Regaining the Balance: An Augustinian Response to Eric Voegelin

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Introduction

Walsh: Voegelin inattentive to historical person of Christ.

Eric Voegelin's treatment of Christianity is notoriously problematic. David Walsh writes that "a problem within Voegelin's . . . work . . . is the problem of Voegelin's understanding of Christianity, and more broadly, of revelation." He goes on to note the "incompleteness and unsatisfactory quality of Voegelin's treatment of Christianity."[1] Three areas of concern emerge in the literature on Voegelin. First, there are those who find him to be inattentive to—or even unconcerned about—the historical person of Christ. Reflecting on Voegelin's treatment of Christianity in *The Ecumenic Age*, Gerhart Niemeyer notes that Christianity

> was born from amazement about a particular person Jesus, his deeds, teachings, and such claims as that men in order to gain their lives must lose them for his sake, that it will be he whom men will face in the ultimate judgment, that there will be a new covenant with God in his blood, that he would die to free humanity from sin, that he alone had full knowledge of the Father. Christian theology . . . stems . . . from the question which Jesus himself put: 'Who do you say I am?'[2]

But Voegelin, Niemeyer goes on to say, does not consider the historicity of Christ a relevant question. In fact "Voegelin's exegesis

[1] David Walsh, Book Review, *Review of Politics*, vol. 57, no. 1, Winter 1995, 134.

[2] Gerhart Niemeyer, "Eric Voegelin's Philosophy and the Drama of Mankind," *Modern Age*, Winter 1976, 35.

of St. Paul would not have to be changed if one removed Jesus Christ from it altogether."[3]

Expressing the same concern but in a somewhat more caustic tone, Frederick Wilhelmsen writes:

> Reality does not count for Professor Voegelin. The very question, hence, of the historicity of Christ and of His resurrection, of the Easter we Christians celebrate as the central feast of our Faith, annoys Voegelin: he finds it vulgar. In fact only fundamentalists, for Voegelin, are worried about whether the empty tomb on the third day was really empty after all. Whether Christ arose in deed or arose from the dead only in Paul's experience of a deed that occurred only in Paul is an irrelevant distinction for the German professor. . . . But, Dr. Voegelin, 'if Christ be not risen'—in the words of the same Paul—then I for one don't give a damn about Paul's experience of him.[4]

Douglass: Voegelin distorts meaning of Christian salvation.

The second area of concern focuses upon what some take to be Voegelin's inadequate treatment of Christian soteriology. Bruce Douglass does not believe that Voegelin "neglects the historical Jesus in the way Niemeyer suggests."[5] His concern, though, centers on Voegelin's understanding of salvation. "[W]hat is missing is the sense of the Gospel *in the specifically Christian sense*."[6] Voegelin's view of salvation is "more the attainment of meaning than the restoration of a broken relationship with God or the creation of a 'new man.'" This, Douglass believes, represents a serious distortion of the Gospel, for "if the Gospel means anything in the New Testament, it is that a new power is at work in the life of the believer."[7]

In commenting on Voegelin's letter to Alfred Schutz, in which Voegelin explains "why I as a philosopher am not inclined to throw Christianity overboard," Walsh notes that "[t]aken together Voegelin's reasons for not jettisoning Christianity provide an im-

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[3] *Ibid.*, 35. In spite of his criticism of Voegelin's treatment of Christianity, Niemeyer devotes an entire article to the task of showing that Voegelin was sympathetic to the Christian faith, a sort of mystic who identified himself as a "pre-Nicaean Christian." Gerhart Niemeyer, "Christian Faith, and Religion, in Eric Voegelin's Work," *Review of Politics*, 57.1 (1995): 91-104.

[4] Frederick Wilhelmsen, *Christianity and Political Philosophy* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1978), 203.

[5] Bruce Douglass, "A Diminished Gospel: A Critique of Voegelin's Interpretation of Christianity," *Eric Voegelin's Search for Order in History*, ed. Stephen A. McKnight (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 145.

[6] *Ibid.*, 146. Italics in the original.

[7] *Ibid.*, 146-47.

pressive justification of the Christian spiritual and intellectual tradition. They include everything with the single exception of what is most important: the story of Christ's representative suffering and death to redeem fallen humanity."[8] While puzzled with the obvious "incompleteness" of Voegelin's treatment of Christianity, Walsh is reluctant to accuse Voegelin, a thinker of "evident spiritual sensitivity," of failing "to grasp the full implications of the Christian experience."[9] Instead he elects to leave the question open for further study with the hope that further insight can eventually be gained.

Morrissey: Voegelin rejects orthodox interpretation of the Incarnation.

Third, where Douglass and Walsh find Voegelin's Christology in large part unobjectionable, Michael Morrissey believes that Voegelin's Christ is quite other than the Incarnate God of orthodox Christianity. Regarding the identity of Christ, he writes: "Voegelin rejects the orthodox interpretation of Christ as the eternally preexistent Son of God incarnated only in Jesus . . . [instead] . . . Voegelin's view is based on the notion of Jesus' union with God as unique in degree but not in kind."[10] I will suggest that these three areas of concern—historicity, soteriology, and Christology—are fundamentally related. This connection will become obvious as we proceed.

For Voegelin, reality of existence a mutual participation of human and divine.

In order properly to situate this inquiry, it is necessary first briefly to discuss Voegelin's notion of *metaxy*, the In-Between in which the unfolding of human consciousness occurs, for a proper understanding of Voegelin's thought—and thus his understanding of Christianity—must begin with this all-important symbol. Taking his cue from the Anaximandrian fragment and several Platonic dialogues (especially the *Symposium* and the *Philebus*), Voegelin envisions human conscious existence as a participatory (*metaleptic*) event that differentiates within the questing of human *nous* toward the divine ground of being. But this movement is not unidirectional, for the "reality of existence, as experienced in the movement, is a mutual participation (*methexis, metalepsis*) of human and divine . . . ."[11] Furthermore, and creating an extraordinary philo-

[8] David Walsh, "Voegelin's Response to the Disorder of the Age," *Review of Politics*, 46 (1984): 282.

[9] *Ibid*., 285.

[10] Michael P. Morrissey, *Consciousness and Transcendence: The Theology of Eric Voegelin* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994) 242-43.

