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**Philosophy, Christianity and Revolution in Eric Voegelin and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy.**

## **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Eric Voegelin's star has continued to rise since his death in 1985. But while there has been a steadily growing body of works on his thought, very little of that work has been critical. In this paper, I want to present a critique of Voegelin from the perspective of another great, and largely unknown, polymath and (unorthodox) Christian thinker, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy (1888-1973).

Voegelin represented himself as a Christian Platonist and political scientist whose main preoccupation was the symbols of order and disorder throughout history. In Voegelin's approach to politics, revolutions are the product of existential hubris. They are the blastings, derangements and deformities of humanity. His writings on politics are a warning against the dangers of revolution as well as a diagnosis of the states of mind which create the explosive outbursts of revolution. For Rosenstock-Huessy, on the other hand, while the great world revolutions are 'Satanic', they are no less part of God's plan and trial; they are an essential energising force of God's creation and an indispensable part of our experience which we must face up to and integrate into our future peace.<sup>2</sup> At the heart of these different assessments lie two very different interpretations of Christianity and two diametrically opposed evaluations of philosophy as a form of life. By undertaking this comparison of Rosenstock-Huessy with Voegelin, it is also my intention to introduce readers to a thinker who, though now almost completely forgotten, was a major influence upon his best friend, Franz Rosenzweig, and lauded by contemporaries such as Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, Martin Buber, Lewis Mumford and W.H. Auden, who wrote the Preface to Rosenstock-Huessy's *I am an Impure Thinker*, and a valedictory poem in the *Atlantic*.

### Voegelin's Christian Philosophy

In the Preface to the first volume of *Order and History*, Voegelin was to spell out that he conceived the central theme of his work to be the philosophical fight against ideology and the proper grounding of a healthy philosophy.<sup>3</sup> For Voegelin, the close association between philosophical diagnosis and politics arises because the most important political question concerns the adequacy of the ground upon which consciousness acts. Openness to the ground produces good action because action which is a response to the proper order of Being is rational and suited to our nature. That nature only becomes disclosed through studying the truth of the tension established between man and the ground of Being.<sup>4</sup> The symbol which has been used to designate that ground for the greater part of human history is the divine or (a) God.

It is no exaggeration to say that Voegelin's magnum opus, *Order and History*, just as his most widely read book, *The New Science of Politics*, continually restates this one idea: when man forgets his place in the order of things and raises himself to divine heights (either by making himself the equal, or the creator of God) the order of Being is derailed. Modernity, for Voegelin, has succumbed in numerous ways to this derailment, commencing with Enlightenment progressivism — which blinds the species to acceptance of its limits and feeds the aspiration to create heaven on earth — and leading up to its most horrific forms in the totalitarian politics of Nazism and Marxism. For Voegelin, what is common to all ideological distortions is a misplacement of the ground of Being, and it is only a secondary matter what form the misplacement takes, whether it mistakes the economic as the ground as in Marxism, or power as in Nietzschean thought, or race as in Nazism, or the libido as in Freud.<sup>5</sup> With all such displacements man oversimplifies the ground of Being. He no longer

stands before a power which adequately describes his place in the order of Being; he fails to perceive the state of tension between his mundane existence and the depth of his need for transcendence and comprehension. Further, the misplacement of the ground is built upon an act of faith, an act which involves hypostasis and self-aggrandisement. The destructive consequences of this defiance are inevitable whenever it occurs because any tasks based upon such misplacement are a defiance of reality. Reality will always have the last say.

For Voegelin, the problem of order and metastatic faith is a perennial one, though different historical conditions provide the channels through which order may be correctly grasped or else perverted. The order of Being is one, but the compactness and differentiation in which that order is experienced and articulated are an historical matter.<sup>6</sup> Thus the symbolic delineation which is found in the *Old Testament* does not express the nature of man's relation to God, nor the tension which is part and parcel of that relationship, in the form peculiar to philosophy, but it expresses that relationship within the symbolic order available to it.<sup>7</sup>

The *Bible* and philosophy are, then, distinguished by their respective emphases, not by virtue of expressing two contradictory teachings of order and the meaning of existence and its limits. Moreover the difference cannot, insists Voegelin, be treated as revelation versus reason. Myth in Plato, he points out, is revelation: there 'the God speaks...just as in the prophet or in Jesus.'<sup>8</sup> In arguing for the fundamental compatibility of the classical experience of reason and the logos of the gospel, he invokes the authority of Justin the Martyr, insisting upon the orthodoxy of Justin's teaching that 'the Logos of the gospel is...the same Word of the same God as the logos spermatikos of philosophy, but at a later state of its manifestation.'<sup>9</sup>

The innovation of Christian symbolism ultimately revolves around the Pauline vision of the Resurrected. That vision, for Voegelin, is not to be taken in any fundamentalist or

literal sense, but as a symbol of the 'Metaxy', the In-Between, hence not as an object that can be grasped by attempting to locate the 'historical Jesus'.<sup>10</sup>

The Pauline/ Christian emphasis upon *pneuma*, grace, transfiguration and resurrection, for Voegelin, provide a story of order which ultimately places the emphasis upon the divine pole reaching back toward the human pole. Its contrast with philosophy is one of emphasis: philosophy emphasises 'the human search', while Christianity emphasises 'the divine gift'; philosophy emphasises 'man's ascent toward God through the tension of Eros', while Christianity emphasises 'God's descent toward man through the tension of Agape'; and philosophy concentrates upon 'the structure of reality that becomes luminous through the noetic theophany', while Christianity concentrates on 'the pneumatic irruption.'<sup>11</sup> There is, though, another contribution to our understanding of order which is rooted in the Judaic Exodus and the Pauline vision: the 'irruption' of the divine Being is historical. However, the Pauline conception of history is not to be understood in its mundane sense. Christianity directs man to contemplation of a life beyond this world, for it is in that world that his salvation is to be found. This is why, for Voegelin, the church fathers' synthesis of *noetic* and *pneumatic* illumination provides such a potent equilibrium and triumph of our consciousness. Paradoxically, it is a triumph that reinforces our understanding of the tensional relationship which he claims is constitutive of our reality. Christianity drives home to us the limitations of our knowledge and the uncertainty which characterises our existence.<sup>12</sup>

