Philosophy and the Flow of Presence

Philosophy and the Flow of Presence: Desire, Drama and the Divine Ground of Being

By

Stephen Costello

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS PUBLISHING

Philosophy and the Flow of Presence: Desire, Drama and the Divine Ground of Being
By Stephen Costello

This book first published 2013

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2013 by Stephen Costello

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-5038-1, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-5038-4

I dedicate this book to my late friend, John Rice, *in memoriam*.
‘But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
all losses are restored and sorrows end’.

Deum et animam scire cupio. Nihilne plus? Nihil omnino.
(I desire to know about God and the soul.
Nothing more? Nothing less).

St. Augustine.

Nulla est homini causa philosophandi, nisi ut beatus sit.
(Man has no reason to philosophise except with a view to happiness).

St. Augustine.

Noli foras ire, in te ipsum redi. In interiore homine habitat veritas.
(Do not wander far and wide but return into yourself.
Deep within man there dwells the truth).

St. Augustine.

Tranquillus Deus tranquillat omnia, et quietum aspicere, quiescere est.
(God in his peace stills all things and to behold him at rest
is to be at rest ourselves).

St. Bernard.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express sincere gratitude to my parents, Val and Johnny, for their unfailing support and constant encouragement, and especially to my closest friend, Darren Cleary, without whose presence in my life the very stars would seem suburban.

I would also like to acknowledge the impact and influence on my life of Fr. John Harris, O.P., and Prof. Richard Kearney. Thanks, too, to Rev. Dr. Brendan Purcell, Dr. Meins Coetsier, Prof. David Walsh, Prof. William Desmond and Prof. Patrick Masterson, for their helpful communications and constructive comments, all of which were hugely appreciated and integrated into this work.

PREFACE

This work is a philosophical study of desire, drama and the divine Ground of being, that pays particular attention to Eric Voegelin's symbol of 'the flow of presence'. The study does not pretend or presume to be a scholarly work on the entire *oeuvre* of Eric Voegelin *per se* but focuses on particular facets of his thought.

The fact of our being creatures of desire has been amply attested to and argued for by philosophers from Plato through Spinoza and Hegel, to contemporary formulations and accounts in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Further, among the many things we desire is the desire for God, as explanation of ultimate meaning and order in society and the soul, according to philosophers as diverse as St. Thomas Aquinas and Voegelin. I shall argue that not only are we indeed beings of desire, and that God is the answer to our deepest desire but that God desires us too and, moreover, He desires to communicate His will/desire to us. Furthermore, it is possible to discern this divine desire with the help of St. Ignatius of Loyola, whose *Spiritual Exercises* have, as one of their principal aims and objectives, to aid us to discover God's will for us as His spirit works through the world. As such, we may speak of 'the drama of humanity', to employ another Voegelinian term, meaning the record of the spiritual experiences of human beings in their openness to the Ground[1]. It is to this drama and divine desire that the philosophers, poets and mystics elected below attest.

Poets such as Rilke, Rumi, Kavanagh, and T. S. Eliot, all of whom feature in this reflection, represent a small handful of representatives who have attested to this flow of divine presence. By 'Presence' we mean a search for the experience of timelessness in time, a spiritual search for the never-ending One. This search is primarily an inner journey as one confronts one's own self. It may, of course, involve an outward or external journey to sacred places such as Glendalough in Ireland, which has been described as a 'pilgrimage of flow'[2]. And on this journey one inevitably faces 'flow monsters' (a symbol coined by Dutch philosopher Meins

[1] See Voegelin, *The Drama of Humanity and Other Miscellaneous Papers 1939-1985*, vol. 33.

[2] See Meins Coetsier, 'The Flow of Presence Academy' web-site, www.flowof presence.be

Coetsier) such as anxiety or melancholy to name the more common ones, as we meet with all the trials and tribulations that take place in the human heart and in society. Living in the flow of (divine) presence in the (Platonic) *metaxy* (the In-Between) is to cease to long for the past or future. It involves living in the present instant. The Presence (and present) simply Is. One becomes attuned to the eternal present, to the *hit et nunc*, wherein God abides. For past, present and future are all intertwined.

We will pay attention to the experiences that generate the flow of presence and that attest to the divine-human encounter or theophany. The search is for spiritual symbols that articulate the signs of the times. My desire, thus, is to re-evoke the flow of presence as evidenced in the works of certain philosophers and poets. I would argue that 'happiness' is precisely this mystical attunement to, and attestation of, the flow of presence in one's life. Socrates, to take just one example, obeyed his inner *daimon* (the word *eudaimonia* usually translated as 'happiness', is allied with this notion, etymologically) and was open to the promptings of the divine spirit, as he attended to the flow of presence in his life and work, a fidelity that ended with his execution.

T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, which opens chapter one, begins with the 'present' and progresses to the 'presence' under God. His poetic-philosophic meditation starts with the individual intending to seek God and culminates in the discovery that it was the divine Ground who was seeking him. This is an experience of conversion, that is to say, the realisation that one's 'centre' is not in one's self but in the self that is rooted in divinity. So the soul arrives where it 'started from' and knows the place as if for the 'first time'.

An equivalent symbol of 'the flow of presence', so, is 'the drama of humanity', by which Voegelin means the life and record of the spiritual experiences of human beings in societies at specific points in time. We will examine two – the drama of Ignatius Loyola (a mediaeval example) and of Etty Hillesum (a modern mystic).

Chapter one presents the pioneering and penetrating work of Eric Voegelin who, arguably more than any other contemporary philosopher, has stressed this double dialectic of desire – man's desire for God and His desire for us as He draws us 'beyond'. He emphasises the eschatological dimension of such desire. This first chapter gives a theoretical framework, one which introduces key and central Voegelinian concepts, such as the *metaxy* (which we will compare with parallel concepts in Martin Buber and D. W. Winnicott, hitherto unexplored) and the 'flow of presence', which will guide us throughout our applied enquiry.