[11] Eric Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture," *The Collected Works of Eric*

sophical complexity, "the language symbols expressing the movement are not invented by an observer who does not participate in the movement but are engendered in the event of participation itself."[12] Thus, there exists, by virtue of human conscious existence, an epistemological uncertainty that makes indubitable noetic foundations unattainable.[13] The fact that human existence is uncertain, though, is surprisingly revealing, for the fact of uncertainty implies an awareness of the possibility of ignorance, which in turn opens the door to the possibility of truth. In other words, the fact that human minds are capable of identifying the categories of ignorance and knowledge implies a certain degree of knowledge, but the fact that ignorance is a live possibility also implies the tenuous and uncertain stance human consciousness takes toward knowledge. This In-Between characteristic of human existence pertains to those elements most fundamental to reality: knowledge, time, perfection, and life itself. Thus, *metaxic* existence is "in the In-Between of ignorance and knowledge, of time and timelessness, of imperfection and perfection, of hope and fulfill-

Mankind's metaxic *existence is "in the In-Between of ignorance and knowledge."*

Voegelin, vol. 12, *Published Essays 1966-1985*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 187.

[12] *Ibid*., 187. In his introduction to *Israel and Revelation* Voegelin expands on this fact of human conscious existence. "The perspective of participation must be understood in the fullness of its disturbing quality. It does not mean that man, more or less comfortably located in the landscape of being, can look around and take stock of what he sees as far as he can see it. Such a metaphor, or comparable variation on the theme of the limitations of human knowledge, would destroy the paradoxical character of the situation. It would suggest a self-contained spectator, in possession of and with knowledge of his faculties, at the center of a horizon of being, even though the horizon were restricted. But man is not a self-contained spectator. He is an actor, playing a part in the drama of being and, through the brute facts of his existence, committed to play it without knowing what it is . . . . Participation in being, however, is not a partial involvement of man; he is engaged with the whole of his existence, for participation is existence itself. There is no vantage point outside existence from which its meaning can be viewed and a course of action charted according to a plan, nor is there a blessed island to which man can withdraw in order to recapture his self. The role of existence must be played in uncertainty of its meaning, as an adventure of decision on the edge of freedom and necessity" (*Order and History*, I, [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956], 1). See also *Order and History*, IV, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), 314.

[13] This is not to say that such indubitable foundations have not been sought. For example, Voegelin notes that "Descartes has deformed the movement by reifying its partners into objects for an Archimedean observer outside the search." "The Gospel and Culture," 176-77.

ment, and ultimately of life and death."[14] Human existence, for Voegelin, lies between these opposing nodes; thus, the "metaxy is the domain of human knowledge. The proper method of its investigation that remains aware of the In-Between status of things is called 'dialectics'; while the improper hypostasis of In-Between things into the One or the Unlimited is the characteristic defect of the speculative method that is called 'eristics'."[15]

For Voegelin, proper method of studying life in the metaxy *is "dialectics."*

For those not content with the painstaking noetic gains achieved through dialectics, the uncertainty of existence in the *metaxy* is disconcerting and can produce abortive attempts to consummate the *metaxy* by forcing the transcendent node into the realm of the immanent, for only if reality is so reduced can human understanding pretend to know reality with certainty. This rebellion against *metaxic* existence is driven by an (understandable) desire for "a stronger certainty about the meaning of existence."[16] But, ironically, in an attempt to dominate reality by immanentizing it, this "pneumopathological" movement in actuality so distorts reality that the pseudo-knowledge gained from the deformation is not of reality at all but a metastatic counterfeit that ultimately produces disorder in the souls of those who stage such revolts against reality.

Attempts to immanentize the transcendent distort reality.

In his *Ecumenic Age* Voegelin accuses St. Paul of moving into such a deformation when, in the wake of his vision of the resurrected Christ, he "moves from participation in divine reality to the anticipation of a state of perfection."[17] Was St. Paul guilty of such

[14] "The Gospel and Culture," 176. In "Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History" Voegelin writes: "Existence has the structure of the In-Between, of the Platonic *metaxy*, and if anything is constant in the history of mankind it is the language of tension between life and death, immortality and mortality, perfection and imperfection, time and timelessness, between order and disorder, truth and untruth, sense and senselessness of existence; between *amor Dei* and *amor sui*, *l'ame ouverte* and *l'ame close*; between the virtues of openness toward the ground of being such as faith, love and hope, and the vices of infolding closure such as hybris and revolt; between the moods of joy and despair; and alienation in its double meaning of alienation from the world and alienation from God" (119-20). For another shorter description of the various elements constituting the *metaxy*, see "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme: A Meditation," 360. Both essays are published in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 12, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989).

[15] *Order and History*, IV, 184-85.

[16] *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc, 1997), 74.

[17] *Order and History*, IV, 247.

a perversion? Was he overcome with such enthusiasm for the *parousia* that he upset the delicate *metaxic* balance? In what follows I will attempt to respond to Voegelin from an Augustinian point of view. In so doing, I will argue that (1) Voegelin downplays the central symbol of the Anaximander fragment, which is cosmic justice, and (2) fails to appreciate how the Fall fundamentally shifted the balance within the *metaxy*; and thus, (3) for him, restriking the balance of consciousness is not nearly as radical an undertaking as described by Augustine (and St. Paul), which (4) leads to his unsatisfactory treatments of the historicity of Christ, soteriology, and Christology. I will argue that, ultimately, Voegelin fails to recognize the possibilities of *metaxic* consummation opened up by the incarnation and resurrection.

I. Anaximander's Fragment and Cosmic Justice

Voegelin looks back to the sixth century B.C. philosopher Anaximander of Miletus for an early description of the concept of *metaxy*. He gives his rendition of Anaximander's understanding of reality as follows:

> The origin (*arche*) of things is the Apeiron . . . . It is necessary for things to perish into that from which they were born; for they pay one another penalty for their injustice (*adikia*) according to the ordinance of Time.[18]

This version of Anaximander's thought is a combination from two sources. The first clause is from Theophrastus, who paraphrases Anaximander's views. The rest is Voegelin's translation of the only surviving fragment of Anaximander's writing. McKirahan translates the fragment as follows:

> The things that are perish into the things out of which they come to be, according to necessity, for they pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice in accordance with the ordering of time, as he says in rather poetical language.[19]

Obviously the final clause indicates that the fragment is not entirely comprised of Anaximander's words, and there is some controversy regarding the proper distinction between Anaximander

[18] *Ibid*., 174. Voegelin's rendering of the passage is essentially identical in *Order and History*, II, 305-06.