As fruitful as the church's synthesis of the symbols of the noetic and pneumatic will prove to be, Voegelin argues that the derailment of civilisation also finds added potential with the arrival of Christianity. For while Gnosticism antecedes Christianity, 'the epiphany of Christ' is 'the great catalyst that made eschatological consciousness an historical force, both in forming and deforming humanity.'<sup>13</sup> Gnosticism appropriates the symbols of epiphany and

eschatology but transposes them to the mundane. In so doing, the humble faith of orthodox Christianity becomes metastasised into the arrogant faith, which now holds itself up as Gnostic knowledge. By forgetting or ignoring the essence of Christianity and its metaxical disclosure, then, the emphasis upon the divine reaching back easily becomes a source for the Gnostic actors who believe they know God's will in the world, who seek to implement it, and who reinterpret an eschatology of transcendence into one of imminence. This eschatological reinterpretation, for Voegelin, is, in fact a recasting of the symbols of order: this is not merely an alignment involving compactness and differentiation as in the contrast between classical reason and the Israelite or Christian religion; rather it is a revolt of cosmic proportions in which the order of being is derailed as the natural phobias, anxieties and passions of humanity blast away at the real cosmological constraints, as if they were prison wardens, and in their place present a deformed and totally abstract (i.e. impossible) reality as if it were a realisable, even inevitable state of existence.<sup>14</sup>

The interpretation of the central symbols which Greek philosophy and the Christian religion have yielded, then, are, for Voegelin, of enormous political value to the West when they operate as a pair of mutually reinforcing symbolic orders: one with its emphasis upon noetic structures, the other with its emphasis upon pneumatic transfiguration. At the same time, the synthesis of Christianity and philosophy is derailed by Gnosticism and the progressivist philosophy of the Enlightenment creates an apocalyptic concoction. Modern totalitarian revolutionary modes of consciousness are, according to Voegelin, the product of this concoction. They are, then, deformations which have a discernible structure, and much of Voegelin's life's work was dedicated to describing that structure.

What I wish to highlight in summing up this section, for the purpose of the comparison with Rosenstock-Huessy, are a number relationships. First, within Christianity and Greek philosophy there is fundamental agreement between the existential depiction of

man and society. Secondly, although in *The New Science of Politics* Voegelin presents Christianity as making an advance over Greek philosophy in that it contributes in richer detail the divine response to man's reaching out, the symbolic order with which Voegelin operates is grounded by philosophy, and his writings increasingly became preoccupied with the symbolisations of philosophy.<sup>15</sup> But what takes precedence when there is a tension between the insights of Greek philosophy and Christianity? The answer is that the symbols of Christianity are ultimately translated by Voegelin into the noetic framework.<sup>16</sup> A passage from the fourth volume of *Order and History*, where Voegelin contrasts his position with Gnosticism, illustrates exactly what I mean:

Since Gnosticism surrounds the *libido dominandi* in man with a halo of spiritualism or idealism, and can always nourish its righteousness by pointing to the evil in the world, no historical end to the attraction is predictable once magic pneumatism has entered history as a mode of existence. Nevertheless, it is a dead end inasmuch as it rejects the life of spirit and reason under the conditions of the cosmos in which reality becomes luminous in pneumatic and noetic consciousness. There is no alternative to an eschatological extravaganza but to accept the mystery of the cosmos. Man's existence is participation in reality. It imposes the duty of noetically exploring the structure of reality as far as it is intelligibly and spiritually coping with the insight into its movement from the divine Beginning to the divine Beyond of its structure.<sup>17</sup>

Contemplation is the pathway to reality; it is the privileged way of participating in reality. Or, to put it another way, when Voegelin says that the 'duty' 'imposed on man' is to explore noetically the structure of reality', he is saying we have a duty to live philosophically. That this is not an essential feature of the Christian philosophical anthropology should be evident even from the terms Voegelin uses. The gospels do not admonish people to explore

noetically the structure of reality. Indeed, the emphasis is upon a particular mode of passionate action, viz. love, not contemplation. It is also a teaching which emphasises good works based on faith rather than theoretical sophistication and intellectual penetration of the structure of reality.

The convergence in Voegelin between the soteriological truth of Christianity and the humility he discerns in the classical conception of reason serves the double purpose which gives Voegelin's own thought its peculiar character. On the one hand, classical reason and Christianity are combined in a political and moral potion. The purpose of that potion is to bring us back to our senses, to cure us of the various psychic and mental diseases (positivism, progressivism, communism, Nazism, Freudianism) which are the modern ideological expressions of Gnosticism. On the other hand, Voegelin's entire corpus increasingly took on what I can only call a deep mystical strain, which is accompanied by an extraordinarily limited appreciation of the importance of action in world affairs and an exaggerated importance of the role that intellectual processes play in shaping reality. Voegelin is at pains to keep a radical separation between our religious and our political desires and doctrines because of the importance he ascribes to the mystical and contemplative dimension of human experience. This separation is seen by Voegelin as at the very centre of Judaic and Christian doctrine.<sup>18</sup>