Chapter two is a critique of the so-called 'New Age' and Gnosticism. The psychologies of C. G. Jung and Ken Wilber are singled out as examples, *par excellence*, of modern Gnosticism and so-called New Age desire which, according to Voegelin, has marked and marred the modern era profoundly.

Chapters three and four deal with two 'flow monsters', which can impede the flow of presence; they are depression and anxiety respectively. Freud's famous paper on 'Mourning and Melancholia' is discussed before turning to Voegelin's analysis of the 'Dispute of a Man who Contemplates Suicide With his Soul'. Certain poems are cited as examples of experiences of depression, in keeping with Voegelin's injunction to return to the *experiences* that engender symbols, before a more philosophical analysis is undertaken; the Greeks felt poetry was the prelude to philosophy. The affect of anxiety is analysed in the succeeding chapter that draws on the thought, albeit briefly, of Sören Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan before engaging with Voegelin's interpretation which brings him back to Cicero and to Christ's teaching which is *against anxiety* and his exhortation to us to live in the present day. The aim is to bring the thought of these diverse philosophers, normally not grouped together, into creative and critical dialogue with each other around these central themes of 'desire' and 'presence'.

Chapter five turns to the reflections of Goethe because his central insight is that happiness is attained by living in the present instant. As such, Goethe's explicit teaching on this subject provides a complementary approach to the insights accrued in the previous chapter(s).

Chapter six explores the themes of attending to the present moment in the Platonic moral philosophy of Iris Murdoch and her emphasis on 'unselfing' the self in its orientation to the Good. This further extends our discussion and links it up with previous arguments already articulated. Indeed, at the end of the chapter, I adumbrate ten commonalities between the philosophies of Murdoch and Voegelin.

Chapter seven draws on St. Ignatius of Loyola and Bernard Lonergan, S.J. (the latter briefly), in an attempt to discover and discern divine desire. I relate some key Ignatian concepts to some crucial Voegelinian ideas, while chapter eight outlines a concrete case-history as an example of divine desire and the flow of presence, evidenced empirically in the life of Etty Hillesum as well as mentioning, *en passant*, two other modern female mystics – St. Edith Stein and Simone Weil. Their lives read as 'dramas' in the Voegelinian sense of the word. A conclusion follows, which synthesises the findings and shows the underlying themes that connect the disparate and often diffuse chapters together.

This endeavour was undertaken in close engagement with the thought of Voegelin, Murdoch, Goethe, Freud, Lacan, Bernard Lonergan, Viktor Frankl, Simone Weil, and others in the Continental tradition of twentieth-century philosophy. It is a contemporary philosophical contribution to, and exercise in, theoretical as well as applied analysis to current philosophical, psychological, spiritual and cultural concerns.

CHAPTER ONE

ON DESIRE, THE DIVINE AND BEING DRAWN: THE WORK OF ERIC VOEGELIN

Men's curiosity searches past and future
And clings to that dimension. But to apprehend
The point of intersection of the timeless
with time, is an occupation of the saint –
No occupation either, but something given
And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.
For most of us, there is only the unattended
Moment, the moment in and out of time,
The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts. These are only hints and guesses,
Hints followed by guesses, and the rest
Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.
The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.
Here the impossible union
Of spheres of existence is actual,
Here the past and future
Are conquered, and reconciled.

T. S. Eliot, 'The Dry Savages IV', *Four Quartets*

Introduction

It was Plato who, in ancient times, first eroticised man's search for wisdom, otherwise known as 'philosophy', understood as the 'love of wisdom'. Desire takes central stage in dialogues like the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* but it is a desire that springs from lack. St. Augustine continues the tradition and 'existentialises' desire in his *Confessions*. In the Christian Middle Ages, St. Thomas Aquinas will speak of man's 'natural desire' for God but places the notion within a scholastic metaphysics. In the Age of Enlightenment Spinoza will argue in his *Ethics* (1677) that desire is the essence of man and constitutes us in our very being. G. W. Hegel will take up the dialectic of desire and give it his own

inflection in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). In contemporary philosophy, desire assumes prominent place in the theorising of a Lacan (who draws on Hegel and Plato) and a Voegelin (influenced hugely by Plato), albeit from very different perspectives. For Voegelin, this desire is pre-eminently the desire for divine reality, as the transcendent 'Ground of being'. This divine Reality draws man and desires to be known by him. Ignatius tells us in his *Spiritual Exercises* that we can discern this divine desire through the movements of diverse spirits. He sets up a kind of hermeneutic criteria, which is anathema to Derrida's deconstruction with its emphasis on 'undecidability', which is not the same as 'indecision', as recent debates bear witness[1].

For Lacan, desire springs from lack and all desire is mediated by an Other but his conceptualisations occur from within a post-Freudian psychoanalytic frame of reference. Mention may be made of many more philosophers but during the course of this book I hope to bring some Continental thinkers into contact with the thought of Eric Voegelin, albeit only partially, as partners in an intellectual conversation, in an open-ended dialogue on desire and the divine. As such, what is offered below is a theoretical project that aims to outline the broad contours of Voegelin's meditations before applying his perspective to concrete concerns in the chapters that follow, paying particular attention, in these succeeding chapters, to the symbol of the 'flow of presence'.