[19] Richard D. McKirahan, Jr., *Philosophy Before Socrates* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994) 43. This fragment is reported in Simplicius' *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*.

and his commentator.[20] It is apparent that Voegelin, in combining the two statements, is seeking to place the concept of *apeiron* as *arche* into the symbolic context of time, justice, and necessity, which are the central features of the Anaximandrian fragment. It should be noted that these symbols are not present in Theophrastus' version of Anaximander's thought from which Voegelin takes the clause regarding the *apeiron* and *arche*. That account is primarily a refutation of Thales' cosmology, which claimed that water was the source of all things and reads as follows:

> Of those who declared that the ARCHE is one, moving and APEIRON, Anaximander . . . said that the APEIRON was the ARCHE and element of things that are, and he was the first to introduce this name for the ARCHE. (In addition he said that motion is eternal, in which it occurs that the heavens come to be.) He says that the ARCHE is neither water nor any other of the things called elements, but some other nature which is APEIRON, out of which come to be all the heavens and the worlds in them. This is eternal and ageless and surrounds all the worlds.[21]

Voegelin attributes to Anaximander the concept that "the poles of being were Apeiron *and Time.*

By combining the two sources Voegelin can conclude that for Anaximander "the poles of being were *Apeiron* and Time. The *Apeiron* was the inexhaustibly creative ground (arche) that released 'things' into being and received them back when they perished; while Time with its ordinance was the limiting pole of existence."[22] But at least one commentator finds no reason to link the concept of *apeiron* with the process of perishing and coming into being described in Anaximander's fragment. McKirahan writes: "the process here described seems to have nothing to do with the APEIRON but can easily apply to the opposites hot and cold, which we have seen are important in the beginning of the world and which are also important in the present state of things."[23] Thus, since opposites "perish into the things out of which they come to be," hot perishes (turns into) cold and vice versa; light perishes into dark and vice versa; storms perish into fair weather, and fair weather turns to rain; hunger perishes into satiation, exhaustion into rest, and life into death. Indeed, when

[20] For a discussion of this matter see C. Kahn, *Anaximander and the Origins of Greek Cosmology* (New York, 1960), 168-78, 193-96.

[21] McKirahan, 33-34.

[22] *Order and History*, IV, 185. For Voegelin's discussion of *apeiron* as *arche* in Anaximander, see *Order and History*, IV, 174ff.

[23] McKirahan, 43-44.

read without the Voegelinian addition, the passage does appear quite clearly to refer to the interaction of opposites succeeding one another in a temporal exchange that is governed by certain laws. Thus, if the passage stands alone without the addition of the concept of *apeiron*, and if by adding the concept of *apeiron* the fundamental meaning of the fragment is altered, hermeneutical caution counsels against the addition.

Anaximander's fragment does not mention the apeiron.

What does this matter? With the Voegelinian addition of the symbol *apeiron*, the symbol of the *metaxy* is visible if not completely differentiated, for *apeiron* is that which is boundless or unlimited. According to Voegelin it is the "inexhaustibly creative ground (*arche*) that released 'things' into being and received them back when they perished."[24] But standing alone, the fragment does not speak of an unlimited ground of being but rather an awareness of the fundamental repetition within reality. The repetitious reality is timebound and governed by necessity which seems to be tied fundamentally to an undifferentiated notion of cosmic justice. Governing the entire process is an underlying realization that the *cosmos* is one in which injustice regularly occurs, and such injustices demand retribution which, Anaximander is confident, will be meted out according to a proper ordering of things within time.[25] Thus, two points must be stressed. First, the symbol of the

[24] *Order and History*, IV, 185.

[25] Regarding Anaximander's understanding of 'justice' McKirahan writes the following: "A notable feature of the fragment is its legal language: 'pay penalty and retribution,' 'injustice,' and 'the ordering of time' (as if time plays the role of a judge assessing penalties in criminal trials). The legal language may strike us as no more than a colorful metaphor, but that response reveals our distance from Anaximander. To assume that it is a metaphor presupposes a radical difference between the world of nature (where injustice and the like are not really found) and the world of nature (where they are): humankind is somehow distinct from nature, and the two realms operate according to different principles. This interpretation, though congenial to those who hold that social, moral, and evaluative language applies only in the human sphere, is inappropriate for Anaximander and other presocratics, who place humans squarely in the natural world. The injustice which hot commits on cold is the same kind as that which a robber commits on a victim—taking something which is by right not its own—and the penalty assessed by a judge according to the law is of the same sort as that assessed by time according to necessity—restoration of what was taken and payment of an additional amount as a fine. In Greek, DIKE ("justice") and its opposite have descriptive as well as evaluative force. Descriptively, injustice is taking something not one's own; evaluatively it is bad. This evaluation applies to all acts that, descriptively, are unjust, regardless of the nature of the agent. Further, the idea that justice or retribution comes inevitably accords with a view of justice expressed

Anaximander's central symbol is cosmic justice, not the metaxy.

metaxy does not receive adequate differentiation in Anaximander's fragment. This implies that this basic symbol itself has been subject to an historical process of differentiation.[26] Second, central to the Anaximandrian fragment is the notion of cosmic justice, which implies both a realization that injustice and justice exist and a confidence that justice will eventually prevail. Thus, even if the symbol of the *metaxy* is vaguely visible in Anaximander's conception of reality, the central and explicit symbol within the fragment is the inevitability of cosmic justice.[27]

Standing roughly contemporaneous with Anaximander's writing is the Hebrew Wisdom Literature.[28] The third chapter of *Ecclesiastes* contains a detailed list of opposites that comprise human life. Each element has its proper place and replaces its opposite, much like Anaximander wrote "in accordance with the ordering of time."

> There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven:
> a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,
> a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,
> a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,
> a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,

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by other authors of the Archaic period, and the notion that the cosmic principle of justice is fair to the rival contenders is doubtless due to the ideal of justice on which the legal system known to Anaximander was based." McKirahan, 45.

[26] This, of course, serves to make any investigation into the symbol of *metaxy* even more complex, for if, as Voegelin claims, the "metaxy is the domain of human knowledge," then a differentiating *metaxy* represents a changing field of knowledge investigated by noetic beings themselves subjected to that changing field.

[27] Anaximander is not the only pre-Socratic to allude to some form of cosmic justice governing the natural world. For example Heraclitus writes that "[t]he sun will not overstep his measures; otherwise, the Erinyes, ministers of Justice, will find him out" 10.91 (94) McKirahan, 125. With the foregoing discussion in place, it is important to note that Anaximander is quoted by others as holding that the *apeiron* is the *arche* of all existing things. In other words, by focusing upon Anaximander's fragment, the central concepts appear to be cycles of opposites and the necessity of cosmic justice.

[28] I am not suggesting a linear and causal progression from Anaximander to the Hebrew author of Ecclesiastes; instead, I am merely pointing out how the same symbol has become increasingly differentiated in history.

a time to embrace and a time to refrain,
a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,
a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.[29]

Author of Ecclesiastes differentiates God as arbiter of justice.

