The New Science of Politics

This is an outline of *The New Science of Politics* by Eric Voegelin, published in 1952. These were the Walgreen Lectures of 1951 and were originally titled *Truth and Representation*.

The **bold headings** are copied from the Table of Contents.

Your comments and corrections are always welcome: please e-mail Bill McClain.

Return to the Eric Voegelin Study Page.

Outline

A brief guide to the Introduction and six lectures:

Introduction. The destruction of political science by positivism, and its recovery in the 20th century.

I. Representation and Existence. Political representation in the existential sense: how societies become organized for action.

II. Representation and Truth. The discovery of transcendental truth by the Greeks.

III. The Struggle for Representation in the Roman Empire. The new salvational truth of Christianity.

IV. Gnosticism--The Nature of Modernity. The responses to the triumph of Christianity and its political problems.

V. Gnostic Revolution--The Puritan Case. An example of a radical Gnostic movement of the Reformation.

VI. The End of Modernity. Hobbes' attempt to solve the problems of gnosticism.

Introduction

[1]

Political theory and philosophy of history

A theory of politics must be a theory of history. These lectures will link the two subjects by exploring:

- the nature of "representation", by which a society gains existence for action
- the symbols by which political societies interpret themselves as representatives of transcendental truth
- how these symbols form an intelligible succession of phases in history

Plato melded philosophy and history when he founded political science in a time of

crisis. Political science expands to its greatest extent during such times. On the largest scale of Western history, the three greatest crises have been:

- the Hellenic crisis, when Plato and Aristotle founded political science
- the crisis of Rome and Christianity, when Augustine wrote *The City of God*
- the modern crisis, beginning with Hegel's philosophy of law and history

Many intermediate crises and restorations, for example Jean Bodin's work in the 16th century.

Decline of political science and restoration

"Restoration" means a return to consciousness of principles, not to the content of earlier attempts. Much recent progress.

[2]

The destruction of political science through positivism

The causes and intentions of retheoretization. Science was destroyed by positivism in the last half of the 19th century.

Positivistic assumptions

1. All sciences must emulate the mathematizing natural sciences.
2. The methods of the natural sciences are the criterion of theoretical relevance.

The first assumption would have been a harmless failure, but combined with the second it led to the assertions:

- A study of reality is scientific only if it uses the methods of the natural sciences.
- Problems couched in other terms are illusory.
- Metaphysical questions should not be asked.
- Realms of being not explorable by the chosen methods are irrelevant or nonexistent.

The subordination of relevance to method

Making method the criterion of science confuses means and ends and perverts science. Science is the search for truth in various realms of being and different objects require different means of investigation. Positivism disregards this elementary truth.

Science begins with the prescientific existence of man and with his participation in reality with his body, soul, intellect and spirit.

The suitability of the methods of investigation can be judged only at the end of the investigation. The conclusions reached must be consistent with the prescientific experience of reality.

It is important to distinguish the general principle of subordination of relevance to method from its specific manifestation in positivism. Because this distinction has not

been made, no adequate study of positivism has yet been done.

The nature of positivism

Positivism cannot be defined as the doctrine of a specific thinker. Begin with the emotional impact of the Newtonian system and trace its effects. Note that the actual application of the methods of mathematical physics to the social sciences has hardly ever been tried (apart from the area of quantifiable social phenomena).

Manifestations of positivism

1. Accumulation of irrelevant facts
2. Misinterpretation of relevant facts
3. Development of methodology

Accumulation of irrelevant facts

(1) The use of method as the criterion of science abolishes theoretical relevance. Facts are promoted to the status of science regardless of their relevance. Trivialities. Some useful analysis does occur.

Misinterpretation of relevant facts

(2) The selection and interpretation of facts without proper theoretical foundation. The materials accumulated through such efforts are sometimes valuable, but opinion (*doxa*) cannot substitute for theory in science.

The movement of methodology

(3) The development of methodology, especially from 1870 to 1920, helped to overcome positivism because it regained the understanding of the adequacy of different methods for different sciences. Examples:

- Husserl's critique of psychologism
- Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms

One problem relevant to the destruction of political science: the attempt to make social science objective by the exclusion of "value-judgements".

Objectivity through exclusion of value-judgements

The positivist conceit was that propositions concerning facts of the phenomenal world were "objective", while judgements concerning the right order of soul and society were "subjective" and scientifically invalid.

Contrast the classical and Christian sciences of man which elaborate, both empirically and critically, the problems of order which derive from philosophical anthropology as part of ontology. When ontology as a science was lost this realm of knowledge became suspect as subjective and uncritical opinion.

Eventually, "values" were made into unquestioned axioms. The sciences sank into relativism because scientists were free to choose the values they found relevant.

[3]

The transitional position of Max Weber

Methodology in political science came to an end in the work of Max Weber.

Weber's value-free science

His approach:

- the exploration of causes and effects
- the construction of ideal types
- the construction of typical causal relations

Weber moved beyond methodology but could not achieve the contemplation of order because "values" were not subject to critical evaluation.

The demonism of values

Weber created the categories of "demonism", where values were the ordering ideals of political action but beyond rational argument, and of "responsibility", whereby politicians would be made aware of the consequences of their actions when motivated by such values. His pragmatic reasons. The implication that politics had become a field of disorder is an ignored aspect of his work.

The contradictions in Weber's position

What is the point of teaching political science when the motivating values are beyond science? If the students revised their values in response to knowledge of their consequences then values were not demonically fixed. An appeal to judgement would mean that the science was not value-free.