Thirdly, Voegelin's conception of revolution as derailment from order is inseparable from his belief that ideology is untruth. The untruth toward Being is an immoral act, but in the Platonist sense – evil is ignorance, and being ignorant means living in a way that is removed from the order of Being. There is a static conception of the good at work here which coincides with the benign evaluation which Voegelin implicitly assigns to the symbol of order, something which is also commensurate with his privileging of the philosophical mode of participation in reality. Closely related to this is a fundamental cleavage between good

thinking (philosophical thinking) and bad thinking (thinking which does not satisfy the standards set by philosophy). When this way of thinking is projected onto the political trials and tribulations of modernity, we are left with no other conclusion than that modern thought and the revolutionary political action which is based upon it are pathological. Indeed, the whole revolutionary experience of modernity has been a gigantic mess, a complete waste with no redeeming features. As Voegelin writes in *Anamnesis*:

On the level of pragmatic history, of the mass movements, totalitarian governments, world wars, liberations, and mass slaughters, the deformation of existence has produced "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing"; it has revealed itself as a febrile impotence that cancers out in bloody dreams of greatness and has brought the majority of mankind into subjection under mentally diseased ruling cliques.<sup>19</sup>

### **Rosenstock-Huessy's Christian Anti-Philosophy**

The most glaring distinction between Rosenstock-Huessy's interpretation of Christianity and that of Voegelin concerns the significance of Jesus in the scheme of their thinking. As Voegelin well knew, his emphasis upon the continuity between Athens and Jerusalem involves underplaying the significance of Jesus.<sup>20</sup> Or to say it another way, Voegelin's Christianity may well be compatible with philosophy, but it shuns an investigation of Jesus which may require a break from philosophy. Rosenstock-Huessy, on the other hand, takes Jesus and the gospels as the centre of Christianity, not just as another cult in the empire which, as Voegelin held, was resuscitated through the infusion of philosophy.<sup>21</sup> For Rosenstock-Huessy, Jesus stands at the gateway of the ancient world.

Jesus is the heir of antiquity. He filled and fulfilled the four "listening posts"

of

Child of the ancestors in the tribes,

Child of the times in empires,

Child of nature in Greece

Child of revolution in Israel.<sup>22</sup>

In Jesus, the language and life-ways of the tribes, the empires (Egypt and Rome), the poet legislators (Greece) and the prophets (Israel) are, according to Rosenstock-Huessy, unified and rejuvenated. The four gospels are interpreted by Rosenstock-Huessy as the four records of this act of unification of dispersed languages. By bringing these four languages and ways of being into one life, Jesus was simultaneously beyond any single one of them, and yet aware of the living truth of all. 'By showing that he was free from their separate authority, he became the founder of a new language in which they all could be fused for a new start.'<sup>23</sup> The rich and intricate reading of the Gospels developed by Rosenstock-Huessy to make his case does not concern me here. Rather, the point I wish to emphasise is the uniqueness of the Gospels and the historical meaning of Jesus' life in the thinking of Rosenstock-Huessy. It is not, as with Voegelin, a matter of depicting the different modalities in which order is expressed in history, but of emphasising a new vision of man which emerges when the old orders are confronted with each other, and bound together by the symbol of the cross. The cross of Jesus, for Rosenstock-Huessy, is not simply the site of his death, but a fusion of the four ancient orders which intersect and conspire in his death, and find themselves overcome and fulfilled through that death.<sup>24</sup>

The new orientation established by Jesus is not primarily a pneumatic expression of man's finitude before God. The teaching sees us all as God's children, as springing from a common source and united in a common task, a task which requires living beyond death, unifying generations through time, and quite literally bringing peace on earth by bringing human beings into the order of heaven. In *Out of Revolution* he writes that 'The old Messianic faith of mankind told generation after generation that a man was a citizen of one great commonwealth.'<sup>25</sup>

The resurrection is not construed by Rosenstock-Huessy, as it is by Voegelin, primarily as a metaxical confirmation of transfiguration which, in turn, confirms the truth of metaxy, but as the continuation of a life through the bequeathment of its spirit. For example, the Franciscan way of life which spread throughout the world was the resurrection of St. Francis – his soul lived on in the body of his order. To be sure, this teaching will not satisfy those who believe in the traditional literal interpretation of the resurrection of the body, but it reveals a way of thinking about Christianity that does disclose something true about human experience and the continuation of the soul after death, and something which Voegelin does not treat in his discussion of Christianity or immortality.<sup>26</sup> The significance of Jesus's teaching for the overcoming of death, then, is not, as it is with Voegelin, primarily a symbol which reinforces the reality of the beyond and our own in-betweenness. Rather, Rosenstock-Huessy sees Jesus as teaching that we accept death as the necessary condition of the fulfilment of 'God's plan'; he made the discovery 'that including death within life is the secret of the fullest life.'<sup>27</sup>

Whereas Voegelin had looked for the permanence of the divine presence in history by analysing the elements of order in the respective symbolisations in great texts, Rosenstock-Huessy looks for the active presence of God in His work. In effect, the difference between their orientations amounts to the fact that in Voegelin's work history is subordinate to order,

in Rosenstock-Huessy's work, time is the flow of revelation. In the second volume of his *Soziologie* he writes: 'All I have done is take the sentence "the spirit bloweth, where it will" completely seriously. Until now the national historians of literature, teachers of public law, professors of history refuse to consider the terrible authority and power (*Gewalt*) of this sentence. "When does the spirit blow? When has the spirit blown where?" – this is the question of all questions.'<sup>28</sup>