What distinguishes Anaximander's fragment from the Wisdom Literature is the monotheism that is clearly differentiated within the Hebrew writings. This is made fully apparent in terms of justice, for in Anaximander's account injustice is repaid according to the ordering of time, while in Ecclesiastes, justice is brought about at a certain undetermined time by God:

> And I saw something else under the sun: In the place of judgment—wickedness was there, in the place of justice—wickedness was there. I thought in my heart, 'God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed.'[30]

The cyclical relationship of opposites remains a central element, but while for Anaximander justice seems to consist in the act of opposites replacing one another, thus constituting the cycle of opposites itself, the Hebrew writer recognizes God as standing outside the cycle of opposites and ensuring that justice is eventually accomplished. This is not to say that the Hebrew writer is conceiving of some day of judgment after death, for he writes: "All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?"[31]

In the next section I will first turn to Plato, in whose work the symbol of *metaxy* receives explicit articulation. I will then turn to St. Augustine who, although he does not employ the symbol of the *metaxy*, sees an ontological contingency that both Plato and Voegelin articulate.

[29] Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (Unless otherwise noted all Biblical references are taken from *The New International Version*).

[30] Ecclesiastes 3:16-17.

[31] Ecclesiastes 3:20-21.

II. Ontological Suspension: The Contingency of Existence

For Voegelin, the human nous *seeks divine ground of being in response to pull of the divine* nous.

Voegelin focuses much of his attention upon Plato as the thinker who first explicitly conceived of the symbol of the *metaxy*. Capitalizing on this Platonic concept, Voegelin describes the differentiation of human consciousness as consisting of the participatory (*metaleptic*) reality of *metaxic* existence as human *nous* seeks out the divine ground of being in response to the divine drawing of the *nous*. He relies heavily upon Plato's *Symposium*, which primarily develops the concept of noetic (or epistemological) *metaxy* in which humans are between knowledge and ignorance. Plato writes:

> No god is a philosopher or seeker after wisdom, for he is wise already; nor does any one else who is wise seek after wisdom. Neither do the ignorant seek after wisdom. For herein is the evil of ignorance, that he who is neither good nor wise is nevertheless satisfied: he feels no want, and has therefore no desire. But who then . . . are the lovers of wisdom, if they are neither the wise nor the foolish? . . . [T]hey are those who, like Love, are in a mean [*metaxy*] between the two.[32]

Furthermore, because man is neither purely divine nor purely mortal (for the two categories correspond to wisdom and ignorance), Voegelin writes that "[m]an experiences himself as tending beyond his human imperfection toward the perfection of the divine ground that moves him."[33]

Besides noetic field, there exist other metaxic *fields, one of which is ontological.*

In addition to the noetic field, there exist other *metaxic* fields, one of which is ontological. At several points in the *Republic* Plato discusses God and the Good. These discussions will help in focussing our inquiry upon the ontological contingency of the cosmos and thus develop the idea of the ontological *metaxy*. To begin we must first turn to Book II of the *Republic*, in which the conversation turns to God. The discussion is occasioned by Socrates' claim that the poets must be forced to refrain from telling lies about matters of great concern. The poets created stories that included references to gods who behaved much like humans. In many cases their actions were repulsive. Socrates asserts that such stories will only serve to induce similar actions in humans; thus, in order to prevent such deplorable acts "God is always to be represented as

[32] Plato, *Symposium*, 204a, trans. B. Jowett.

[33] "Reason: The Classic Experience," published in *Anamnesis*, trans. and ed. by Gerhart Niemeyer (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978), 103.

he truly is."[34] Following this declaration we find a discussion of God "as he truly is." First, God is always good.[35] That is, He is not the cause of evil. All that He produces is necessarily good because it is absurd to claim that something that is completely good could be the source of anything but good. Second, God is perfect.[36] This being the case He must also be immutable, since that which is perfect cannot change, because to change would be to move away from perfection. And that which is perfect, by definition, cannot become less perfect because to possess the capacity to become less perfect is itself an imperfection. Thus, "he remains absolutely and forever in his own form."[37] God is simple; that is, He is not a conglomeration of particulars. He is, instead, a single unity. He is one. In addition, we see that He abides forever in His own form. Thus, God is the perfect source of all good and an eternal, unchanging One. God is a form, *the* form that is the source of all good.

The analogy of the cave in Book VII presents us with a powerful description of the Good and man's relationship to it. After exiting the cave, one can, after some time, see the sun. The sun, of course, is the Form of the Good. It illuminates all else and makes the forms intelligible.[38] Once a person comprehends that it is the Form of the Good that is the source of all knowledge, "he will reason that the sun [the Good] is he who gives the seasons and the years, and is the guardian of all that is in the visible world, and in a certain way the cause of all things which he and his fellows have been accustomed to behold."[39] Here we have a brief, though important, articulation of the attributes of the Good. It has causal properties. It causes the seasons, and furthermore, it is the cause of all visible things. Second, it is a guardian or governor of the visible world. We do not get the sense that Plato's conception of the Good is a personal being, but he clearly indicates that we ought to attempt to know the Good; although, whether or not he

[34] Plato, *Republic*, trans. B. Jowett, 379a.

[35] *Ibid*., 379b. For an interesting parallel treatment of the attributes of God from a specifically Christian viewpoint, see Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Contra Gentiles*, Bk. I.

[36] *Ibid*., 381b.

[37] *Ibid*., 381c.

[38] See Analogy of the Sun (508a-509d).

[39] *Ibid*., 516c.

believes it can know us is left for us to speculate. But this knowing is not simple or automatic. In explicating the analogy of the cave, Socrates declares that

> My opinion is that in the world of knowledge the idea of good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and the lord of light in this world, and the source of truth and reason in the other: this is the first great cause which he who would act rationally either in public or private life must behold.[40]

For Plato, both God and the Good are the cause of the ongoing existence of all that exists.

Again we see the causal and governing properties of the Good. Here, though, we get a clearer picture of the true extent of its causal influence: it is the cause of "all things beautiful and right." In the discussion above we saw that God is the cause of all good. Socrates claims that "the good only is to be attributed to him."[41] Of course, in terms of ontology, existence itself is a good; thus, all existing things are good to the degree that they share in the Good. And because all existents necessarily share in the Good by virtue of existence, all existents are ontologically dependent upon the Good. Thus, both God and the Good are claimed to be the source of everything good. They converge here as the source: the causal force required for the ongoing existence of any existing thing. As Augustine puts it, "this Sovereign Good, according to Plato, is God."[42]

Augustine, like Plato, argues that God is not only the source of all being but the sustainer as well. He clearly articulates this ontological suspension when he writes that God's

> hidden power, penetrating all things by its presence, yet free from contamination, gives existence to whatever in any way exists, in so far as it exists at all. For the absence of God's creative activity would not merely mean that a thing would be different in some particular way; it simply could not exist. . . . And if he were to withdraw what we might call his 'constructive power' from existing things, they would cease to exist, just as they did not exist before they were made.[43]

Here Augustine makes it unambiguously clear that in his view God is not merely the creator of the cosmos, but more completely,

[40] *Ibid*., 517c.

