

TEXTS FROM WEBB AND VOEGELIN (W141 con'd; cf. pp. 3f) 1*
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a different use of language of "existence" is called for; existence does not have this simple factual meaning at all but has fluctuating meanings as it represents different levels between perfect Being and nothingness. As Voegelin stated the issue in the "Gospel and Culture" (p. 63):

Well, existence is not a fact. If anything, existence is the non-fact of a disturbing movement in the In-Between of ignorance and knowledge, of time and timelessness, of imperfection and perfection, of hope and fulfillment, and ultimately of life and death. From the experience of this movement, from the anxiety of losing the right direction in this In-Between of darkness and light, arises the enquiry concerning the meaning of ~~IX~~ life. But it does arise... because life is experienced as man's participation in a movement with a direction to be found or missed; if man's existence were not a movement but a fact it not only would have no meaning but the question of meaning could not even arise.

From Webb's Introduction, pp. 5 - 12.

W 5: ... but it will be helpful at this point.. to indicate at least briefly what philosophy does mean to him (Voegelin).

Perhaps the best way to do this is to describe the manner in which //6// his conception of the philosophical task took shape and finally crystallized in its present form during the 1940's. Voegelin began his career as intellectual historian specializing in legal and political philosophy. On the early 1940s he undertook what was to have been the major scholarly enterprise of his career, a history of political ideas from ancient to modern times. He worked on this project steadily for several years and produced the equivalent of several volumes of manuscript, some parts of which have subsequently been published. In 1945, however, while working on Schelling's theory of mythology and revelation, he arrived at what seemed to him a crucial realization that eventually made his entire endeavor to that point seem fundamentally misconceived. This //7// realization was that ideas are not what is most fundamental in thought, and have no life of their own, but rather are the symbolic expressions of various kinds of experience and existential stance. Or at least that is what they are at root; they may also become uprooted from their engendering experiences and thereby lose their substance, and in this form they may

they may become both elements and objects of argumentation. The history of ideas as conventionally practised, in other words, came to seem to Voegelin no more than a game of shadows founded on the illusion that essential meaning could be captured in the form of the husks left behind when philosophy itself had vanished.

From this negative realization, Voegelin proceeded over the years between then and the early 1950s to develop his positive conception of the philosophical enterprise as the rediscovery of the philosophical quest itself through the recovery of its experiential ground. By the time he delivered his Walgreen lectures at the University of Chicago in 1951 [under the title "Truth and Representation"] (subsequently published as The New Science of Politics), it was clear to him that philosophy in its essential reality was but a phase -- the most reflectively conscious -- of an existential process in which one experiences and freely yields oneself to what Voegelin has come to call the "tension of existence," the deep longing of the soul for truth and for fulness of life, the pull at the core of the philosopher's being toward a goal that will remain always mysterious but which draws him with mysterious force.

W 8: This is a process that embraces the whole of the philosopher's existence, its levels of comparative ^{un}consciousness as well as its luminous heights. Philosophy from this point of view may be said to be in continuity with a range of wondering, questioning, and aspiring that has various degrees of conscious clarity and expresses itself in many symbolic forms, of which ideas are only one and not always the most adequate. The ideational expression of philosophy is the most superficial level of the philosophic life. At its best, this level has the advantage of a high degree of explicitness and self-awareness, but its very clarity may also involve some loss of the richness and complexity of the fundamental experience, which is at root the mystery of existence, something that can never be rendered fully explicit. Existence as Voegelin approaches it is not something we can turn into an object of contemplation -- as though it were a field we could step outside to grasp it intellectually in a single view. Rather we are immersed in it fully, with all of our being, and it will always remain a mystery; both an action and a passion, luminous

and yet unfathomable.

W 9: For Voegelin the intellectual enterprise of the philosopher -- who by the very nature of his task must be simultaneously a historian of philosophic thought and a philosopher of history -- has become the recovery of the experiential ground of philosophy, the descent by way of historical memory through the various levels of symbolization, mythic and conceptual, to the deepest motivating center of the philosophic quest, which at its root is the spiritual quest of man for true existence.

W 10: History is an enterprise .. in which one may succeed or fail, and what the philosopher of history must offer are criteria by which that success or failure may be measured.

These criteria can be found, Voegelin believes, by the study of man and his history.... "The order of history emerges from the history of order" (OHI:ix). The philosophical historian discovers in other words that there is an order to human nature that has manifested itself historically. This order and the essentials of the human condition have been known implicitly by thinkers of every period of recorded history -- even if many have failed to acknowledge or recognize them. Now and then these central truths of man's existence have been rendered explicit by means of various symbolisms. It is the task of the philosopher of history to recover these insights from forgetfulness, restore them to clarity, and where necessary to carry further the process of their explication.

W 11: It should now be clear.. why Voegelin's philosophical thought could not take the customary form of a logical argument. He aims deeper, and he offers something different: an avenue of entry into the fundamental experience that underlies philosophy as such. Each person has a field of experience, but may notice more or less of its discernable features. Complicating this is the fact of human freedom and the spiritual dimension of our involvement in existence: we may choose not to notice what we do not wish to recognize. If this happens, we fall from what Voegelin calls "existence in truth" or "open existence" into what he calls "closed existence".

W 11: As James L. Wiser said in a commentary on the World of

Polis: "Philosophy cannot compel assent. It can only hope to initiate a conversion experience by supplying intimations of a fecund reality which is unavailable to the closed form of experience." [Political Science Reviewer, 2(1972), 158; see also paper by Wiser in McKnight]

W 12: Philosophy is constantly being lost, and if it is to continue, it must constantly be rediscovered. The rediscovery is a process of appropriation and reappropriation that involves both a movement back into the past of human thinking and downward into its depths. Both movements are concrete and empirical; both can be tested according to criteria that are genuinely objective, even if they make demands of intellectual and spiritual maturity on the part of those who apply them; that one may acquire a valid fundamental perspective on the human experience of existence //13// does not necessarily mean that the interpretation of a text or event from the past will have a matching validity, though a comprehensive view of man will be a great advantage in the interpretation of a thinker of rich experience and complex insights.