It is this restless spirit which creates through time, which gives a purposefulness to history that is so contrary to the classical experience of reason. The way of God is not reasonable, or rather we can only discover reasons for God's ways after they occur. Why? Because our reason is only one aspect of our relationship with God. From Rosenstock-Huessy's perspective, then, Voegelin's noetisation of Christian doctrine is a defacement, or rather an act of plastic surgery on the face of the doctrine. The face changing exercise is also an act of defusement of some of the explosive energies that lay incubating in its will to power. It should be noted in passing that Rosenstock-Huessy was an admirer of Nietzsche, whom he saw as a dark messenger who correctly warned of imminent apocalypses. But Nietzsche did not understand the real potency of Christianity as a galvanising global force opening up the possibility of Europe, the United States of America, the modern nation state and freedom from total political power. Nietzsche's hatred of the dead husk at the end of the nineteenth century blinded him to the will to power of the church, a will to power which Rosenstock-Huessy describes as 'something beautiful, something bad, a historical great work, a stumbling block to enemies of the church and Sunday school students, but a monstrous achievement of the first millennium.'<sup>29</sup> In contrast to Christianity, Rosenstock-Huessy sees philosophy as a kind of speech which elevates the rational mind and conceptualisation, and thereby privileges spatial and visual metaphors and operations as the way to Being. The spectator of *theoria*, 'the *eidos*' from *eidein* to see, essence, being, the contemplative life, the

insight of the knower, the wonder of the philosopher, the search for the ground (to use a favourite of Voegelin's), defining the topic (*topos*, the place), categories,<sup>30</sup> – these are the stock and trade of philosophical thought. In philosophy, the person who sees reality, or parts of it, is able to *demonstrate* it to others who also attempt to see (whether with the eye of the mind or the eye of the senses is a subordinate problem within philosophy) the nature of being. Philosophers dispute what kind of being the ground of existence is, whether it is 'God,' the first cause, the thing in-itself or matter, the will to power, or even the Being of beings; but the ground is thus a being or object or process whose order is discernible to the searching, reasoning mind.

For Rosenstock-Huessy, the major problem with philosophy is that it generally tries to squeeze reality into the kind of speech which sustains philosophy itself. Like Vico before him, Rosenstock-Huessy claims that philosophy is grounded in the speech of disputation which emerged through the courts and the practical need to provide uniform abstract judgments.<sup>31</sup> However, philosophical speech, like any mode of speech, only captures a particular kind of human action and a particular disclosure of the real, (not the least reason being that reality is continually being made).<sup>32</sup>

There is in Rosenstock-Huessy an inextricable connection between the potency of the multiformity of speech, the multiformity of man and the multiformity of the ways of God. Man looks small, indeed diminishes himself, when he tries (by means of reason) to constrain the paths to God as well as the powers that emanate from Him. Hence like Paul, Tertullian, Luther and Pascal before him he insists that the God of philosophy and theology is not the God of Christianity:

He is not an object but a person, and He is not a concept but a name. To approach Him as an object of theoretical discussion is to defeat the quest from the start.

Nothing but the world of space is given in this manner. Nobody can look at God as an object. God looks at us and has looked at us before we open our eyes or mouths. He is the power which makes us speak, He puts words of life on our lips.<sup>33</sup>

The significance, then, of the contrast between a philosopher's God and the Christian God is not just an isolated difference that one can point to in comparing Rosenstock-Huessy and Voegelin, but it is indicative of two contrary approaches to reality. In contrast to Voegelin, Rosenstock-Huessy's work emphasises speech, names and personality rather than consciousness, symbols and the impersonal divine ground, or the even more impersonal It-reality of the fifth volume of *Order and History*, timeliness rather than transcendence, action rather than contemplation, contingency and life's exigencies rather than eternal standards, rebirth through death in time rather than the speculation of salvation in a timeless eternity, *metanoia* (the unwillingness to continue in what is a corrupted way of life, and the following of the call into a new way)<sup>34</sup> rather than metaxy. Rosenstock-Huessy himself would no doubt see that the heart of the difference between him and Voegelin lies in the 'abyss between Greek and Christian thought'. That 'abyss' is said by Rosenstock-Huessy to have been accurately expressed by Jean Guitton, who wrote in *Le Temps et l'éternité chez Plotin et Saint Augustin* (Paris, 1933, p. 359):

The unsurmountable abyss (sic) between Greek and Christian thought is the Christian rehabilitation of the unique and temporal event. The moral order is general and abstract to every philosophical or Greek mind. In Christianity the time of every human existence receives a superior quality in its smaller fragments.<sup>35</sup>

There is, for Rosenstock-Huessy, an intrinsic connection between the emphasis upon 'the time of every human existence' and the divinity of the word, just as there is an intrinsic connection between philosophy's abstractness and the timeless moral standard which it defends against sophism.<sup>36</sup> Or to put this another way, the unique time of every existence becomes in Rosenstock-Huessy's hands an argument against the dominance of the indicative mood. According to Rosenstock-Huessy, the Greek philosophical emphasis upon the indicative mood was consolidated in the Alexandrian grammar which we have inherited.<sup>37</sup> Instead, again taking a biblical cue, Rosenstock-Huessy argues that it is the imperative mood which provides the more primordial orientation to reality, the demands and commands to which we must respond if we are to survive. Closely related to this is, for Rosenstock-Huessy, the need to redeem the importance of the vocative case, a case which he believes grammarians underestimate. Speech orientates us through life. And that orientation begins with our being addressed and receiving a name. It continues through the reception of the different names which are placed upon us as we move through the stages of life, first our particular name then names which place us such as baby, child, adult, brother, sister, son, daughter, husband, wife, our professional name or social role, i.e. the totality of existential placements. In other words, because our language immediately places us, if we harken to our names and if we respond to what we are called, we already find ourselves enmeshed in a social order and in the responsibilities and obligations that are placed upon us. The different names we receive in life are indicative of the different callings to which we must respond if we take our name seriously, if we are to live up to our names. Taking our name seriously, living up to our names means taking seriously the collective experiences and insights which guide us by speech. One does not need to know a line of philosophy to know how to be a good mother or a good friend, but one is orientated into motherhood, friendship, a profession, through speeches, through disapprovals. commendations, gossip etc. The role

that is allocated through the name is supported by the speeches which enable our entry into it and the speeches through which we grow into it. For Rosenstock-Huessy, a role dictates the kind of speaking which is required of us at a particular time. Philosophy is but one form of human association, and as such there is a limitation of the kinds of speech which are appropriate for its activity. As one form of association and as (primarily) one form of speech, it is preposterous, according to Rosenstock-Huessy, for philosophy to set itself up as the arbitrator of life, just as it is preposterous to take the philosophical life as the paradigmatic form of life.