Weber taught by indirection:

1. he would not state any principles of order
2. he relied on shame to try to shift demonically fixed values

However, what if the student were beyond shame? Or felt that good intentions justified his actions? Could such "ethics of intention" be the cause of demonic values, arrogating the quality of divine command?

The reintroduction of values

An objective science of politics was incompatible with unquestionable values. Weber could not admit a science of order, but he could use much of its content in terms of the historical facts of its expressions and of its causal factors. Such facts invalidated certain demonic values. He did not consider that this establishes a standard of objectivity in science, contrary to the value-free stance.

The demonism of values implies a goodly portion of ignorance.

The taboo on classic and Christian metaphysics

Weber did not publish studies of pre-Reformation Christianity or Greek philosophy. If he had, he would have had to invalidate the claims to science of Plato, Aristotle and St. Thomas, which would have been a self-defeating effort. By the time a critic understands metaphysics, he has become a metaphysician.

Positivism with regrets

Sociology: the positivistic escape from the science of order.

Weber's was the last of the great positivistic systems, but with overtones of regret for the loss of divine enchantment and the triumph of rationalism.

Like Nietzsche, he complained that his soul was not attuned to the divine, but unlike Nietzsche he did not engage in the tragic revolt against God.

[4]

The restoration of political science

After Weber, the route to the restoration of political science was to rediscover the rationality of metaphysics and of philosophical anthropology in particular.

Obstacles and success

The difficulty of restoration, a work still in progress. Example: the "progress" of science has actually been an increase in irrationalism. Exploring sociology as a religious movement. The ranking of religious experiences. Progressives as retrogressive irrationalists.

The course of restoration. The foundations have been laid.

I. Representation and Existence

[1]

The Aristotelian procedure

The symbolic structure of human society. Political science begins with the self-interpretation of society and proceeds by clarification of pre-existing symbols.

Human society has externality, but is also a little world ("cosmion") illuminated from within.

Symbols in reality and concepts in science

The theorist is faced with two sets of symbols:

1. the language symbols which are part of social reality
2. the language symbols of political science

The relation between the two sets is complex. The second is derived from the first, but the first set can contain symbols derived from the clarifying process of science.

A common error: presuming the symbols of political reality are theoretical concepts. Many of the things described as "theory" are not. Retrogression: for example, Plato discusses and disposes of "contract theory". What he would have called *doxa* is now sometimes called "ideology".

Science is not a warehouse of definitions. Concepts can be defined, but reality cannot.

[2]

Representation in the elemental sense

In common usage, "representation" refers to characteristics of the external existence of society. We speak of representative institutions.

[3]

Insufficiency of the elemental concept of representation

Different views on what systems may be called representative.

[4]

Representation in the essential sense

"Political society in form for action."

Society in form for action

The rulers find habitual obedience for their acts of command. These acts serve the existential necessities of a society.

Articulation: the process in which people form themselves into a society for action.

The acts of representatives are not imputed to themselves but to society as a whole. Their declarations have obligatory force.

Representative and agent distinguished

An "agent" acts under specific instructions. A representative has power to act for a society by virtue of his position in the structure of the community.

[5]

Representation and social articulation

Because of democratic symbolism, there is reluctance today to distinguish between the rulers and the ruled. The "people" now means what would once have been called both the "realm" and the "subjects".

Magna Carta

The long history of complicating terminology and advancing articulation. Example from Magna Carta.

Writs of summons to Parliament

In the 13th and 14th centuries. Recognizing new articulations but fitting them into royal representation.

Ferrers' case

Melting the representative hierarchy into a single representative: the king in Parliament. Comments of Henry VIII, 1543.

Lincoln's dialectic formula

The limit of articulation is the level of the individual. This limit is expressed in Lincoln's phrase "government of the people [the articulated political society], by the people [its representative], for the people [the membership]".

This limit of articulation occurs only in the West.

[6]

Western theory of representation

Articulation is the condition of representation. A society articulates itself by producing a representative that will act for it.

Further differentiation of the concept of articulation. Attempts at such are made when a society:

- is about to come into existence
- is about to disintegrate
- is in an epochal phase

The consolidation of the realms in the fifteenth century

An example of such an epochal phase: in the mid-15th century, the consolidation of the Western realms after the Hundred Year's War.

Sir John Fortescue attempted theorization of the problem of articulation.

Fortescue's theory

Compared the creation of a realm with the growth of the articulate body out of the embryo.

Eruption and proruption

Fortescue coined the terms "eruption": the initial articulation of a society, and

"proruption": advances in articulation.

Corpus mysticum

To describe the inner substance that provides the binding force of society, Fortescue transferred the Christian symbol of the "mystical body" to the realm. A momentous step:

1. Symptomatic of the decline of Christian society and the consolidation of the national realms.
2. Showing that the realms had a acquired a peculiar ultimacy of meaning, foreshadowing their eventual succession to the Church.

Intencio populi

Fortescue called the sacramental bond of the community the *intencio populi*, the center of the mystical body of the realm, an immanent Logos, where "people" referred to the mystical substance erupting in articulation, and "intention" meant the urge of this substance to erupt and maintain itself.

[7]

Migratory foundations

In describing the new political order of the realms, Fortescue used the old myth that the ancient kingdoms had been founded by groups of Trojan refugees.

The myth of Troy

The myth points to the initial phase of the articulation of migration bands into political societies.

Paulus Diaconus

Author of the *History of the Lombards*, second half of the 8th century. An account of the origins of a kingship.

[8]

Disintegration

The problem of representative articulation also comes to the fore during times of disintegration.