Voegelin

The German-born American political philosopher Eric Voegelin's (1901-1985) work was oriented towards diagnosing the causes of the wars and various crises of the twentieth-century, as well as recalling for human consciousness the divine Ground of reality within which the search for order is undertaken. He is a philosopher of history, a political philosopher and mystic-philosopher all at once and this multifaceted dimension of the man is reflected in the breadth and depth of his writings and vision, which attempt to recapture and re-symbolise the reality of the Whole. Needless to say, there are ethical and political consequences and outcomes of living with rightly-directed desire and sustained mindfulness of the 'in-between' of the human condition that both Plato and Voegelin have ably articulated. Plato's trajectory is from the soul to society, from the personal (*psyche*) to

[1] See Richard Kearney, *Debates in Continental Philosophy*, pp. 139-156, and *After God*, pp. 301-317. John Caputo accuses Kearney of confusing undecidability with indecision in his paper, 'Richard Kearney's Enthusiasm', *After God*, p. 316.

the political (*polis*), though this will not be the primary concern in our treatment of the topic, important as it is.

Voegelin's conviction is that the philosophical and Christian life is ordered through an Anselmian faith in search of understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*). Voegelin completes Aristotle's opening sentence in the *Metaphysics* 'all men by nature *desire* to know' by the words 'the divine Ground of being'. But there is also a response from the divine Reality. Desire is, thus, twofold. Both Plato and Aristotle recognised this desirous dimension of reality, with their conceptualisation of an Unmoved Mover who attracts men to himself. 'Plato and Aristotle recognised these [moving] forces in the experiences of a human questioning (*aporein*) and seeking (*zetein*) in response to a mysterious drawing (*helkein*) and moving (*kinein*) from the divine side'[2]. In the *Laws* X, Plato symbolised the emergence of the pull (*helkein*) of the Word/God and the counter-pull (*anthelkein*) of the world/man – man is the 'puppet of the gods'. Whether man responds to the drawing/pull of the golden cord or surrenders to the pull of the steely cords marks the dividing line between openness of soul and closure[3]. In the second part of St. Anselm's *Proslogion*, Anselm prays thus: 'Speak to my desirous soul what you are, other than what it has seen, that it may clearly see what it desires'[4]. Desire, as St. Augustine noted, does not rest until it discovers the object that dazzles it. This is the Logos about which Heraclitus speaks ('The Logos holds sway always') and St. John: 'In the beginning was the Logos'. The Logos has been operative in the world from its creation but comes to its fulfilment in the Incarnation of the Word in Christ.

Plato has given us the famous Parable of the Cave in the *Republic* to denote this drawing of desire. In this allegory, 'prisoners' are depicted as men fettered with their faces to the wall and who are then dragged up by force to the light. Plato depicts a pilgrimage, an ascent from the sensual to the spiritual. This involves a re-orientation of desire, a conversion of consciousness, a (Platonic) *periagoge* or turning around, a *metanoia* or (Christian) conversion to the divine Ground of being. We experience the sacred pull of reason (*logos*) that lifts us up to the Beyond (*epekeina*). Existence is thus seen as a field of pulls and counter-pulls, of ascent to the light and descent to the depths. The Gospel of St. John (12: 32) is in full accord with classic philosophy but He is now named as the Christ who,

---

[2] Eric Voegelin, 'Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme', *Published Essays 1966-1985*, vol. 12, p. 326.
[3] See Plato, *Laws*, 644-45.
[4] Cited by Voegelin, 'Quod Deus Dicitur', *Published Essays 1966-1985*, vol. 12, p. 383.

when He is lifted up, will draw all men to Himself. He is the magnetic pneumatic centre of attraction who exerts this pull of love and is the source of all our eschatological expectations. John 6: 44: 'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him'. John thus symbolises, in an avowedly Christian context, the pull of Plato's 'golden cord'.

We are not apes but nor are we angels. For Voegelin, existence has the structure of the Platonic *metaxy*, of the In-Between – the In-Between of immanence and transcendence, mortality and immortality, nature and the divine. Existence has a noetic structure and so, for Voegelin, madness (in the Aeschylean sense) is the refusal of reason, is the loss of personal and social order through loss of contact with divine reality. Voegelin aims to return to immediate experience, to the reality engendering and the symbols engendered. And pneumopathologies are manifest in human systems of thought, in dogmatism and in doctrinal metaphysics, in constructions of 'second realities'. The aim, therefore, of philosophy is to recapture reality, to return to the engendering *experiences* to which symbols give rise. According to Voegelin, reason (*nous*), which he describes as 'the cognitively luminous force'[5], is the force and source of order in the soul/*psyche* of man and in the cosmos. Order pertains, thus, to the structure of reality as experienced and the attunement of man to such an order results in joy. If soul connotes man's depths, spirit denotes man's openness to this divine Logos. 'By spirit we understand the openness of man to the divine ground of his existence: by estrangement from the spirit, the closure and the revolt against the ground'[6]. For Aristotle, this yearning, desiring, longing, quest(ion)ing after the Ground is the beginning of all philosophy. Plato's philosophy sounds a more erotic note and envisages a turning, in loving search, to the Ground, from spiritual desolation to the spiritual consolation of the sun, which is his metaphor for the Good. The choice: turning toward the Ground (*epistrophe*) or a turning away from the Ground (*apostrophe*) – perhaps a catastrophe. In so far as man participates in the divine drama of being, in the dialectic of desire, truth (*aletheia*) becomes luminous and existence too. Such symbols of open existence are 'God, man, the divine origin of the cosmos and the divine Logos permeating its order'[7].

---

[5] Eric Voegelin, 'Reason: The Classic Experience', *Published Essays 1966-1985,* vol. 12, p. 265.

[6] Eric Voegelin, 'The German University and German Society', ibid., p. 7; see also ibid., p. 21.

[7] Eric Voegelin, 'On Henry James's *Turn of the Screw*', *Published Essays 1966-1985*, vol. 12, p. 151.