[41] *Ibid*., 379c.

[42] Augustine, *City of God*, trans. by Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), VIII, 8 (311).

[43] *City of God*, XII, 26 (p. 506).

he is the necessary being by which all existing things are sustained in their existence. God is the ontological foundation of all being, and He continuously infuses the cosmos with the sustaining power of His Divine Being.

Ontological dyads of metaxy *are Absolute Existence and its opposite, non-existence.*

It appears that we are justified in conceiving the *metaxy* as a variegated field comprised of at least noetic and ontological dyads. While the noetic insight is crucial, it is equally important that the ontological features of the *metaxy* are not neglected. Human existence is dependent upon Absolute Being, which Plato called the Good and which Augustine identified as God.[44] The nodes of this formulation of the *metaxy*, then, are Absolute Existence and its opposite, non-existence. In the words of Augustine, "to this highest existence [God], from which all things that are derive their existence, the only contrary nature is the non-existent. Non-existence is obviously contrary to the existent."[45] Noetically, humans are participants in an epistemological *metaxy* and thus can recognize that they are, in Plato's words, "neither mortal nor immortal." That is, the fact that humans can recognize the difference between the mortal and the immortal, between the finite and the infinite, indicates that they are somehow different from the brutes. Awareness of the possibility of ignorance indicates the presence of some knowledge. In the same way, an awareness of the reality of death, of finiteness, indicates the awareness of the infinite. In the words of the Hebrew poet, "the living know that they will die."[46] But the fact that this noetic realization can be attained indicates that "He [God] has also set eternity in the hearts of men."[47] Thus, ontological suspension is a crucial element for a fully differentiated understanding of the *metaxy*.[48] In the next section we will turn to Augustine's view of the Fall and explore how that event reveals further *metaxic* differentiation while at the same time creating extraordinary tension within the *metaxy*.

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[44] Aristotle called this sustainer the "unmoved mover" (*Metaphysics*, Bk. XII, 1072b 5-17).

[45] *City of God*, XII, 2 (p. 473).

[46] Ecclesiastes 9:5.

[47] Ecclesiastes 3:11.

[48] Voegelin acknowledges the reality of the ontological *metaxy* when he writes: "The emergence of a cosmos existing in precarious balance on the edge of emergence from nothing and return to nothing must be acknowledged, therefore, as lying at the center of the primary experience of the cosmos" (*Order and History*, IV, 73).

III. Further Differentiation and Heightened Tension

The Fall from original grace is presented in the Myth of the Garden in the third chapter of Genesis. The man, in an act of will, which was perfectly free, chose to rebel against the transcendent One. The man and woman, representative of all humanity, willfully chose to violate that which had been commanded. The immoral act was preceded by an immoral decision of will, for will logically precedes free action.[49] The result was death—not immediate physical death—but ultimate spiritual death. From this highly compact description, further *metaxic* dyads emerge: existential, volitional, axiological. The ontological dyad, already discussed at some length in the previous section, did not escape the effects of the Fall. Because the ontological is logically prior to the others, I will turn to it first and deal with subsequent dyads in turn.

St. Augustine's treatment of the consequences of the Fall in his *City of God* will help to clarify these further differentiations within the *metaxy*. First, the Fall was an ontologically significant event, for while man remained obedient, his being participated perfectly in the Divine Being so that non-being was not a live possibility. All that changed in the wake of human rebellion:

> Yet man did not fall away to the extent of losing all being; but when he had turned towards himself his being was less real than when he adhered to him who exists in a supreme degree. And so, to abandon God and to exist in oneself, that is to please oneself, is not immediately to lose all being; but it is to come nearer to nothingness.[50]

Before the Fall humans enjoyed stable ontological tendency toward Being.

Because they are created beings, humans are necessarily ontologically contingent upon another non-contingent One. As long as they remained oriented toward the divine source of Being, their own being enjoyed a stable ontological orientation that tended toward Being. But the Fall produced a change in that divine orientation because "he had turned toward himself." Thus, by willfully separating his being from divine Being, man became "less real"—ontologically less substantial. The Fall produced a reorientation from Being to non-being within the ontological dyad.

But this reorientation had definite existential implications, for it is now the case that "from the moment a man begins to exist in this body which is destined to die, he is involved all the time in a

[49] See *City of God*, XIV, 13 (p. 572).
[50] *City of God*, XIV, 13 (p. 572).

process whose end is death."[51] Death, according to the Genesis myth, was not the original human *telos*; instead, it was presented as the condition of disobedience: "for when you eat of it you will surely die." Thus, as St. Paul writes: ". . . sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin. . . ."[52] Man's participation within the existential dyad of the *metaxy*, between life and death, was, like the ontological dyad, fundamentally reoriented so that rather than a firm hope of life, there is now a permanent threat of death, which ultimately will be realized. Thus, the ontological threat of non-being is ultimately brought to reality in the existential death of each individual.

Disobedience turned human telos *from firm hope of life to the certainty of existential death.*

But, as we have seen, the ontological and existential reorientations were a direct result of an act of volition. A disregard of God and an attempt to acquire ultimate reality apart from Him signals a will that has lost its orientation to the Divine source of all Being. This shift is readily conceptualized in terms of a revolt against the transcendent, which amounts to an attempt to usurp God's place in the cosmos. Because man is finite, this attempted cosmic *coup* is only tenable if all of reality is fundamentally restructured so that the transcendent is no longer the infinite source of Being but rather an immanentized deity that is ultimately the creation of human imagination. Thus, the autonomy of volition is only possible in a world divorced from ontological contingency, but such a world is illusory. The relationship between volition and ontology is clearly revealed when Augustine writes:

> For man's wretchedness is nothing but his own disobedience to himself, so that because he would not do what he could, he now wills to do what he cannot. For in paradise, before his sin, man could not, it is true, do everything; but he could do whatever he wished, just because he did not want to do whatever he could not do. Now, however, as we observe in the offspring of the first man, and as the Bible witnesses, 'man has become like nothingness.' For who can list all the multitude of things that a man wishes to do and cannot, while he is disobedient to himself, that is, while his very mind and even his lower elements, his flesh, do not submit to his will? Even against his volition his mind is often troubled . . . . We should not endure all this against our volition if our natural being were in every way and in every part obedient to our will.[53]

Through the Fall human will became fractured.