Maurice Hauriou

Developed a theory of representation during the malaise of the Third Republic.

The *idée directrice*

Hauriou: government has legitimate power as the representative of the state, which is

the national community in which the ruling power conducts public business. The ruling power must organize the nation for action. The "directing idea" of the state is to expand itself and increase its power. A representative is a ruler who guides the work of realizing the idea.

Power and law

Hauriou's propositions:

1. Authority precedes regulation of power by law.
2. Power can make law when it has representative authority.
3. The origin of law is in the decision which replaces a litigious situation by ordered power.

Constitutional and existential representative

According to Hauriou, a government must be representative in the existential sense, not just in the constitutional sense (EV's "elemental" sense).

[9]

Summary

From representation in the elemental to the existential sense. The problems of articulation.

Definition of existence

A political society comes into existence when it articulates itself and produces a representative.

Of representative institutions

Elemental representative institutions are realizations of only one special type of articulation and representation.

Provincialism of contemporary theory of representation

The arrogation of the symbol "representation" for a specific type of articulation. The danger is that representation in the elemental sense is no insurance against disintegration.

The crisis of Western civilization is due to a massive reluctance to face reality.

II. Representation and Truth

[1]

Social symbolization and theoretical truth

Assumptions made in the previous lecture which must be challenged. That we can

speak of:

- a social reality and a theorist who explores it
- critical clarifications and theoretical contexts
- symbols of theory which are not symbols in reality
- concepts which refer to reality while their meanings were derived from reality through the mysterious critical clarification

Questions:

- Is a theorist outside of social reality or is he not rather part of it?
- If he is part of reality, in what sense can reality be his object?
- When clarifying the symbols of reality, does the theorist do anything different from what everyone does who participates in the self-interpretation of society?
- Is the theorist's interpretation sometimes superior in quality to society's, and will this cause conflicts?

[2]

Society as the representative of cosmic order

The conflict between the truth of the theorist and the truth of society. Another level of representation: society itself becomes the representative of transcendental reality. This was true of the ancient Near East and Far East empires, where the order of the empire was representative of the cosmic order.

Truth and Lie

In such cases the meaning of truth becomes clear only when the society is under attack. Those on the side of order represent the truth and their enemies represent disorder and falsehood.

The Behistun Inscription

Example from the Achaemenides in the time of Darius I.

The Mongol Order of God

Example from the 13th century of the clash of two imperial representations of the truth: the Mongols and the Western Empire.

The monadism of imperial truth

The cosmological representation of truth survived the ancient empires, for example in Marxian dialectics where cosmic order has been replaced by historically immanent order.

[3]

The challenge to imperial truth

Raising questions about the nature and legitimacy of imperial truth establishes a

competing theoretical truth.

Jasper's axis time of human history

The discovery of this competing theoretical truth occurred roughly from 800 to 300 BC in different areas:

- China in the age of Confucius and Lao-tse and the other schools
- India in the age of the *Upanishads* and the Buddha
- Persia, of Zoroasterism
- Israel, of the Prophets
- Hellas, of the philosophers and of tragedy

Karl Jaspers called the period around 500 BC the "axis time", when Heraclitus, Confucius and Buddha were contemporaries.

Bergson's closed and open society

Bergson called the two competing truths the "closed" and "open" societies.

[4]

Plato's anthropological principle

The creed of a new epoch: "A polis is man written large." Today, as much as then, it must be remembered that society is not just a microcosmos, but also a "macroanthropos".

The principle has two aspects:

1. a principle for the interpretation of society
2. an instrument of social critique

As a principle for the interpretation of society

(1) Society reflects the type of men of whom it is composed.

As an instrument of political critique

(2) Discovery of the true order of the soul leads to the desire to express this order in society. For Plato there is one type of true humanity and several types of disorder in the psyche.

The true order of the soul as a standard

The true order of the soul is dependent on the love of divine wisdom. The experiences of such become predominant and form character. This is a standard for comparing human types and the social orders they express.

[5]

The meaning of theory

Theory is the attempt to formulate the meaning of existence by explicating the content of certain experiences. Theory uses the aggregate of such experiences for empirical control.

Aristotle's theory of the mature man

Aristotle's "mature man" (*spoudaios*) has maximally actualized the potentialities of human nature. Aristotelian ethics are a type study of the mature man.

Theory as an explication of experiences

Corollaries:

1. Theory cannot be developed under all conditions by all people. Although not necessarily a paragon, the theorist must be capable of imaginative re-enactment of the experiences.
2. Theory is intelligible only to those in whom the explication will stir parallel experiences as the empirical basis for testing the truth of theory. Debate is possible only among "mature men".

Both Plato and Aristotle recognized the practical difficulties of finding many such men.

The experiential basis of theory

A brief catalog of some of the experiences:

- love of wisdom
- eros toward the good and the beautiful
- justice, the virtue of the right ordering of the forces of the soul
- Thanatos, the cathartic purification of conduct by placing it in the perspective of death
- the mystical ascent of the soul toward the border of transcendence (*Symposium*)
- the descent into the depths of the unconscious (*Timaeus*, *Critias*)
- the Aristotelian *philia,* the nucleus of true community between mature men

[6]

The authority of theoretical truth

Why do these experiences become the carriers of a truth to rival the older myths? Why should the theorist be able to pit his authority against that of society?

The opening of the soul

The psyche is found as the new center in which man experiences himself as open toward divine reality.

The psyche as the sensorium of transcendence

The openness of the soul is experienced through the opening of the soul itself. The philosopher finds himself in a new relation with God, discovering both his psyche and transcendent divinity.