St. Thomas Aquinas likewise stresses the 'in between' structure of our existence in the world. 'Man is placed between the realities of this world, where his life unfolds, and the spiritual goods, where eternal beatitude is to be found. The more he leans to one side the further he distances himself from the other, and vice versa'[8]. In accord with the famous Augustinian adage that our heart are restless until they rest in God, Thomas similarly observes: '… as regards the calming of the restless desire: for he does not perfectly rejoice, who is not satisfied with the object of his joy. Now, peace demands these two conditions: that we be not disturbed by external things, and that our desires rest altogether in one object. Wherefore, after charity and joy, peace is given in the third place'[9].

What we have in Freud, by contrast, is the notion of unconscious desire. Freudian psychoanalysis is explicitly *archaeological* in its orientation. It operates at the level of an archaeological axis, drawing us back to our origins (*arche*). Paul Ricoeur notes: 'Man is the only being who is subject to his childhood. He is that being whose childhood constantly draws him backwards'[10]. However, there is also, according to Ricoeur, an implicit teleology in Freudian psychoanalysis in that there is a thrust into the future with the notion of the 'end' (*telos*) in view, whereby the patient has overcome some symptoms and can better love and work. What is altogether lacking within the Freudian perspective, according to Ricoeur,[11] is an eschatology of the sacred. The sacred calls on us from on High. This insight is identical, though expressed differently, to Voegelin's insistence on the sacral dimension of human existence. And to omit this dimension is to offer a vision or perspective or theory or methodology that is limited, partial, restrictive, reductive. So I am arguing for a dialectic of desire – one that does justice to both axes, to the archaeological and the eschatological, to this double dynamism of desire, even if this work explicitly emphasises the latter dimension. I have concentrated on the former in another work[12]. But more, it is my Christian contention that the divine reality desires to communicate with the creature and that it is possible, with the help of St. Ignatius of Loyola, to discover and discern this divine desire (this will be the focus of the penultimate chapter).

---

[8] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae q. 108 a.4; cited by Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 2, *Spiritual Master*, p. 249.
[9] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae q. 70 a.3; cited by Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 2, *Spiritual Master*, p. 219.
[10] Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 110.
[11] See Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations* and *Freud and Philosophy*.
[12] See Stephen J. Costello, *Hermeneutics and the Psychoanalysis of Religion*.

The human being is viatoric – on the way, a pilgrim questing and questioning and wondering, restless and desirous. Our desires are metonymical, always deferred, distant, directed to the One who alone can fulfil them. As Voegelin describes it: man

> 'is moved by God to ask the questions that will lead him toward the cause (*arche*) of being. The search itself is the evidence of existential unrest; in the act of questioning, man's experience of his tension (*tasis*) toward the divine ground breaks forth in the word of inquiry as a prayer for the Word of the answer. Question and answer are intimately related one toward the other; the search moves in the *metaxy*, as Plato has called it, in the In-Between of poverty and wealth, of human and divine; the question is knowing, but its knowledge is yet the trembling of a question that may reach the true answer or miss it. This luminous search in which the finding of the true answer depends on asking the true question, and the asking of the true question on the spiritual apprehension of the true answer, is the life of reason'[13].

To put it in Pascalian terms, we can say that we search for what we have already found. What is a unique characteristic of man is the 'unrest of wondering … feeling moved or drawn – the desire to escape ignorance'[14]. By contrast, the derailment or disease of the spirit is a closure to this divine Ground; it is, in short, what Voegelin calls the 'decapitation of God', the rejection of the transcendental *realissimum*, as the source of order in self, society and history. What has marked and marred modernity, in the main, according to a Voegelinian analysis, is the immanentisation of the eschaton, to use Voeglelin's felicitous and famous phrase from his *The New Science of Politics*, i.e., the desire to reduce the transcendent reality to a mere psychic phenomenon. This is an egophanic revolt, one that is Gnostic through and through. For Voegelin, the psyche is the sensorium of transcendence just as man is a participant in the drama of being, in the lasting and passing of existence. Attunement to the flow of (divine) presence occurs when man hearkens to that which is lasting in being and listens attentively to the still, small, silent voices of conscience and grace in human existence. This leads to a radical reorientation in man; it may be symbolised as the Platonic *periagoge* or as Christian conversion. And the mundane becomes mystical. Man then lives in partnership with God, who is the true source of his order. It is a passionate response to revelation, to an act of gratuitous grace. Participation becomes heightened into

[13] Eric Voegelin, 'The Gospel and Culture', *Published Essays 1966-1985*, vol. 12, p. 175.
[14] Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, p. xiv.

attunement to the divine order of being, to what is enduring, and the soul is thus 'open' in the Bergsonian sense. Man is in search of this Ground, of this God in Hellas (classic philosophy) just as God goes in search of man in Israel. As one philosopher puts it: 'The pneumatic element is displayed in the eroticism of the Socratic soul as it strives toward the divine *Sophon* as the fulfilment of its limitless desire'[15].

This search for the Ground is conducted in the depths and heights of consciousness; it seeks to uncover the ultimate reality of being. For both Aristotle and Aquinas (albeit differently) we *naturally* desire the Ground. And it is philosophy which illuminates with intelligence the loving search of the divine Ground. In *Order and History*, Voegelin speaks of philosophy as 'the love of being through love of the divine Being as the source of its order'[16]. The core and constitutive aspect of man's existence is his immortalising participation through reason in the divine *Nous*. For Aristotle, the *Nous* is the divine element shared by both God and man. We have had thousands of years of the codification of man's experiences of this divine Being. History is a trail of His absent presence; everywhere there are traces of transcendence. Noetically, we experience this as the actualising *Nous*, pneumatically we experience this as the attracting/drawing Divinity. *The Republic* and the *Laws* and the Gospel of John concur so. We tend and attend to the divine reality. We remain in the flow, in the 'in between' of the luminosity of existence, in which eternity is, nonetheless, present. In the flow the trans-temporal eternal Being is felt – what Voegelin calls, in *Anamnesis*, the 'flowing present' of the Eternal. As Anaximander put it: 'The origin of things (*arche*) is the *Aperion* (the depth)'[17].