Further, through philosophical reflection the truth of a speech is distilled, but 'the truth' is one that deals with the static relationships of concepts and judgments. Reflections and distillations, however, take place only once we know what we are dealing with, only once we have the leisure to be like a spectator, a theorist. Thus, for Rosenstock-Huessy, philosophy is by its very nature a second order activity. Philosophy can deal with the known, it is a reactive activity, but life often requires that we move into the unknown. Being philosophical about actions is not to do them. One can write a book of philosophy on motherhood and be a terrible mother, a book on morals and be a selfish brute. The trials of life inevitably outwit the philosophical preparations with which we arm ourselves to face them. The trick of Platonism, from the perspective Rosenstock-Huessy is defending, is to present the world as if it were an eternal form rather than an irruptive process.

This is also why Rosenstock-Huessy sees faith as a more fundamental mood for dealing with reality than the speculative investigation of philosophy. A faith may be simple, it may be misplaced, but it is directive. The philosopher requires that he/ she understands what is going on before a decision is reached and an action is made (though no one can be a philosopher twenty-four hours a day – no one can eat, sleep, breathe, defecate, speak within only one modality of existence); but by faith one can act immediately. Call and response are

the necessary polarities within which faith moves. Of course, that means misplaced faith can be a very dangerous thing, but exposure to danger is an intrinsic part of reality. To believe that one can live a life free from risk and danger is completely absurd. Whether the faith is misplaced or well placed can only be assessed through the fruits produced by that life. For this reason, Rosenstock-Huessy, is thoroughly critical of moral philosophy: 'good and evil, that's for children. It's not for you and me – because we neither know what is evil nor what is good, to tell you the truth.' But then he adds 'the results will tell. You have to invent the next act. Everyone of us has to do this.'<sup>38</sup>

Again, Rosenstock-Huessy finds a fundamental difference between the biblical reality and the moral philosophical tradition. From the ethical viewpoint the *Old Testament* is a series of scandals; stories abound of incest, betrayal, murder, wrath, cruelty, despair, and unnecessary suffering. From Rosenstock-Huessy's position the perilousness of life is such that were we to simply live by the ethical we would long since have ceased to exist. The ethical is a way of ordering our lives, but the multifarious nature of our lives is such that life is more complicated than our ethical ideas, which themselves are abstractions derived from aspects of life. When we try to improve our world we can only ever be working on one bit of life. The exigencies of life are such that when we deal with important problems we are forced to choose between unpalatable alternatives.

Not only is philosophy only appropriate for some aspects of our life, it is also an activity which can never be for all. Plato and Aristotle knew (and Voegelin is at one with them on this) that philosophy was not for the masses. Since the Enlightenment many have believed philosophy can be democratised. But the conditions of the activity make a mockery of the idea that one can philosophise under any condition. Leisure, again as the ancients knew, is the condition of its existence. But a society cannot reproduce itself through everyone having the leisure required to be philosophical. The Christian position adopted by

Rosenstock-Huessy works differently. Its emphasis upon uniqueness, call, response, communion, fellowship and transfiguration requires engagement with the task at hand. Christianity accepts the division of labour and distribution of talents as the condition of making life more abundant, but it seeks to establish a unity in which a common spirit breathes through that division. Such diversity also extends to the types of people who are servants of the spirit. Whereas philosophy surrounds itself with scholars and the intelligentsia who excel in analysis and argument, Jesus surrounded himself with fishermen, whores, tax collectors and, in general, the riff raff. The spirit of Christianity works with whatever material is at hand. It does not seek to turn those people into what they could never be, viz. philosophers, rather it requires that they love, and that they do what they do with love and devotion. In this way it seeks to unleash a multiplicity of unique talents which are latent within the species. Rosenstock-Huessy points out that a boorish Fisherman, a liar and a weakling, Peter, could, nevertheless, be the founder of the church. Peter's greatness cannot be assessed by how good he was at theorising or by a philosophical investigation of his character, but it is realised through the fruits that he bequeaths, fruits that he bequeathed in spite of some aspects of his character. He does not need to make himself what he cannot be.

### **Revolution in Voegelin and Rosenstock-Huessy**

It is in light of these very different starting points that Rosenstock-Huessy's interpretation of revolution needs to be understood in contrast with that of Voegelin. Voegelin's position on modern revolutions is from first to last a moral and philosophical one: revolutions are wrong because they cause a vast amount of unnecessary human suffering. They are caused by the excessive aspirations of men who have lost all sense of their own finitude, and in this respect they have spiritually diseased minds. The polarity between Gnosticism and the healthy

consciousness is likewise grounded in his appreciation of an eternal order. Further, the search for a matrix of Gnostic variants is preventative – if humans knew what they were doing, they would cease participating in various forms of Gnostic revolts, they would come to their senses, and the nightmare politics would cease.

