; among the best are Greek and Latin, Germanic and Romance, Indic and Iranian, Chinese and other national literatures. The same is true of Sumerian, Egyptian, Hittite, Canaanite, etc. It would thus be passing strange if the Israelites were an exception. Historical analogies do not constitute proof when taken alone, but when they fully agree with such evidence as was mentioned above, the historical tradition may be considered as secure.

Another category of biblical literature which has been consistently dated too late by most critical scholars of the past century is early Hebrew law. This category includes fragments of civil codes, such as the so-called Book of the Covenant, extensive remains of early ritual and ceremonial law, and condensed summaries of the contents of older religious compacts of the *b'rit* type. The surviving civil and religious laws of early Israel are partly in generalized case form, couched in the same conditional formula that we find in all the codes preserved in whole or in part from the second millennium—Sumerian, Accadian, and Hittite. Parallels are so close that there can be no doubt that customary Hebrew law of this casuistic type goes back well into the premonarchic and often into Mosaic or pre-Mosaic times. It has recently been demonstrated by George E. Mendenhall of the University of Michigan that the structure of the best-known compact, the Covenant of Joshua, is virtually identical with that of the suzerainty treaties of the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C., recovered from the capitals of Bronze Age Anatolia and Syria.¹⁷ Suzerainty treaties of the eighth and seventh century, recovered in the past few years from Syria and Assyria, have a much more simplified structure.¹⁸ To illustrate, the earlier suzerainty treaties begin with a historical preamble and end with the statement that the text was to be deposited in a specified temple. The covenant between the God and people of Israel described in Jos 24 begins and ends the same way, with other parallels of equal significance appearing in its structure. Quite aside from the similar structural framework, we find in the Anatolian treaties the same mixture of casuistic and apodictic formulation that we find in the Book of the Covenant in Exodus.

¹⁷ See particularly his brilliant survey of the material in *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: Biblical Colloquium, 1955).

¹⁸ Against some recent criticisms cf. William L. Moran, S.J., in a recent review (not accessible to me at the moment), where he points out that recently published Aramaean and Assyrian treaties from the eighth-seventh centuries B.C. lack such vital elements as the historical preamble—though there are naturally some survivals from earlier times.

The underlying historical and literary tradition of the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Joshua is thus throughout in general agreement with literary and historical facts as we know them today. Voegelin's instinct is therefore correct when he insists repeatedly on the antiquity and centrality of Mosaic tradition. On the other hand, he relies far too much on modern scholarly analysis and much too little on the rapidly increasing mass of archeological evidence—using "archeology" in its broadest sense. As a result, his many illuminating observations about the development and transformation of symbols are too often buried in a mass of erroneous critical dissection and reinterpretation of the sources. Where the author follows the Hebrew text itself, he is at his best. The reviewer is reminded of Eduard Meyer's reply to his question about the great ancient historian's method of research: "Ich habe meine eigene Forschung immer auf die Quellen gebaut, nicht auf moderne Hypothesen und Konstruktionen."

GREEK PHILOSOPHICAL ORIGINS

Voegelin's approach to the problem of Greek philosophical origins is definitely in need of revision. Neither the attempt to trace the evolution of Ionian science and philosophy from Homer through Hesiod nor the assumption that they arose spontaneously by unrecorded empirical stages or by a series of brilliant intuitions is now tenable. In the first place, the theogony of Hesiod has been shown conclusively by H. G. Güterbock (1946)¹⁹ and Uvo Hölscher (1953)²⁰ to be derived with scarcely any essential change from the pre-Hellenic Aegean, which had derived it from Hurro-Hittite theogony—ultimately in part Sumerian. We can therefore not derive Hesiod's theogony from the Homeric epics, directly or indirectly; it is much older.

We now know that the material culture of Phoenicia, Cyprus, southern Anatolia, and the Aegean was thoroughly syncretized during the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., following several centuries of interpenetration of Aegean and Phoenician civilization. The Greeks of these two centuries had a long line of colonies and trading stations extending from Cyrene through Egypt, Palestine, and Phoenicia to northern Syria. The Phoenicians had been colonizing different Mediterranean lands for centuries, and the Hellenes had already borrowed from them much of their art and architecture, as well as their alphabet. The Ionians were at that time the leaders of the Greek world in culture, and all the Eastern peoples derived their names for "Greek" from "Ionian." Uvo Hölscher has put the case for Phoenician and Egyptian origin of Ionic science and metaphysics so well that little need be

¹⁹ See his *Kumarbi* (*Istanbuler Schriften* 16) pp. 100–115.

²⁰ See his important study, "Anaximander und die Anfänge der Philosophie," *Hermes* 81 (1953) 257–77, 385–418.

added. The great contribution of Thales, I might add, to mathematics consists in generalizing and formulating mathematical propositions according to the analogy of legal codes. Since all mathematical texts from both Mesopotamia and Egypt state propositions only in the form of concrete problems which embody specific examples, the generalization of problems in the form of abstract propositions or theorems was a tremendous step forward. It can scarcely be accidental that Thales is said by Herodotus to have distinguished himself as a constitutional lawyer!²¹ Logical demonstration of propositions in geometry came gradually during the fifth century and reached its climax in Euclid, who applied Aristotelian logic.²²

To conclude, we congratulate the author on a monumental work, from whose inevitable errors we may learn as much as from its innumerable correct statements. Since both Voegelin's standard of historical value and the ultimate aim of his work are beyond history, he has escaped Hegel's fatal mistake of treating history as a self-contained system from which its own goal could be inferred by the application of his dialectic logic to the factual data which he then believed to be true. In saying this, the reviewer is not speaking *pro domo*, since his own syntheses—published and unpublished—are based on quite different postulates: (1) historical knowledge is identical with scientific knowledge in vast areas of research dealing with the past of mankind, and differences tend to be of degree rather than of kind; (2) the historian is obligated to use all the resources of modern scientific and philosophical analysis to reconstruct the steps by which men have learned to use their minds more effectively. In other words, the writer insists on basing historical research on a combination of empirical and rational methodology. Neither philosophical idealism nor the existentialist systems of our day can contribute much to the historian, except where he undertakes to assess their influence on historical thought and its consequences. Here the historian must agree with Voltaire: "Il faut écrire l'histoire en philosophe!"

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²¹ Thales was not only reputed by the Greeks to have been the founder of geometry but is said by Herodotus to have been a highly respected authority on public law (*Clio* 170).

²² For a contrary view see B. L. van der Waerden, "La démonstration dans les sciences exactes de l'antiquité," *Bulletin de la Société mathématique de Belgique* 9 (1957) 8-20, but he has misunderstood Proclus, as will be pointed out elsewhere. There is thus not the slightest evidence for such a tremendous leap as the transition from preductive to deductive logic in a single lifetime. Logic and philosophy remain the contribution of Greek genius, though it required several centuries for the attainment of the level represented by Aristotle and Euclid.