The true order of the soul represents the truth of human existence on the border of transcendence. It is the standard for measuring both human types and types of social order.

The theological principle

Plato: "God is the measure". Man is the measure of society only in so far as he has become the representative of divine truth.

Development through Solon, Heraclitus, and Xenophanes.

Plato on the types of theology

The types of symbolization. Exposure to unseemly symbolizations of the gods can corrupt the souls of the young where they know about God.

[7]

Tragic representation

What of the insurmountable difficulty of making the truth socially effective? This was an illusion caused by Plato's disappointment with Athens. Previously Athens had been a political society articulated down to the individual, each of whom experienced the responsibility of representing the truth of the soul, and who expressed this experience through the public cult of tragedy.

Aeschylus' *Suppliants*

An example. The conflict between the wrath of Zeus and the risk of war. The appeal to justice above the law.

The meaning of action

The descent into the Heraclitean depths of the soul.

Government through persuasion

The king persuades the people by having them follow his descent into the depths of the soul.

The decision for Dike

The souls of the people are formed by the persuasion of the king. Justice prevails against passion. The decision represents the truth of God.

Representative suffering

The meaning of tragedy as a state cult consists in the representation of suffering as the consequence of the choice for justice.

[8]

From tragedy to philosophy

Tragic Athens ended in the Peloponnesian War. Euripedes' *Troades*, ca 415, portrays the destruction of the Athenian ethos.

The representation of truth passed to the philosophers and their schools.

[9]

Summary

We have not only the existential meaning of representation, but also the sense in which society is the representative of transcendental truth.

Representation in the transcendental sense

The two meanings of representation refer to two aspects of one problem:

1. The existential representative of a society is its active leader in the representation of truth.
2. Individual citizens can be make active participants in the representation of truth through persuasion.

Theory as the science of order

The nature of the problem came into view with the discovery of the psyche as the sensorium of transcendence. The mystic philosopher became the representative of the new truth, and his symbols the nucleus of a theory of social order.

The criterion of truth in science

The solution of the mystery of critical clarification. It consists:

- Genetically: of the discovery of the psyche and of its anthropological and theological truth.
- Critically: of the measuring of the symbols in reality by the standards of the new truth.

III. The Struggle for Representation in the Roman Empire

[1]

Theoretical issues

To existential representation we added transcendental representation, and found theory to be a type of truth competing with the truth of society.

Christianity added another competing type of truth. All three types struggled for existential representation in the Roman Empire.

The competing types of truth

1. Cosmological, as in the early empires.
2. Anthropological, as in the political culture of Athens and in tragedy, covering the range of problems connected with the psyche as the sensorium of transcendence.
3. Soteriological ("salvational"), appearing with Christianity.

Anthropological and soteriological truth distinguished

Christianity adds the bending of God in grace toward the human soul, a mutuality in the relation with God.

The revelation of this grace was the incarnation of the Logos in Christ, which fulfilled the movement of the spirit in the mystic philosophers. The fact of revelation is its content.

Substance of history defined

Assumption: the substance of history consists in the experiences in which man gains understanding of his humanity and its limits.

Philosophy and Christianity empowered man as a contemplator and master of nature, but Christianity also placed limits on human grandeur. Man in his mere humanity is demonic nothingness: this is the ultimate border of clarity which is revelation.

The dependence of theory on the classic and Christian range of experience

The hesitation of Jaspers and Bergson. A consequence of the assumption above is that a theory of human existence must operate within the medium of historical experiences. The theorist cannot disregard the differentiations achieved by Greek philosophy and Christianity. To do so is to fall into anti-Christian nihilism.

[2]

Varro and St. Augustine on the types of theology

Varro, *Antiquities*, 47 BC:

1. mythical - of the poets
2. physical - of the philosophers
3. civil - of the peoples

Augustine:

1. civil, including the mythical ("fabulous")
2. natural
3. supernatural

[3]

The political function of the *Civitas Dei*

A refutation of pagan theology and of the arguments against Christianity. Although no longer very popular, the Roman cult was still the state cult of the empire. The struggle was for public representation of transcendental truth.

The attack on the Roman cult

In 382 Gratianus abandoned his title of *pontifex maximus* and abolished the cult endowment.

The affair of the altar of Victoria

That year the altar was removed from the Senate.

The pleas of Symmachus and St. Ambrose

Symmachus: Neglect of the cult (particularly of Victoria) would lead to disaster. Let everyone worship in his own way. Ambrose: The subjects serve their princes (existential representation) but the Christian prince serves God (transcendental representation).

St. Augustine's *imperator felix*

The happiness of the emperor is measured only by his conduct as a Christian on the throne.

The Roman cult as a living issue

Suppression of the cult was a living memory when Rome was invaded by the Goths in 410.

[4]

The existential issue in Roman civil theology

Neither Ambrose nor Augustine seemed to understand that pagans under Christian rule were in the same position as Christians under pagan rule.

St. Augustine's misunderstanding of Varro's position

Augustine had differentiated the earthly and heavenly cities and could not comprehend the inseparable compactness of the community of gods and men in Roman society.

Cicero's opposition of the *princeps civis* to the *princeps philosophiae*

Philosophy had no authority to challenge the dignity of the cult.

Roman archaism

Varro and Cicero give us the archaic experience of social order before its dissolution through the experience of the mystic philosophers. There are no intact Greek sources from that period.