Voegelin thus finds himself trapped between different alternatives: on the one hand, he recognises the limits of philosophy's influence on the world and he recognises that philosophy is not for all; on the other hand, he desires to be listened to by sufficient numbers of powerful people who are philosophical enough to know that revolution is wrong and hence forbear inciting or participating in it. Like Plato, the realisation of Voegelin's thought ultimately requires that philosophy and statecraft coincide, that philosophers be kings, or at least, that institutions be philosophical. Voegelin is really telling us, then, that he is a philosopher, and from the serene heights of philosophy, revolution is unnecessary, undesirable, horrible and evil, and those thinkers and colleagues who fan the flames of revolution are themselves evil Gnostics. Voegelin believed that in diagnosing the mental/spiritual disease he was providing a great service (and this is what makes his work more than a monumental exercise in scholarship). But this is only the case if revolutions spring from a mental/spiritual disease.

Against this position, Rosenstock-Huessy is more paradoxical, and more grounded. He does not deny that revolution is an horrific event, and indicative of a massive breakdown of order. Along with war, decadence and anarchy it is one of the four great social evils. Nor does he shirk the issue of the cruelty of revolutionaries who sacrifice everything living to the 'not yet' of the future.<sup>39</sup> But evil, for Rosenstock-Huessy, is only one side of the coin of revolution. To understand the total revolutions – and these are the ones that truly deserve the name of revolution – which have shaped the fate of the world, one needs to appreciate that revolutions occur not primarily because some thinkers have Gnostic aspirations and that they

have infected the consciousness of the mass, but because the old world and the speech which holds it together can no longer hold, no longer command sufficient compliance. There is not enough faith, enough respect in the world as it is.<sup>40</sup> Revolution brings out the fact that the love for a particular social order has dried up and that hatred for the old is being charged with love for the new. Institutions cannot survive without belief, and belief rests on love. Morality neither founds nor sustains institutions.

What Voegelin condemns as metastatic faith is seen by Rosenstock-Huessy as the *sine qua non* of the act of political creation at a particular time. Only by elevating themselves beyond the constraints of legality, morality, temperance and the panoply of philosophically approved virtues, only by raising themselves to the heavens do people undertake the terrible risks and actions of revolution. Voegelin's reaction to the extravagant aspirations of the revolutionary is a reasonable response to the unreasonable time. That is why it is out of time. The value of a plea for moderation such as one finds in Voegelin, Camus, or in Hegel (whose political thought is thoroughly travestied by Voegelin) takes its hold only once the immoderate passions and inflammatory acts of the revolutionary have been spent. As a reaction to twentieth-century totalitarianism Voegelin's *New Science* is a rich and rewarding study of the symbolic elective affinities of the revolutionary consciousness. But the study is marred by its very virtue: the revolutionary consciousness is condemned regardless of the fruits or of the time in which the Gnostic symbols are thrown up. Because Gnosticism is identified as the enemy to be countered, it is seen as a pathology that has grown over time. This is why Voegelin can make the incredible claim near the conclusion of *The New Science* that 'the corrosion of Western civilisation through Gnosticism is a slow process extending over a thousand years'<sup>41</sup>, without realising that this claim is exactly of the same level of truthfulness as the ideological distortions against which he rails. The idea of the West as being slowly corroded is the mirror image of the West as progressive construction.

Because Voegelin's primary indicator of the condition of a community is its spiritual symbols, he tends to gloss over economic and social transformations which facilitate liberty, as well as the genuine political progress that has been made in the liberal democratic zones largely due to a combination of the emergence of commercial society and its increased living standards, and the expansion of political sites of representation and social sites of articulation.<sup>42</sup> In other words, Voegelin's evaluation of the importance of the great pre-Bolshevik revolutions is limited by its one-sided concern with preserving the symbols of order. The French revolution, for example, in *The New Science*, is seen as a stepping stone to the barbarism of Nazism because of the concoction of laicist and Enlightenment energies, when it could more plausibly be argued that the French Revolution was the inevitable product of intransigent social and political interests (interests Montesquieu warned had to give concessions) blocking the political expression of the social power that the commercial and intellectual classes had already acquired. The interests of the clergy and nobles could be better advanced behind the older Christian symbols of order, while the new interests of the commercial and intellectual classes required a different set of symbols.

A similar flaw exists in his discussion of the English Revolution where Voegelin acknowledges the Gnostic dimension of puritanism, but treats the fortunate result of the revolution – the balance of powers – as if it could be separated from the excessive aspirations of the revolutionaries, as if that call should not have been made. Generally, Voegelin downplays the extremity of the deeds and the symbolic accompaniments that have created modern liberty. And he has not addressed the processes which have generated the social patterns and institutional structures of modern civil societies and liberal democratic states. The creation of the conditions of commercial society was frightful in its bloodiness. But, again as Montesquieu saw, the savagery of Henry VIII's treatment of beggars, vagabonds and paupers propelled England into a commercial society, a society whose development could

not be sustained by a distribution of political power that suited monarchical interests at the expense of the expanding commercial classes. The bloodspilling was not peculiar to the actions of Henry VIII and the English Revolution, it was endemic to Christendom, due, *inter alia*, to the division of imperial and papal sovereignty (that is *the* circumstance which inspired Dante's, Marsiglio's, Machiavelli's conception of sovereignty, and which Hobbes, in *Behemoth*, identifies as the real source of the English revolution). In other words, the stability of the symbolic order of Christendom as approved by Voegelin did not by any means indicate stable, sustainable, or desirable social and political conditions.

Voegelin's analysis suggests a pessimistic attitude towards the general direction of civilisation as he witnesses the asphyxiation of Christian and classical symbolism. Another kind of temperament might see the spiritual situation confronting the West as an historical change in the symbols of the divine and human encounter. Differently put, Voegelin might be seen as confusing the symbols with the spirit; witnessing that an older symbolic order no longer is venerated, he becomes increasingly pessimistic about the world he wants to defend, instead of seeing that God has not abandoned the world, that it is the time for new dwellings of the spirit. This was how Rosenstock-Huessy saw the situation of 'Western Man' and why he saw the twentieth century as the beginning of the post-religious era, an era which would not be possible were it not for the fruits of Christianity.