There is no final or ultimate Answer to the Question other than the Mystery – all answers confront their limit in the Mystery of Reality whose meaning becomes more luminous in the very act and art of questioning. Voegelin's main principles come from the inquiry itself and may be summarised with Sandoz as follows[18]:

1: Participation: the principle of participation is central to noetic existence. We participate in the reality of which we are but a part, ontologically symbolised by man, God, world and society, which together form a quarternarian structure of being. Participation is our perspective on reality; Voegelin supplants the subject-object/ consciousness/world dichotomy with the Platonic metaxological in-between participatory aspect

[15] Ellis Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution*, p. 153.
[16] Eric Voegelin, *Order and History*, vol. I, p. xiv.
[17] Ellis Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution*, p. 193.
[18] See ibid., pp. 204-16.

of our being/experience/existence. This participation tends in the direction, in the pull of super-eminent reality – God (or any other names that symbolically designate divinity, or the Ground of being). They have been experienced and expressed in various modes or modalities: the Platonic vision of the Good (*Agathon*) and the love of wisdom (*sophia*); the Heraclitean Logos; Pauline faith, hope and love; the Aristotelian immortalising quest; the Augustinian *amor Dei*; the Anselmian faith in search of understanding. There is, thus, a fundamental tension – such is the nature of the In-Between, in which we participate. Reality is metaxological; it is also hierarchical; participation is layered upon ascending grades of greater reality and participation, from the physical to the spiritual, rational and divine. This is mirrored in the hierarchical structure/order of man's *psyche*/consciousness, whose highest nature is *nous*. The Question is constant in the experience of reality: one formulation of it is Leibniz's, re-asked by Heidegger: 'why are there things at all rather than no things?' The Question gives rise to the quest, and the quest seeks the Ground of things (the depth), the God who is the Beginning and the Beyond (the end), the Alpha and the Omega; our pilgrim's progress points toward eschatological fulfilment and finality in the Parousia[19].

2: Differentiation: Answers to the Question are not all the same; some possess more force, are superior in their perception and penetration, in their luminosity, completeness and compactness. This is achieved through the principle of differentiation, which designates a developmental process in the structures of consciousness/reality experienced/symbolised. For example, myth is less differentiated than philosophy and revelation, the latter symbolic forms articulating greater profundity of the Whole. This process of differentiation is the exclusive source of knowledge of reality/consciousness (the knowledge attained through noetic science). Man is a participant in the process; he is not a stoical spectator, rather, he is a passionate participator in the personal, social and historical dimensions of human experience/existence. If 'differentiation' is attained through openness to the Ground, 'contraction', by contrast, connotes closure to the Ground. There are counter-movements within consciousness; these may be described as revolt, rebellion, reduction, bad faith, metastatic faith, magic, deformation, derailment, defection from reality, alienation, egophany, refusal to apperceive, contempt for reality. Any of these occur when the insights as symbolised are perverted, dogmatised, doctrinalised, obscured through systems or torn from their

[19] See E. F. Schumacher's classic, *A Guide for the Perplexed*.

experiential contexts for obfuscatory purposes. Scholasticism is one such example, so named by Voegelin.

3: Experience-symbolisation: For Voegelin, experience is not primarily the perception of external objects but the apperception of the processes of the participatory reality of consciousness in tension to the Ground. Experience engenders symbolisms. Experience-symbolism forms a unit. The search for the Ground and its symbolisation of experience stresses the ontic perspective of luminous participation. The principle of equivalence arises from the fact that the same reality is intended by varied symbolisms as the trail of history from Stone Age petroglyphs to Platonic dialogues to the philosophising of a Bergson. Aristotle recognised the equivalence of the insights symbolised in myth to those symbolised in philosophy. So that for Aristotle, the lover of myth, the *philomythos* is at the same time a lover of wisdom, a *philosophos*.

4: Reason: For Voegelin, it is reason that is the core constituent of man. Man is a rational animal – a *zoon noetikon* or *homo sapiens*, as a being who possesses *nous*, to give it an Aristotelian flavour. Reason is at the heart of noetic science and is *the* principle of science. It is the highest principle shared by both man and the divine Being. Reason is both a structure (of man's participation in the *metaxy* and the tension toward the divine Ground of being) and a process. 'Its content is attunement to the truth of reality experienced, which manifests itself in personal, social, and historical order and in resistance to disorder in the several dimensions of human existence'[20]. We are restless wanderers pulled toward the super-eminent reality that stirs man to wondering; it is experienced as an attraction to higher reality. Man's *nous* responds to the divine *Nous* or Ground. The classical experiences are the theophanies of Moses and Paul and their decisive responses to the divine disclosure. This unrest is joyful; it is the beginning of the theophanic event as noetic consciousness (the sensorium of transcendence, as we said) opens to the Ground. We may tentatively venture a Voegelinian definition of *eudaimonia* here: it would be man's participation in the theophany, his attunement to the flowing presence of the Divine Ground of Being, and the corresponding ordering of his life in its personal, social and historical dimensions, accordingly. Man's joy is not 'this-worldly'[21]; its ultimate source is other-worldly, trans-mundane. Man's desire seeks its fulfilment in absolute Love. Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, to list the three transcendental properties of being, are three names for God, and three paths that lead to Him. Their presence is an indicator that the flow of divine presence is at work in the world and