The truth of Rome against the truth of philosophy

Cicero's insistence on the superiority of Roman order. The Roman substance was sustained until the 3rd century AD, and then struggled with alternative types of truth.

[5]

The princeps as the existential representative

How were the institutions of republican Rome adapted so that the emperor could be the existential representative of the Mediterranean empire?

The patrocinial principate

The hierarchy of patronage.

The principes as military and political leaders in the late republic

Rivalries among the men of highest rank. Agreements and feuds. Party organization and the patronage of armies. Inheritance of clienteles.

The triumvirs

Octavian's maneuvers against Antony.

The imperial principate

Loyalty oath to the emperor.

[6]

The sacramental weakness of the imperial principate

The sacramental bond was not shared by the increasing non-Roman population and grew weaker among the Romans.

Experiments in imperial theology

Divinization of the emperor failed, but the search for a highest imperial god put the Romans on a course compatible with Christianity.

The experiment with Christianity

Christianity was freed in 311-313 and its God incorporated into the imperial system of divinity.

[7]

Celsus on the revolutionary character of Christianity

"The most competent pagan critique of Christianity" was Celsus' *True Discourse*, ca 180. The radical de-divinization of the world spelled the end of a civilizational epoch. Origen's response.

[8]

The metaphysical monotheism of Philo

Jewish monotheism combined with Aristotelian metaphysics.

The political theology of Eusebius of Caesarea

In the time of Constantine, borrowing from Philo. The coincidence of the appearance of Christ with the pacification of the Empire by Augustus. *Pax Romana* as an environment for spreading the faith.

The end of political theology through trinitarianism

With the victory of trinitarianism it was no longer possible for an imperial monarch to represent divinity. Spiritual destiny could be represented by the church, but not by any political power organization. When the sphere of power is de-divinized, it becomes solely temporal.

The double representation of man through church and empire lasted through the Middle Ages. Modern problems of representation are connected with the re-divinization of society which is covered in the next three lectures.

IV. Gnosticism--The Nature of Modernity

[1]

The victory of Christianity

The result of the victory was the de-divinization of the temporal sphere of power.

De-divinization of the political sphere and re-divinization

De-divinization: the death of polytheism and reordering of human existence toward eternal life in beatific vision.

Re-divinization is not the return of polytheism, but is a process which has its origins in Christianity itself.

The chiliasm of Revelation and St. Augustine's theory of the church

Early church life oscillated between apocalyptic expectations and the eschatology of supernatural perfections. Augustine dismissed literal belief in the millennium, saying instead that this referred to the reign of Christ in his Church, a conception that remained effective until the end of the Middle Ages.

Spiritual and temporal representation

Christian society articulated into spiritual and temporal orders.

The survival of the Roman idea in Western society

The Roman Empire was seen as the concrete representation of human temporality, and idea of history which lasted through the end of the 17th century.

[2]

The symbolism of re-divinization

The resurgence of an eschatology of the realm produced a definite symbolism toward the end of the 12th century, when Joachim of Flora produced the first clear exposition of the idea.

The trinitarian speculation of Joachim of Flora

He applied the symbol of the Trinity to human history, producing three periods:

1. the age of the Father, starting from the creation
2. the age of the Son, beginning with Christ
3. the age of the Spirit, beginning around 1260

Each age had its own leader and two precursors.

The Joachitic symbols: (a) the Third Realm, (b) the Leader, (c) the Gnostic Prophet, (d) the Brotherhood of Autonomous Persons

Joachim's aggregate of symbols govern the self-interpretation of modern political society to this day.

a. The Third Realm: the third age of the world as the last and most spiritually fulfilling. Variations:
    - humanistic and encyclopedist periodization of history into ancient, medieval and modern

- Turgot and Comte's theological, metaphysical and scientific phases
- Hegel's three stages of freedom and spiritual fulfillment
- Marx's primitive communism, class society and final communism
- National Socialism's Third Realm

    b. The Leader. Immediately applied to St. Francis, reinforced by Dante. Paracletic figures, Machiavelli, Condorcet, Comte, Marx. The leaders of recent history.

    c. The Gnostic Prophet. Joachim himself. The modern intellectual. This symbol sometimes merges with the previous one.

    d. The Brotherhood of Autonomous Persons. Life free of sacramental mediation and institutional authority. Democracy and anarchism.

The National Socialist Third Realm

1. The first German Reich ended in 1806
2. The Bismark Reich ended in 1908
3. The National Socialist Reich

This provincial effort was the result of dubious literary transfers.

Moscow--the Third Rome

Constantinople was the second Rome. The notion of Moscow as the third gained currency in the 16th century.

Western recognition of the Russian problem

15th and 16th century attempts to integrate Russia into the West were rebuffed because the Russian leaders claimed a superior authority from God.

The Russian type of Representation

Unique types of both transcendental and existential representation. Messianism and Dostoekski's ambivalent vision.

[3]

The theoretical content of the new symbols

How does Joachitic speculation differ from the Christian philosophy of history that was traditional at the time?

St. Augustine's meaning of transcendental history

Christianity added direction and destination to history. Augustine distinguished profane from sacred history which culminates in Christ and his church, and which is embedded in a transcendental history of the City of God. Only transcendental history has direction toward eschatological fulfillment; profane history does not.

Joachim's immanentization of the meaning of history

Living in a vigorous time, Joachim to endow the immanent course of history with

meaning. He did not intend a radical immanentization, but rather a new transcendental irruption of the spirit.

Secularization

The second phase of immanentization, "from humanism to enlightenment", grew slowly. Only by the 18th century, with the idea of progress, had the increase of meaning in history lost all transcendental reference.