[51] *City of God*, XIII, 10 (p. 518).
[52] Paul's Letter to the Romans 5:12
[53] *City of God*, XIV, 15 (p. 575-6).

Thus, with the reorientation of the will, and the corresponding ontological unmooring, the volitional *metaxic* dyad, between freedom and necessity, is pushed toward the node of necessity, for the "choice of the will, then, is genuinely free only when it is not subservient to faults and sins. God gave it that true freedom, and now that it has been lost, through its own fault, it can be restored only by him who has the power to give it at the beginning."[54]

Perfect participation in the eternal law replaced by continuous struggle.

But while the impetus for the volitional act was the assertion of the immanent self in place of the transcendent God, the content of the act was axiological, for creation was originally good, but the act of revolt was morally evil. The symbolism of shame in nakedness reveals a basic truth of human existence: moral knowledge produces moral culpability, for without such knowledge, there is no shame, but once such knowledge is acquired, moral guilt is inevitable. Thus, the two nodes of the axiological dyad are the perfectly moral and the immoral. Human participation in morality is between these two nodes. Due to the volitional act of rebellion, not only was man's ontological (and thus, existential) participation in the *metaxy* fundamentally reoriented, but too, his participation within the axiological In-Between was shifted from perfect participation in the eternal law to a struggle against opposing inclinations. In this regard, St. Paul laments: "I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind [*nous*] and making me a prisoner of the law of sin."[55]

Human noetic capacity rendered inadequate to restore balance of consciousness.

But, if the *metaxy* suffered radical reorientation due to the Fall, then we must not fail to include the noetic dyad in this unfortunate event. Suspended between perfect knowledge and absolute ignorance, the noetic dyad, which once enjoyed a stable orientation toward knowledge, now finds itself in a constant struggle between the opposing nodes. St. Paul speaks of this as a "war against the law of my mind." If a war is being waged in the noetic field, this immediately throws us into an epistemological crisis, for the reliability of the noetic capacity must now be openly questioned. The least that should be noted at this point is that the noetic capacity—in the wake of the Fall—is woefully inadequate as a foundational principle for the restoration of the balance of consciousness.

[54] *Ibid*., XIV, 11 (p. 569).

[55] Paul's Letter to the Romans 7:23.

To summarize this section, then, in the state of perfection, man's participation in the variegated *metaxy* was oriented toward what, for lack of a better term, might be called the positive nodes of each dyad. That is, while the nodes of each dyad are descriptive, they are also normative. It is self-evident that Being, life, freedom, and good are (or at least ought to be) desired over non-being, death, necessity, and evil. The initial balance was actually a position between actuality (the positive nodes) and possibility (the negative nodes) where actuality enjoyed a stable presence in human existence. In order to experience the actuality of the positive nodes, a proper orientation toward the transcendent must be maintained. But with the Fall that initial and perfect relationship was lost. It would not be an overstatement to say that the entire *metaxy* was thrown into disarray. In the next section I will begin pulling the strands of the argument together by pursuing the logical and existential consequences of the human situation in the unmoored *metaxy*.

Steady human tendency toward positive dyads of metaxy *replaced by oscillation between opposite nodes.*

IV. The Unmoored Metaxy

Returning to Anaximander, I argued that his fragment, taken alone without Voegelin's addition, which imports the symbol of *apeiron*, emphasizes cycles of cosmic justice, which is meted out in due time in accord with unchanging laws. Thus, at the root of Anaximander's conception of reality is the problem of injustice and the underlying belief that such injustices will be rectified. His view of the *cosmos* is fundamentally nomocratic, but the cycles of injustice also imply that the *nomos*, which infuses the *cosmos*, is regularly violated and in need of retribution. The Hebrew writer of the Wisdom Literature brought further differentiation to the problem of cosmic justice by speaking of a sovereign God who is the ultimate arbiter of that justice. Carrying this symbolism further, the Hebrew prophet Jeremiah brought the question of justice from the impersonal and the corporate to the individual. Thus, he writes of a time when "people will no longer say, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' Instead, everyone will die for his own sin; whoever eats sour grapes—his own teeth will be set on edge."[56] With this, an early articulation of ultimate individual culpability emerges. With these

Jeremiah brought question of justice from the impersonal and corporate to the individual.

[56] Jeremiah 31:29-30.

symbols present, the problem of justice becomes disconcertingly personal, for while Anaximander's notion of justice and injustice seemed to be impersonal and cyclical, with the emergence of individual *noesis* and culpability, there is a heightened tension within the variegated *metaxy*: I know that injustice is punished; I am aware that I am unjust (my eyes have been opened); therefore, I will be punished. Thus, the noetic dyad seeks to know ultimate truth, but the knowledge that is acquired consists of the fact that injustice will be punished. This knowledge immediately sends shock waves over the entire variegated *metaxy*: Only gods are immortal, and gods are morally perfect. But I am not morally perfect; thus, I am not immortal. Further, I recognize that perfection is only obtained when the will is perfectly obedient to the Divine *nous*, but I know from experience that such obedience will never happen perfectly. Thus, I will never be immortal. Further, since only God is ontologically non-contingent, and my existential duration is contingent upon His Being, and since injustice will be repaid according to Divine justice, my existence will necessarily return to non-existence as due payment for my injustices. As Augustine writes: "Therefore it was a just punishment that followed, and the condemnation was of such a kind that man who would have become spiritual even in his flesh, by observing the command, became carnal even in his mind; and he who in his pride had pleased himself was by God's justice handed over to himself."[57]

Fallen man's nous *cannot of own accord regain orientation toward divine ground.*

The Fall produced an unmooring within the *metaxic* field that destabilized man's existence in reference to God and himself. Instead of tending toward the positive node of each dyad, man tends simultaneously toward both nodes—he is at war within himself. Thus, human *nous* can never of its own accord regain that orientation which was lost. In other words, if the symbol of the Fall accurately reflects reality, then the implications are simply awe inspiring. How can *noesis* be secured if human *nous* tends toward both knowledge and ignorance? How can one gain immortality when one tends toward both Being and non-being? How can the will to know the Divine Ground of Being be sustained when that will tends toward both freedom and necessity? Of what use is knowledge if death is inevitable and imminent? How can one distin-

[57] *City of God*, XIV, 15 (pp. 574-75).

guish the *agathon* from evil if the axiological field is at least partially drawn toward evil?