[20] Ellis Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution*, p. 211.
[21] Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, p. 84.

in ourselves. One of Karl Rahner, S.J's major works in theology deals precisely with this theme – *Geist in Welt* (*Spirit in the World*). For this German Jesuit, grace is God's self-disclosure, His self-communication to His creatures. Similarly, for Bernard Lonergan, S.J. (and sometimes Lonergan and Rahner are together classified as 'transcendental Thomists'), the transcendental precepts of being attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, and loving are ways by which we seek God and ways that God is present to us too. I attend to myself, the other and God in that I try to sense the Spirit at work. My faith searches to understand; it is intelligible, like the universe. We seek the Truth with our intellects. Faith is reasonable and rational; we are responsible in that we *respond* to the Divine call or promptings (or choose not to), to everyday epiphanies, seeking God in all things and all things in God, as St. Ignatius would have it. We search for God as Cause and Call. And we love; we commit, we endure all things in the light of the divine Ground of being. In so doing, we partake in the Divine Love/Life that characterises God as triune, as a communion of Love.

For Voegelin, the source of order in human existence is rooted in experiences of transcendence, in the attunement to divine Reality; this involves getting 'in tune' with God. 'Song is existence', as Rilke said. It is a uni-*verse*. Psyche is the substance of society and social or societal order depends on the order of the individual soul. Political order is achieved by the attunement of the citizen's soul to the divine Ground of existence. This is the cardinal insight of Voegelin, an insight that has been expressed by prophets, mystics, saints and sages of all times and by the philosophers of the past. To be created in the image and likeness of God is to be ordered to the divine Ground; it involves an *amor Dei* rather than an *amor sui*, an openness rather than closure to the Ground of all. We participate in the divine *Logos* by way of the divine *Nous* that dwells in all of us – such is the life of self-transcending reason. What is of primary importance are experiences of the Transcendent; doctrines and dogmas are secondary; they are hypostasised ideas. According to Voegelin, we have lost the immediate encounter with the transcendent, what Voegelin calls the 'truth of existence'[22]. The task is to make radiant once again the symbols of the divine-human relation/encounter/meeting (not merging). Such is the 'order of love', of which Voegelin speaks. And what love desires is immortality[23]. When we partake of the divine being/substance we become

[22] Michael Morissey, 'Voegelin, Religious Experience, and Immortality', *The Politics of the Soul*, p. 14.

[23] See Miguel de Unamuno's passionate poetic philosophy as summarising this desire for personal immortality in his *The Tragic Sense of Life*.

theomorphic. The theomorphism of the soul is the principle of all order originating in the cosmos. The experience of divine Reality occurs in the psyche of man, the psyche that exists in the *metaxy*, in tension toward the Ground. The psyche is the sensorium for divine Reality and the site of its luminous presence.

Voegelin's whole aim is to return to the experiences and symbols which give rise to second-order constructions, the mediaeval paradigm of which is St. Thomas Aquinas' scholastic metaphysics, but which is erected on the basis of an animating mysticism[24].

We began this chapter by citing some lines from the Christian poet, T. S. Eliot. Voegelin's philosophical symbol of 'the flow of presence' is precisely the divine Presence of which Eliot writes, symbolised in his immortal words: 'the point of intersection of the timeless with time'. Man is the meeting place of both body and soul, of the visible and the invisible, of time and timelessness, 'The visible reminder of Invisible Light', as Eliot puts it. His *Four Quartets* is the spiritual autobiography of a Christian soul, a metaphysical poem which is, at once, a meditation and incantation, as Voegelin describes it[25]. If we are open to divine reality,

> 'every point of presence is as T. S. Eliot formulated it, a point of intersection of time with the timeless. This is the point of presence. Thus, the whole series of time would not be a series on a line at all but a series of present points in which none is ever past, but only past in relation to their present, not really past. Ontologically, really, it is always in relation to the presence, which is the same presence that constitutes my present here and now. On this conception of a divine presence, which is the presence in every present point on the line…'[26].

The Presence is the presence of the divine Ground. The transcendent Being is the cause of all the beings in the world, the Ground of all other being. 'There is one real being, the eminent being that is divine being in the Beyond'[27]. There is no immanent being without transcendent being. Voegelin calls this Ground of being 'a nonexistent reality'[28]. It is real yet nonexistent. By nonexistent Voegelin means that the divine Being does

---

[24] See Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 2, *Spiritual Master* and Robert Barron, *Thomas Aquinas: Spiritual Master*. Both books attempt to engage with Thomas' spirituality.
[25] Eric Voegelin, 'Notes on T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*', *The Drama of Humanity and Other Miscellaneous Papers 1939-1985,* vol. 33, p. 34.
[26] Eric Voegelin, 'The Drama of Humanity', ibid., p. 181.
[27] Ibid., p. 212.
[28] Ibid.

not have the mode of existence in time and space. To speak of this Being, one has to draw on a different logic, for example, on the Thomistic analogy of being (*analogia entis*). Aristotle had developed terms to describe the searching part, the *zetesis*, that is, searching and being moved toward the search and *kinesis*, coming from the divine side (in Christianity it is called grace). And when consciousness is the site where transcendence and immanence meet we speak of the *metaxy*, or the In-Between. We live in this In-Between, and if we are open, we live in the flow of presence, 'which is neither time nor the timeless, but the flow in which time and the timeless meet. That is the time in which we exist. In this flow of presence, in-between, that is where all the [concerns] of man are transacted'[29]. Reason attracts man (this is Aristotelian *kinesis*, without which nobody would search for anything). *Phronesis*, as conceptualised by Aristotle, is the virtue of practical wisdom, the virtue needed to persevere in the search. We exist in a state of existential tension and unrest, in the flux and flow of presence, from which springs the desire to know or, what Voegelin simply calls '*the attraction*'[30]. The 'indelible presence' of the divine[31] is the moving factor in the soul and world at large, which Plato calls the *parousia*.