The eidos of history a fallacious construction

The problem of the "shape" of history emerges only when Christian transcendental fulfillment is immanentized. But the course of history is not an object of experience.

The types of fallacious immanentization of the eschaton:progressivism, utopianism, revolutionary activism

The Christian symbolism of supernatural destination has a theoretical structure, and the components of this structure can also be immanentized. The components:

1. teleological: movement toward the goal
2. axiological: the goal itself, a state of perfection

The varieties of immanentization accentuate either or both components:

1. progressivism immanentizes movement toward the goal
2. utopianism accents the state of perfection
3. immanentization of both aspects is the goal of those who seek revolutionary transfiguration of the nature of man

[4]

Motives and range of Gnostic immanentism

"The attempt at creating an eidos of history will lead to the fallacious immanentization of the Christian eschaton".

Why do men persistently commit such an elemental fallacy? They achieve a certainty about the meaning of history and their place in it.

The desire for certainty and the uncertainty of faith

Uncertainty is the essence of Christianity and the burden of faith is too great for many.

The social success of Christianity and fall from faith

The greater the success of Christianity, the greater the number of people who will not have the spiritual stamina for it.

When falling from faith, a man cannot fall back solely on himself because he will find despair and nothingness. The alternative is an experience very similar to faith,

but which removes uncertainty. Historically, Gnosis was this alternative experience.

The recourse to Gnostic self-divinization

Immanentizing the meaning of existence is an attempt to get a firmer grip on the knowledge of transcendence. Gnostic experiences expand the soul and bring God into the existence of man.

The psychological range of types: contemplative, emotional, activist

Expansion of the soul will engage various faculties:

- contemplative: Hegel, Schelling
- emotional: indwelling divine substance
- activist: Comte, Marx, Hitler

Men divinize themselves by substituting massive modes of participation for faith.

The range of radicalization: from paraclete to superman

Medieval immanentism, humanism, enlightenment, progressivism, liberalism, positivism and Marxism are logical developments of immanentist eschatology.

Recall that the substance of history is found on the level of experience, not on the level of ideas. The Marxian transfiguration of man into superman is an extreme radicalization of the medieval experience which draws the spirit of God into man.

Gnostic experiences are not properly called neopagan.

The civilizational range: from monasticism to scientism

Gnosis accompanied Christianity from the beginning and is also a component of other religions. It does not by inner necessity lead to the fallacious construction of history.

The drive for certainty has a further component which bends gnosis toward historical speculation. This component is the civilizational expansiveness of the high Middle Ages, which would not put up with mundane senescence.

Since the 17th century, science has become the symbolic vehicle of Gnostic truth. Even the specialized sciences are seen as roads to salvation.

[5]

The course of modernity

The evolution of a historically unique type of Gnostic truth.

Origins in the ninth century

Ancient gnosticism was reactivated by Scotus Eriugena through his own works and his translations of Dionysius Areopagita.

The problem of simultaneous progress and decline

Since the 18th century there has been continuous literature on the decline of Western Civilization, much of it well-founded. But the progressivists also have a case in terms of developments on many fronts. Analysis of modern gnosticism will show how a civilization can advance and decline at the same time.

The premium of salvation on civilizational action

Worldly efforts became a mystical work of self-salvation. The spiritual strength which Christianity required were diverted into creation of an earthly paradise, which effort was more appealing, more tangible and easier.

Nietzsche's expression of the idea. The sequence of types of Gnostic action offering self-salvation.

"The historical result was stupendous."

Immortality of fame and the holes of oblivion

Comte and the world-immanent Last Judgement.

Spiritual death and the murder of God

"The death of the spirit is the price of progress." The more energies are thrown into salvation by world-immanent action, the farther men move from the life of the spirit. Since the life of the spirit is the source of order, the success of civilization is the cause of its decline.

Totalitarianism as the end form of progressive civilization

The limit is reached when Gnostic activists achieve an empire.

V. Gnostic Revolution--The Puritan Case

[1]

Periodization of Western history

Conventionally, modernity begins around 1500.

Modernity as the growth of gnosticism

Modernity can instead be defined as a process, the growth of gnosticism, with its origins in the 9th century.

Modern age as a Gnostic symbol

The convention of a modern age succeeding the Middle Ages is one of the Gnostic "Third Realm" symbols.

Modern age as Gnostic revolution

Existentially, the forces of Gnosticism achieved a decisive revolutionary victory in the Reformation. The Puritans as an example. Richard Hooker as an observer.

[2]

Hooker's portrait of the Puritan

Summary from his *Ecclesiastical Polity*.

The cause and the movement

The Puritans possibly invented "the cause" as a revolutionary weapon. Hooker on:

- criticism of social evils
- holiness of the speakers
- direction of ill-will toward the government
- attack on evil to remove it from the world
- need for a new form of government
- scriptural blindness
- separation of men into "brethren" who are illuminated by the Holy Ghost, and "worldlings"
- leaders and the role of women

Portrait of a type invincibly resistant to argument.

[3]

The revolt against intellectual culture

The intellectual defects of Gnosticism are apt to destroy rational discourse and the functions of persuasion.

Scriptural camouflage

The Puritans developed two techniques to conceal their violence to Scripture:

1. the codification of truth
2. the taboo on the instruments of critique

These techniques have remained important.

The codification of Gnostic truth

(1) The systematic formulation of new doctrine in scriptural terms, making recourse to earlier literature unnecessary. For example, Calvin's *Institutes*.

This type of literature may be called a "koran". Earlier and later history of the genus.