The point of Rosenstock-Huessy's writings on revolution is the acknowledgment of the processes which have created the every-day liberties which we take for granted. As he says, in a characteristically autobiographical aside in the *Soziologie*:

I thank the church for the freedom to write on the powers of the times. For the temporal powers of the Caesars did not allow people to write about them. Tacitus almost unlearned the use of speech under the tyrants. I thank the Reformation for the

freedom to research and publish without the permission of the church. I thank the English parliament for the freedom of the postal secrets and friendships all over the world. I thank liberalism and the French revolution for the author's rights on my work.<sup>43</sup>

And as he says a few pages earlier, 'between Oslo and Buenos Aires there is no part of the world whose political order is not based on a revolution.'<sup>44</sup>

But Rosenstock-Huessy's writings on revolution are not an abstract defence of revolution – as they may appear from reading this outline of his approach –, rather they are a highly detailed exploration of the unique contributions that each revolution has made to Western civilisation. Indeed, Rosenstock-Huessy demonstrates that there is such a thing as Western civilisation because revolutions have borne fruits which have spread beyond the territories in which they occurred; they are not, of course, the only forces that have made the West, but they are intrinsic to its formation.

It is, then, quite wrong to condemn revolution on moral grounds, or to ignore the murderous revolutionary forces which opened up the democratic element of the modern liberal state.<sup>45</sup> The lesson of the evils of revolution is, from this perspective, not a moral one, but an existential realisation that we have been forged through the sacrifice, the struggles, the nightmarish excesses of revolutionary generations. To the extent that we can salvage the significance of those trials in our lives, they cannot be just written off as idiotic rampages. They are part of our story. And the peaceful unification of generations across time and through space, which is, for Rosenstock-Huessy, the world historic meaning that originally sprang from Christianity, requires us to acknowledge that our past has been shaped by the despair, impatience, hate and love of those who forced new futures, that they too have left legacies for us, even if the price was murderous.

## Conclusion

No doubt Voegelin would have seen Rosenstock-Huessy as a Gnostic activist. And Rosenstock-Huessy does fit some of the characteristics of this type, most notably in his Johannine form of Christianity. That is, Rosenstock-Huessy interpreted the stages of history since the resurrection as a story of love, faith and hope.<sup>46</sup> Further, just as the story of the church was the connecting and inescapable historical thread of the first millennium, the formation of national states and the explosions of total revolutions are the inescapable reality and connecting thread of the second millennium. The new millennium is to be based on the hope of the development of a planetary consciousness in the face of a post-Christian reality. For Voegelin, Johannine Christianity was a Gnostic perversion which found its modern expression in the Nazi idea of the Third *Reich* traceable to Joachim of Flora.<sup>47</sup> For Rosenstock-Huessy, far from being a Gnostic disaster, Joachim is the prophet who prepares the way for Saint Francis who in turn helps create the soil for the Italian Renaissance and the Reformation.<sup>48</sup> What, then, to Voegelin seems to be a case of historical disaster is viewed under the optic of Rosenstock-Huessy as a further wonder in the creation of the world. The respective appraisals of Joachim also hold for Proudhon, St. Simon, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, to take just a handful of the figures they both engage with. In each case where Voegelin sees the embodiment of doom, Rosenstock-Huessy witnesses an invaluable contributor to the creation of reality, even in the cases such as Nietzsche, Darwin, Marx and Freud who are so at odds with the faith he served. These are the messengers of the changing energies of the world that must be confronted. Thus, for Rosenstock-Huessy, the appropriate response to such 'disangelists' is gratitude, even though they may appear as enemies.

The lesson of Christianity is not, then for Rosenstock-Huessy, primarily a matter of knowing our finitude in relation to God – though that is part of it; equally as important is our infinitude. Christianity also, for Rosenstock-Huessy, teaches the need to redeem 'our sins' by turning them into a blessing, by truthfully acknowledging how we have come to be where we are and of living lives accordingly. With Voegelin, on the other hand, the great truth of Christianity is the great truth of classical reason and the great experience is contemplative, ultimately mystical. At his best, Voegelin offers a way to live which is dignified, decent and thoughtful. As an existential path it is attractive. As a political strategy for understanding and conserving the essential character of free institutions, Voegelin's orientation is too constrained by the experience he so frequently celebrates, the experience of classical reason. Rosenstock-Huessy, on the other hand, is more catholic existentially – prophets, mystics, scientists, explorers, church fathers, martyrs, players, revolutionaries, nihilists, devils and angels are all participants in the creation of the world: a world which is affirmed, which is, in spite of everything, worth affirming.

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<sup>2</sup> *Out of Revolution; The Autobiography of Western Man* (Norwich, Vt.: Argo, 1969), p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> *Order and History: Volume One Israel and Revelation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), p. XIV.

<sup>4</sup> I use the term man because that is the term for the species used by Voegelin and Rosenstock-Huessy. I leave it to their readers to decide whether or not they used the term in a gender specific sense.

<sup>5</sup> See *Conversations with Eric Voegelin* ed. R. Eric O'Connor (Montreal: Perry Printing, 1980), p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. see Voegelin's comparison of the experience of the Israelite prophets in comparison with the Greek philosophers in *Order and History Vol. 1*, p. 327. See also, p. 240.

<sup>7</sup> *Order and History Vol 1.*, p. 427.

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<sup>8</sup>*Conversations with Eric Voegelin*, p. 104. See also *Order and History*, Vol. 4, pp. 228-229.