Due to the unmooring of all the elements within the *metaxy*, there is no fixed star by which to chart a return to the pre-Fall condition that was rooted firmly in the Divine Being. The possibility of certain knowledge is thwarted by a fractured will that longs for stability. But the stability that is too often grasped is the false knowledge grounded in a retreat into either necessity or radical freedom. This false move is readily seen in two strands of modern thought: First, materialistic philosophies seek to reduce all reality to the motion of atoms governed by the laws of physics and thereby reduce all human acts to chemical or environmental antecedents. These philosophical moves are essentially attempts to dominate the noetic field by reducing the inexplicable (e.g. human consciousness and its corresponding awareness of *metaxic* dissonance) to a mechanistic and predictable, though very truncated, world. Second, existential philosophy asserts that human existence precedes essence and thus human freedom is the radical agent of creation. In this view human will is radically autonomous, but to be so, any conception of an ontological support (which implies limits) must be either ignored or destroyed. Furthermore, if freedom is the essence of human existence, then all moral truths are ultimately self-created. The axiological field is reduced to one of radical choice with no orientation toward a good external to individual choice. Thus, in both cases, the reality of the transcendent is denied; therefore, a proper re-orientation within the *metaxy* is rendered impossible.

Fractured will seeks comfort in denial of transcendence.

Of course, the mere act of immanentization does not in itself alter reality. But such attempts do provide an intoxicating sense of control, and control in a *cosmos* that has lost its moorings, is desired above all else.[58] So much is this sense of control desired that individuals willingly forfeit logical coherence and epistemological correspondence for the false but certain reality of the purely

[58] Augustine writes: "In fact they would have been better able to be like gods if they had in obedience adhered to the supreme and real ground of their being, if they had not in pride made themselves their own ground. For created gods are gods not in their own true nature but by participation in the true God. By aiming at more, a man is diminished, when he elects to be self-sufficient and defects from the one who is really sufficient for him. This then is the original evil: man regards himself as his own light, and turns away from that light which would make man himself a light if he would set his heart on it" (*City of God*, XIV, 13 [p. 573]).

immanent.[59] It is useful to think of the *metaxic* disorder caused by the Fall in terms of a gravitational field, which seeks to pull the *metaxic* dyads toward their immanent nodes. The gravity of immanentization, then, woos human consciousness toward its coveted harbor of certainty only to dash those who succumb against the relentless rocks of disorder. *Metalepsis* within the *metaxy* becomes a tragic charade, for meaningful participation implies an openness to the other players (in this case God), but within an immanentized *cosmos*, all that remains is a dim recollection that participation is an essential element of human consciousness. Thus, although the immanentizers long for that which was lost, they find themselves unable to attain it, for they have *a priori* cut off the transcendent. Immanentization, then, produces little more than an aching void which is vainly filled by revolution or "meaningful discourse" or whatever therapy is currently in fashion. Thus, *metalepsis*, which symbolizes the mutual participation of the human and the Divine, is reduced to a sort of immanentized onanism that, by virtue of what it is, will never produce that for which all humans long.

How can human consciousness escape the gravitational pull of the immanent? It seems clear that if the diagnosis is significantly more serious than Voegelin believed, then the remedy, too, must be more radical than he would have liked to admit. In the final section I will turn to Voegelin's discussion of St. Paul in *The Ecumenic Age* and show how Paul comprehended the depths of the problem more profoundly than Voegelin and thus could articulate an adequate solution.

V. Christ: History or Myth?

Problematic view of Christianity follows from Voegelin's philosophic assumptions.

Relying primarily upon the chapter in *The Ecumenic Age* entitled "The Pauline Vision of the Resurrected," I will now attempt to show how Voegelin's problematic view of Christianity goes to the very heart of his philosophy. In other words, in light of his philosophical assumptions, he cannot but take such a stance toward Christianity. The question remains, though: Does his answer adequately address the reality of the human condition in light of the reality of cosmic (Divine) justice and the Fall?

[59] See, for example, Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 121ff.

Voegelin notes that Plato and Paul do agree at certain key points: they agree that

> meaning in history is inseparable from the directional movement in reality. . . . They furthermore agree that history is not an empty time-dimension in which things happen at random but rather a process whose meaning is constituted by theophanic events. And finally they agree that the reality of history is metaleptic; it is the In-Between where man responds to the divine presence and divine presence evokes the response of man.[60]

In this light Voegelin equates the Christian "myth" with the Platonic one, both of which break out of the compactness of cosmological myth and constitute a "true story." Thus, the "Platonic myth . . . is . . . an *alethinos logos*, a 'true story,' of the Demiurgic presence of God in man, society, history, and the cosmos."[61] Likewise, but to a superior degree of differentiation, "the tale of death and resurrection is a myth," and a few pages later he speaks of "the Pauline myth of the 'Son of God.'"[62] Voegelin defines myth as "a symbolism engendered by the experience of divine presence in reality."[63] Thus, both the Platonic and Pauline myths symbolize, in varying degrees of differentiation, the reality of the divine as experienced within the consciousness of Plato and of Paul.

Continuing his analysis, Voegelin argues that Plato "preserves the balance of consciousness, but he plays down the unbalancing reality of the theophanic event; his consciousness of the paradox is weighted toward the Anaximandrian mystery of Apeiron and Time" which are constituted by the "rhythm of *genesis* and *phthora* in the cosmos."[64] In other words, Plato's "true tale" preserved the symbols of coming to be and perishing that Voegelin found to be the central symbols in Anaximander's fragment. Paul, on the other hand, "is fascinated by the implications of theophany so strongly that he lets his imagery of a *genesis* without *phthora* interfere with the primary experience of the cosmos."[65] By looking forward to a

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[60] *Order and History*, IV, 242.

[61] *Ibid*., 249.

[62] *Ibid*., 249, 267.

[63] *Ibid*., 249.

[64] *Ibid*., 241. Earlier Voegelin links Plato with Anaximander: "Neither can Plato's analysis of the *metaxy* structure in reality be fully understood, unless the reader is as conscious of the Ionian symbolism in the background as was Plato" (175).

[65] *Ibid*., 241.

transfigurative event in history, Paul deforms the basic experience of history. Thus, according to Paul, "reality is in transition from the Anaximandrian state of *genesis* and *phthora* to the state of *aphtharsia*."[66] But such an expectation is a "metastatic" deformation of truths which emerged originally in Anaximander.[67]

It is at this point that we can begin to pull the argument together. In the first section I showed how Voegelin's importation of the symbol *apeiron* as the *arche* was hermeneutically unjustified and that the central symbolism in Anaximander's fragment is the concept of cosmic justice meted out according to certain universal laws. If that is indeed the case, then Paul's conception of the ultimate consummation of the process of *genesis* and *phthora* is not an unbalancing of the "primary experience of the cosmos" but a further differentiation of the Anaximandrian symbol. Indeed, when we traced the symbol of cosmic justice through the Hebrew Wisdom Literature, the symbol became further articulated with the notion of a just God who was the arbiter of justice. The prophet Jeremiah brought the question of divine justice to the personal level of the individual, its fullest differentiation.