The taboo on the instruments of critique

(2) Gnostic truth cannot abide criticism by the unfaithful. The instruments of critique must be banned. For example, the Reformation tabooed classic philosophy and scholastic theology. Western society has never completely recovered.

The prohibition of theoretical argument

Theory in the classic sense must be banned. Public debate becomes impossible.

Hooker's reaction

A passage from Averröes.

The Islamic solution

Scholars may discuss some issues privately but not share them with the public. Averröes had a point: vulgar speculations do result in the "death of God".

Appeal to governmental authority

Hooker understood that Gnostic propaganda was political action, not a search for truth, and that the revolutionaries could rightly be put down by force.

[4]

The angel of Revelation and the Puritan army

1. The peculiar experience of the Gnostic revolutionaries
2. The program for the new organization of society

(1) Despite the lack of scriptural authority for revolutionary action, the Puritan army arrogated to itself the angelic function of Revelation 20.

A Glimpse of Sion's Glory

A 1641 pamphlet. Eschatological expectations. Man helping God.

The common man

The common people have a privileged position in the kingdom of Christ.

The Gnostic realm of the saints

The poor will be Saints in the new kingdom. Utopian dreams.

The program of the revolution

(2) Typically, Gnostic revolutionaries are vague about details of the transfigured world, apart from the negation of current evils.

The *Queries to Lord Fairfax*

In 1649 at an advanced stage of the revolution.

The liquidation of the Old World

Elimination of previous authority.

The war between the worlds

The new kingdom will claim universal dominion and be perpetually at war with the old world.

Methodological reflections

This analysis has been concerned with the structure of Gnostic experiences, not with a balanced account of Puritanism. Since the revolutionaries can never achieve their goals, analysis must examine the extreme statements of those goals, rather than the intermediate compromise arrangements.

[5]

Hobbes' theory of representation

Although it contains Gnostic simplifications, *Leviathan* brings new clarity to the problem of representation.

Public order against Gnostic revolution

Hobbes: The conflict is between a society that wants to maintain order and individuals who will fight that order in the name of a new truth. The solution: public truth is the law of concord and any opinion conducive to discord is untrue. Arguments:

1. By reason men understand that happiness requires peace and that this is achieved only when the passions are restrained by government.
2. This reasoning has obligatory force because it is God's command as a law of nature.
3. This law has no effect until men combine into society under a sovereign.

Existential and transcendental representation are combined by covenanting members of a new society. Western and Christian civilization will be admitted as approved by the sovereign. Debate and opinion to be regulated.

The revival of *theologia civilis*

Hobbes intended to install Christianity (= the law of nature) as a civil religion in the Roman sense. For him it derived its authority from government and not because it was the truth of the soul.

The opening of the soul reconsidered

As a way of understanding Hobbes' problems.

When the soul opened to transcendental reality it found a source of order by which to critique the truth of society.

The essential tension between truth of society and truth of the soul

But this discovery did not change the structure of reality and the conflict between the truths of the soul and of society existed both before and after the discovery.

The tension between them cannot be eliminated by disposing of either truth.

Plato's solution

The evolution of his thinking from the *Republic* to the *Laws*. In the former book the truth of the soul was directly incarnated into society. In the later, society mirrored the order of the cosmos and the truth of the soul was mediated by administrators.

Christian vacillations

The Fathers believed that Christianity could eliminate the need for a civil religion. This was not possible, and the eventual solutions:

1. Byzantine caeseropapism
2. Western separation of two balancing powers

When the Western church tried to disengage from civil duties the result was the investiture struggles. When it asserted civic authority, as in the persecution of heretics, it became untrue in its role as representative of the City of God.

The Hobbesian idea of the everlasting constitution

Hobbes' great achievement: public order is impossible without a civil theology which is beyond debate. However, he denied the tension between the truths of the soul and of society, creating man without the experience of transcendence. This and the larger context in the next lecture.

VI. The End of Modernity

[1]

The truth of cosmic order reasserted

Hobbes rediscovered Plato's discovery: that society must represent cosmic order before it can try to represent the truth of the soul. This is the function of the church, not of civil society. If sects fight for control of public order they must all be relegated to the status of private associations.

Gnosticism as a civil theology

Christianity created a vacuum when it de-divinized the natural sphere of political existence. "The immanentization of the Christian eschaton made it possible to endow society in its natural existence with a meaning which Christianity denied to it. And the totalitarianism of our time must be understood as journey's end of the Gnostic search for a civil theology."

The dangers of the Gnostic experiment in civil theology:

1. Its tendency to repress the truth of the soul
2. Gnostic disregard for principles of existence

Its tendency to repress the truth of the soul

(1) Gnosticism supplants the truth of the soul, abolishes Christianity and ruins philosophy. This is a decline to a lower level than paganism, which at least knew truth as a compact experience.

The advent-recession cycle

A giant cycle of world history. Pre-Christian high civilizations are on the ascending branch. The appearance of Christ marks the peak of the cycle, when the soul achieved a maximum differentiation through revelation of the Logos in history. Gnostic civilization, including Western society, is the declining branch.

Future dynamics of Western civilization

Varieties of gnosticism penetrate all the backward countries of the world and continue to advance in the developed countries. But: human nature does not change. The truth can be repressed but the soul and its transcendence cannot be destroyed. Such repression will lead to a world-wide explosion of unknown form.

Gnosticism is still opposed by classic and Christian tradition. Science is being reconstructed.

Unknown: the response of non-Western cultures to Gnostic repression.