<sup>9</sup> Eric Voegelin, 'The Gospel and Culture' in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin Vol. 12: Published Essays 1966-1985* ed. and intro. Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Uni. Press, 1990), p. 173.

<sup>10</sup>*Order and History Vol. 4*, p. 244.

<sup>11</sup> *Order and History Vol. 4*, p. 246; also p.303 and *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), pp. 77-78.

<sup>12</sup>*The New Science of Politics*, p. 22.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>14</sup>*Order and History*, Vol. 4, pp. 19–20.

<sup>15</sup> See William C. Harvard Jr., 'Notes on Voegelin's Contributions to Political Theory' in *Eric Voegelin's Thought: A Critical Appraisal* ed. and Intro. Ellis Sandoz (Durham: Duke Uni. Press, 1982), pp. 113-114.

<sup>16</sup> David Walsh rightly suggests that 'Philosophy in Voegelin's work is not simply one topic of reflection among others; it is the experiential and symbolic horizon within which the whole inquiry is conducted.' 'Philosophy in Voegelin's Work' in Sandoz *Eric Voegelin's Thought: A Critical Appraisal*, p. 135.

<sup>17</sup>*Order and History Vol. 4*, p. 28

<sup>18</sup>*Order and History Vol. 1*, pp. 182–183.

<sup>19</sup> Eric Voegelin *Anamnesis* tr. and ed. Gerhart Niemeyer (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), p. 6.

<sup>20</sup>*Conversations with Eric Voegelin*, p. 82.

<sup>21</sup>*Conversations with Eric Voegelin*, p. 105.

<sup>22</sup>*The Fruit of Lips or Why Four Gospels* ed. Marion Davis Battles (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1978), p. 4. To do justice to Rosenstock-Huessy's understanding of Jesus would take an entire book. What I offer here merely touches the surface of the story he tells.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup>*The Christian Future or the Modern Mind Outrun* intro. Harold Stahmer (Harper and Row: New York, 1966 [1946]), p. 62.

<sup>25</sup>*Out of Revolution*, p. 24. See *The Christian Future*, pp.66–67.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, *The Christian Future*, pp. 109–110.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>28</sup>*Die Vollzahl der Zeiten*, (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1958), p.119. The translation is mine, though I have also worked with William Wolf's unpublished translation of *Die Vollzahl*.

<sup>29</sup>*Die Vollzahl der Zeiten*, p. 618.

<sup>30</sup>In his lectures on Greek philosophy in 1956, Rosenstock-Huessy contrasts Jewish and Greek philosophical thought thus: 'the Bible has to do... with the invisible part of God, because God is in back (sic) of the believer. He pushes you and me

forward. But if you turn around you don't see anything. You can hear God's voice, but you can never see God....The Jews neglect the eye, and the Greeks emphasise it. All Greeks' (sic) words of knowledge are connected with the visual sense.' *Greek Philosophy—1956* Lecture 2, p. 7, (c) Hans Huessy, (Norwich, Vt.: Argo, 1991). It is indicative of their respective orientations that Voegelin, on the other hand, emphasises that 'the word, as it emerges from the Metaxy, need not be "heard", it also can be "seen" as in Amos 1: 1 or in Isa 2:1 and 13:1', 'The Beginning and the Beyond' in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin Vol. 28: What is History and Other Late Unpublished Writings*, ed. and intro. Thomas Hollweck and Paul Caringella, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 1990, p. 180.

<sup>31</sup>See Rosenstock-Huessy *The Origin of Speech* (intro. Harold Stahmer (Norwich, Vt: Argo, 1981) p. 61 ff. and *Die Übermacht der Räume* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1956), p. 192 ff.

<sup>32</sup>There is one ancient Greek philosopher whom Rosenstock-Huessy separates from the others on this score, Heraclitus. See his 'Heraclitus to Parmenides' in *I am Impure Thinker*, introduction W.H. Auden (Norwich, Vt.: Argo, 1970).

<sup>33</sup>The Christian Future, pp. 94-95.

<sup>34</sup>See 'Metanoia: To Think Anew' in *I am Impure Thinker*.

<sup>35</sup>*The Christian Future*, p. 72.

<sup>36</sup>Rosenstock-Huessy is well aware that philosophers have disputed whether such a standard exists. The testament to the centrality of that standard is perhaps most obvious not only when we consider the ethics of Plato, Aristotle and Kant, or the philosophical tradition of natural law, but also the huge importance philosophers like Nietzsche place upon the 'discovery' of the absence of that standard. The absolutist/ relativist divide is entirely inappropriate for appreciating the position Rosenstock-Huessy advances; the divide only makes sense on the basis of the more fundamental philosophical elements and assumptions which Rosenstock-Huessy criticises.

<sup>37</sup> See 'Grammar as Social Science' in Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *Speech and Reality* intro. by Clinton Gardiner (Norwich, Vt.: Argo, 1970)

<sup>38</sup> *St. Augustine by the Sea*, Lect. 5, 20. c. Hans Huessy, 1991.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 71

<sup>40</sup>Revolution 'is the lack of respect for the past. ' *Speech and Reality*, p. 15.

<sup>41</sup> *The New Science of Politics*, p. 188.

<sup>42</sup> For the defense of political progress see Bob Catley's and my *This Great Beast: Progress and the Modern State*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997).

<sup>43</sup>*Die Vollzahl der Zeiten*, p. 654.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 651.

<sup>45</sup>*Out of Revolution*, pp. 719-720.

<sup>46</sup>*Die Vollzahl der Zeiten*, Zweiter Teil, 6, 7,8.

<sup>47</sup>*The New Science of Politics*, p. 111.

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<sup>48</sup>*Out of Revolution*, p. 586 ff.