We have been saying that the notion of the 'in-between' was first articulated by Plato as the *metaxy* and re-interpreted by Voegelin for modern times. But there have been other thinkers who have drawn on or developed this concept – philosophers such as Buber and the psychoanalyst, Donald Winnicott. Let us briefly look at equivalent concepts in Buber and Winnicott, by way of bringing the thought of Voegelin into dialogue with other contemporary thinkers on this crucial concept of the *metaxy* and, thus, into fuller focus.

Buber: The Between

At the beginning of his book, *Between Man and Man*, Martin Buber observes that man is a sojourner not 'in one of the highest storeys, but not in one of the lower, either, rather in the respectable middle'[32]. At the end of the book, Buber is more explicit; he calls the sphere of communication between one man and another 'the sphere of "between"'[33]. For Buber, it is a primal category of human reality. So Buber locates the relation between

[29] Ibid., pp. 213-4.
[30] Eric Voegelin, 'Conversations with Eric Voegelin', ibid., p. 264.
[31] Eric Voegelin, 'Structures of Consciousness', ibid., p. 367.
[32] Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, p. 151.
[33] Ibid., p. 241.

human beings neither in their solitary souls nor in the world but *in between* them. He notes: '"Between" is not an auxiliary construction, but the real place and bearer of what happens between men'[34]. It is where men meet with one another; it is neither an outer event nor an inner impression – it is the space between beings which permits real dialogue to take place as 'deep calls unto deep' and the 'I-Thou' relationship is formed and forged. For man is 'the eternal meeting of the One with the Other'[35].

Buber places the locus of truth not in the subject nor in the object but in the space or realm or category of 'the between' – what Plato had termed the 'metaxy'. For Buber, all authentic living is meeting in the *metaxy*. It is not a centripetal movement to and from the self as source; it is, rather, a centrifugal movement of exodus and expectation and only in the space between does the 'I' make contact with the Other as 'Thou'. Dialogue becomes the *sine qua non* of all human/personal existence.

Winnicott: Transitional Space

I would like briefly to look at the work of D. W. Winnicott, in particular at his notion of 'transitional space', which bears striking resemblance to the *metaxy*, in order to give one example of what I contend is an 'equivalence', in the Voegelinian sense. But first, these lines by John Donne, with their obvious Winnicottian affinities and echoes.

'Where, like a pillow on a bed,
A pregnant bank swelled up to rest
The violet's reclining head,
Sat we two, one another's best.
Our hands were firmly cemented
With a fast balm, which thence did spring.
Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread
Our eyes upon one double string;
So to intergraft our hands, as yet
Was all our means to make us one;
And pictures in our eyes to get
Was all our propagation.
As 'twixt two equal armies, Fate
Suspends uncertain victory,
Our souls (which to advance their state, were gone out)
hung 'twixt her and me'.

John Donne, *The Ecstasy*

[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., p. 244.

'I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I
Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned till then,
But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the seven sleepers den?
'Twas so; But this, all pleasures fancies be.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desired and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

And now good morrow to our waking souls,
Which watch not one another out of fear;
For love all love of other sights controls,
And makes one little room an everwhere.
Let sea-diacoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown,
Let us possess one world; each hath one, and is one.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;
Where can we find two better hemispheres
Without sharp North, without declining West?
Whatever dies was not mixed equally;
If our two loves be one, or thou and I
Love so alike that none do slacken, none can die'.

John Donne, *The Good-Morrow*

In *Playing and Reality* D. W. Winnicott offers the world the view that true creativity and play takes place in the (potential) space between one subject (person) and another one – what he terms the 'transitional space'. This intermediate area or arena first found recognition 'in the work of the philosophers'[36], according to Winnicott, though he does not cite whom he has in mind, and in the 'so-called metaphysical poets (Donne, etc.)'[37]. His own work and distinctive approach to this phenomenon derives from his study of babies and children, with whom he worked as a paediatrician first and as a psychoanalyst later.

He introduces the terms 'transitional space' and 'transitional phenomena' to designate these intermediate areas of experience, like the baby's cloth. The intermediate area is between what is subjectively and objectively perceived; it is in direct continuity with the child 'lost' in play. 'Transitional objects and transitional phenomena belong to the realm of illusion'[38]. This intermediate area of experience constitutes the greater part

[36] Donald Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, p. xv.
[37] Ibid., p. xvi.
[38] Ibid., p. 19.

of the infant's experience and is retained throughout life 'in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work'[39].

Playing takes place in the 'potential space' between the baby and its mother; it is not the inner world or actual (external) reality. Play, for Winnicott, is a therapeutic and always creative experience. 'The precariousness of play belongs to the fact that it is always on the theoretical line between the subjective and that which is objectively perceived'[40]. To reiterate: the area of playing is not in inner psychic reality; it is outside the individual but it is not in the external world. Winnicott is making a direct development and link from transitional phenomena to playing, and from playing to cultural experiences in general. Only in playing is the child or adult free to be creative, perhaps. Winnicott makes two further points: it is only in playing that an individual discovers the self, and only in playing is communication possible. Tagore, the Indian poet, painter and polymath, once penned these beautiful lines that resonate with Winnicott's researches: 'On the seashore of endless worlds, children play'.