When will the explosion occur? Sooner than one might think, because Gnosticism contains a self-defeating factor.

[2]

Gnostic disregard for principles of existence

(2) The fallacy of interpreting the order of society as an eschaton is an error with practical consequences.

The two great principles governing existence:

1. What comes into being will have an end.
2. The mystery of this stream of being is impenetrable.

Gnostic speculation perverts both principles into their opposites.

Creation of a dream world

The final realm will have no end and Gnostics have knowledge of the goal. The dream world is a very important social force.

Its motivations

The order of a society is intelligible but its existence is not. It may cease to exist without right or reason and this is a horror that is hard to bear. The tendency is to extend the meaning of a society's order to the fact of its existence.

The pneumo-pathological result

The extension of meaning can take two forms:

1. As a mere mood, an inclination to disregard the structure of reality and take existence for granted.
2. The Gnostic case where nonrecognition of reality becomes a matter of principle. In the advanced stages the dream world is treated as if it were reality.

Attack on dianoetic virtues and propaganda for moral insanity

Wisdom and prudence are not valuable in the dream world. Morality and immorality may be reversed. Some enemy will be blamed for the failures of the dream conception of cause and effect. Clarification of the problems will be seen as an immoral enterprise.

The symptoms of Gnostic insanity

- Exploration of cause and effect in history is prohibited, making coordination of means and ends in politics impossible.
- Dangers will not be met with the appropriate response, but rather with magical operations such as declarations, condemnation, etc.

The causes of continuous warfare

An example of self-defeating politics. Magical operations in the dream world do not address the disturbances which lead to war. The case of National Socialism and the aftermath of WWII. Rational politics seems to have become impossible and nothing is accomplished except by war.

The impossibility of peace

"The dream cannot be translated into reality and reality has not yet broken the dream."

The system of continuous warfare can end in one of two ways:

1. in horrible physical destruction and revolutionary changes of social order

2. by abandonment of the dreaming before the worst has occurred

[3]

Liberalism and communism

The previous description of the dangers of gnosticism as a civil theology applies mainly to the progressive and idealistic varieties. The activist form found in totalitarian expires is a different matter.

The plight of the liberal intellectuals

A quote from Harold Laski.

Dynamics of the Gnostic revolution

The three varieties of immanentization (teleological, axiological and activist) are related in that in every Gnostic movement the first two form a right wing willing to compromise and make gradual progress, while the activists form a violent left wing.

An individual's position on this range will be mostly determined by his relation to his civilization. Modernity is not entirely gnostic or the revolutionary left would have triumphed long ago.

The dynamics of gnosticism moves along two lines:

1. from the partial immanentization of the Middle Ages to the radical immanentization of the present
2. along the amplitude of right and left

The Communist danger

That the course of Western history is determined by the logic of modernity and that the West is ripe to fall to Communism is Gnostic propaganda:

1. Communism has made no progress in the West.
2. The power vacuum is not of Communist making.
3. Soviet expansion is not due to Communism.
4. The Soviets are not a material threat.

The causes of Western paralysis

By the logic of the dream, gnostics must slide from right to left. "The Western Gnostic societies are in a state of intellectual and emotional paralysis because no fundamental critique of left-wing gnosticism is possible without blowing up right-wing gnosticism in its course." This will continue "as long as civilization is reaction, and moral insanity is progress."

[4]

Hobbes

Hobbes' theory of representation was an attempt to solve the problems of gnosticism as a civil theology.

Radical immanence of existence

He created a new human nature which would find fulfillment in existence itself. Rather than immanentizing the eschaton, he denied it entirely.

The life of the spirit as *libido dominandi*

All motivations had to be explained in terms of immanent existence, as passions.

The abolition of the *summum bonum*

The passions themselves could be studied, but the objects of passion were irrelevant. There was no highest good, and therefore no source of order, in human life.

Passion and fear of death

Since there was no source of order in the soul, it could be found only in a passion more powerful than the others: the fear of death, the greatest evil.

The person and the Leviathan

"In the civil condition the human units of passion are broken and fused into a new unit, called the commonwealth."

[5]

The Hobbesian symbolism

Hobbes' created an aggregate of symbols which expressed the component of radical immanence in modern politics:

1. The psychology of disoriented man.
2. Disease as the nature of man.
3. The Leviathan as the fate of the individual.

The psychology of disoriented man

(1) A new psychology which denied the love of God and recognized only the love of self. The roots of this development lie in the 12th century and was described by John of Salisbury. During the Reformation this became the "normal" type of man. Hobbes' psychology was paralleled by the work of Pascal (who nonetheless preserved the Christian tradition) and La Rochefoucauld.

Modern psychology is incomplete because it deals only with this type of man.

Disease as the nature of man

(2) This new normal type was interpreted as the "nature of man". Contemporary existentialism. Treatment by Plato in *Gorgias*.

The Leviathan as the fate of the individual

(3) Leviathan is what the Gnostic activists can actually achieve, as opposed to the terrestial paradise, which they cannot.

[6]

Resistance against gnosticism

England and America have been most resistant to Gnostic totalitarianism.

The relation of Western national revolutions to gnosticism

Nation revolutions which occurred earlier did so when less radical waves of gnosticism were current.

English and American conservatism

Western society is a stratified civilization with England and America retaining the firmest civilizational tradition, while Germany is the most most progressively modern stratum.

The restorations of traditions

England and America must repress Gnostic corruption and restore the forces of Civilization.

Return to the [Eric Voegelin Study Page](#).

Bill McClain (wmcclain@watershade.net)