Winnicott takes issue with the Jungian terms of 'introvert' and 'extravert'; 'No longer are we either introvert or extrovert [sic]. We experience life in the area of transitional phenomena, in the exciting interweave of subjectivity and objective observation, and in an area that is intermediate between the inner reality of the individual and the shared reality of the world that is external to individuals'[41]. This is the 'third area', of culture and creativity, which begins with a child at play. Playing 'leads on naturally to cultural experience and indeed forms its foundation'[42].

---

[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., p. 68.
[41] Ibid., p. 86.
[42] Ibid., p. 143. For introductions to the thought of Voegelin, see the following: Barry Cooper, *Eric Voegelin and the Foundation of Modern Political Science*, Michael P. Federici, *Eric Voegelin: The Restoration of Order*, Thomas Heilke, *Eric Voegelin: In Quest of Reality*, Glenn Hughes (ed.), *The Politics of the Soul: Eric Voegelin on Religious Experience*, Peter Petrakis and Cecil Eubancks (eds.), *Eric Voegelin's Dialogue with the Postmoderns*, Ellis Sandoz, *The Voegelinian Revolution: A Biographical Introduction* and *Eric Voegelin's Significance for the Modern Mind*, and Eugene Webb, *Eric Voegelin: Philosopher of History*. For a philosophical account of the 'in-between' and 'desire' from a largely Platonic-Augustinian perspective, see the pioneering work of the Irish philosopher, William Desmond (1990, 1995, 2001 and 2008 in particular). For interesting parallels to the

So, though Winnicott's interests and concerns are hugely different from Voegelin's, it is interesting to note, *en passant*, interesting parallels between the two thinkers on this extremely important notion of the 'in-between', conceptualised by Voegelin as the *metaxy* and by Winnicott as the 'transitional space'. However, both of them would concur, no doubt, that it is a creative space from which is produced a poetics of the possible, thus enabling more creative and spiritual ways of being in the world.

Arguably the best known part of Voegelin's work by non-Voegelinians is his critique of the mass movements of modernity which he accuses of being Gnostic and so in the next chapter we explore this critique. We must make the point, however, that later on in his work Voegelin would severely attenuate the term and to some extent at least it has become dated in the Voegelin literature on the subject. That said, the main thrust of his critique still retains salient features that are apposite for our particular meditative enquiry and exploration. It is only after this critique has been made that an affirmation can be mounted and the true nature of the religious sense of life restored, which is the aim we will set ourselves in the chapters that follow.

'flow' in contemporary psychology, see the work of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990).

CHAPTER TWO

FAITH VERSUS GNOSIS: A CRITIQUE OF THE NEW AGE

I struck the board and cried, 'No more;
I will abroad!
What? Shall I ever sigh and pine?
My lines and life are free, free as the road,
Loose as the wind, as large as store.
Shall I be still in suit?
Have I no harvest but a thorn
To let me blood, and not restore
What I have lost with cordial fruit?
Sure there was wine
Before my sighs did dry it; there was corn
Before my tears did drown it.
Is the year only lost to me?
Have I no bays to crown it,
No flowers, no garlands gay? All blasted?
All wasted?
Not so, my heart, but there is fruit,
And thou hast hands.
Recover all thy sigh-blown age
On double pleasures: leave thy cold dispute
Of what is fit and not. Forsake thy cage,
Thy rope of sands,
Which petty thoughts have made, and made to thee
Good cable, to enforce and draw,
And be thy law,
While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.
Away! Take heed;
I will abroad.
Call in thy death's-head there; tie up thy fears.
He that forbears
To suit and serve his need,
Deserves his load'.
But as I raved and grew more fierce and wild
At every word,
Methought I heard one calling, *Child*!
And I replied, *My Lord*.

George Herbert, *The Collar*

Introduction

This chapter attempts, firstly, to set out succinctly the core beliefs of the so-called 'New Age', which are proving to be culturally ubiquitous, paying particular attention, in the debate, to the conflict between faith versus *gnosis* or knowledge. I will argue that the New Age may be regarded as a form of Gnosticism and will offer a robust critique of the Gnostic New Age, drawing on some of the important contributions that

Voegelin made to this enquiry. We shall see how the popular pseudo-psychologies have misappropriated and misused some of the central tenets of the Classical school and of Christianity for their own particular purposes. As we said in the preceding chapter, Voegelin's critique of the age of modernity is somewhat severe. There have been other less censorious accounts which have attempted to balance the positive and problematic aspects of modern philosophy, such as Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (2007) and David Walsh's *The Modern Philosophical Revolution* (2008). That said, the broad brushstrokes of Voegelin's analysis still stand.

Voegelin on Gnosticism

Voegelin's critique of Gnosticism is, perhaps, the best known of his entire *oeuvre*. Especially in his *The New Science of Politics* and *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, he offers a sustained philosophical critique of Gnosticism in its myriad manifestations and modern guises.

Gnosticism is a symbolic form as old as the Christian era itself. Joachim of Fiore, a twelfth-century Calabrian monk, gave civilisation a three-stage periodisation of history; he divided history into the Ages of Father, Son and Spirit. He was the forerunner of the Third Realm's constructions in Condorcet, Comte, Marx, Lenin, and Hitler. In *The New Science of Politics*, Voegelin analyses modern Gnosticism, arguing that that it has been dedicated to the hubristic attempt to overcome all earthly anxieties by building a terrestrial, intra-mundane paradise. Voegelin appeals to us to reorient our priorities and accomplish the *periagoge* urged by Plato in his Parable of the Cave in the *Republic*. Philosophy, in the Platonic sense, is the love of the divine *sophon*. 'The truth of the soul would be achieved through its loving orientation toward the *sophon*'[1]. Platonic *eros* is oriented toward the *kalon* and *sophon* and the *agathon* and *dike* – the virtue of the right ordering of the forces of the soul. The life of

[1] Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, p. 63.