In addition, if the symbol of the Fall actually represents a radical disorientation within the *metaxy*, then we are led to something of a dichotomy. That is, if the awareness of cosmic (later differentiated as Divine) justice is the "primary experience of the cosmos," and if the individual human experience is fundamentally characterized by a disorientation within the *metaxy* as a result of the truths symbolized in the myth of the Fall, then a reorientation can be achieved (1) through regaining the balance of consciousness, as Voegelin suggests, or (2) through a radical act of the Divine that somehow both satisfies the demand for divine justice and at the same time overcomes the consequences of that justice, which is

[66] *Ibid*., 269.

[67] In this regard, John H. Hallowell writes: "Voegelin seems to be saying that only so long as the Gospel mirrors the tension of existence is it the true Gospel. It is not clear to me what his response would be to those who would say that the Gospel is intended to be precisely an answer to this tension, that through the cultivation by the grace of God of the virtues of faith, hope, and charity one might be enabled better to endure the life of tension in the hope that 'when the fever of life is over and our work is done, we may be granted a safe lodging and a holy rest, and peace at the last.' It is not clear if there is any sense in which Voegelin regards the Gospel as 'good news.'" "Existence in Tension: Man in Search of His Humanity," *Eric Voegelin's Search for Order in History*, ed. Stephen A. McKnight (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 123.

metaxic disarray. A third horn can be added to this dilemma making it a trilemma: (3) there is no possibility of a reorientation within the *metaxy*. If this is the case, then human existence is doomed to *metaxic* chaos and the internal dissonance that ensues. If this option is correct, the irony is substantial, for it would seem, then, that the thing for which all humans most long is the very thing they can never attain.

For Voegelin, balance must be maintained (or regained), for imbalance within the *metaxy* represents a distortion of reality. It is the job of the philosopher to preserve this precarious stance.[68]

> The philosopher must be on his guard against such distortion of reality. It becomes his task to preserve the balance between the experienced lastingness and the theophanic events in such a manner that the paradox becomes intelligible as the very structure of existence itself. This task incumbent on the philosopher I shall call the postulate of balance.[69]

But the conscious awareness of imperfection and injustice dwelling within each individual leads to the logical conclusions arrived at in part IV. The argument, it will be recalled, goes as follows: Injustice is eventually punished (Anaximander); I am aware that I am unjust; therefore, I will be punished. But my injustice implies mortality for only gods are immortal, and gods are morally perfect. But I am not morally perfect; thus, I am not immortal. Further, I recognize that perfection is only obtained when the will is perfectly obedient to the Divine *nous*, but I know from experience that such obedience will never happen perfectly. Thus, I will never be immortal. But the implications are even more severe, for if the human *metaxic* existence is fundamentally disoriented such that the opposing nodes of each dyad are actually at war with each other, then it quickly becomes obvious that Voegelin's solution, which entails regaining the balance of consciousness, is simply impossible, for regaining such a balance implies that *nous* is free to restore that balance that was lost. Voegelin believes that (at least) the philosopher is capable of such balancing effort, for he insists that the reason of some is deformed while the reason of others

[68] In his essay "What is Right by Nature," *Anamnesis*, trans. and ed. by Gerhart Niemeyer (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978), Voegelin speaks of the *spoudaios*, the mature man, who possesses *phronesis* and thereby can make proper judgments of right and wrong. Presumably, the philosopher is the *spoudaios*.

[69] *Order and History*, IV, 228.

(philosophers, himself included) is not.[70] Understanding salvation in noetic terms leads him to ignore the symbol of divine justice we have traced to Anaximander and explains why Voegelin fails to speak in terms of sin, justice, and atonement—symbols at the very heart of the Christian faith.

If human nous is subject to unbalancing effects of the Fall, it cannot restore the lost balance.

It is important to point out that Voegelin rejects any notion of autonomous self-salvation.[71] He emphasizes the two-fold movement of human seeking and divine drawing.[72] But this element of Pelagianism is precisely what Augustine would reject as inadequate. For if the noetic node is subject to the unbalancing effects of the Fall, then we must wonder how the philosopher, or anyone else, can transcend the effects of the Fall in order to achieve the balance necessary for proper existence within the *metaxy*. In other words, if the philosopher employs *nous* to regain the lost balance, and if *nous* is at war with itself, being pulled simultaneously toward knowledge and ignorance, then we must wonder how *nous* is capable of effecting the restoration. Thus, to assert that the balance of consciousness can be regained by an act of *nous* responding to the pull of the divine, implies that the fundamental problem of metaxic chaos (at least in the noetic field) has been overcome. But that is precisely what cannot be claimed in light of the fundamental shift within the *metaxy* that occurred in the wake of the Fall. We can conclude, then, that if the nature of the Fall is as radically disorienting as Augustine (and St. Paul) has suggested, Voegelin's solution fails.[73]

The second alternative for restoring a proper orientation within

[70] "The Gospel and Culture," 178.

[71] *Ibid*., 188.

[72] *Ibid*., 183.

[73] Voegelin articulates his solution concisely: "transfiguring incarnation, in particular, does not begin with Christ, as Paul assumed, but becomes conscious through Christ and Paul's vision as the eschatological *telos* of the transfiguring process that goes on in history before and after Christ and constitutes its meaning" (*Order and History*, IV, 270). Voegelin describes this as "process theology" which "is a matter of developing a symbolic system that seeks to express the relations between consciousness, the transcending intraworldly classes of being, and the world-transcending ground of being, in the language of a process constructed as an immanent one. I incline to believe that the process-theological attempt and its expansion, a metaphysics that interprets the transcendence system of the world as the immanent process of a divine substance, is the only meaningful systematic philosophy." "On the Theory of Consciousness," in *Anamnesis*, trans. and ed. by Gerhart Niemeyer (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978), 26-27. For more discussion of soteriology and Christology see, for example,

the variegated *metaxy* is a radical act of the Divine that somehow both satisfies the demand for divine justice and at the same time overcomes the consequences of that justice, which is non-being. This radical act occurs when God, the *logos*, who, in the beginning, was with God and who was God, became flesh and dwelt among us.[74] In this act of incarnation, the transcendent eternal One emptied himself (*kenosis*) of the fullness of His deity and became man.[75] In so doing He could assume the penalty due according to Divine justice, which we have traced from Anaximander. But being God as well as man, He was also capable of overcoming that which was most opposed to His nature: non-being. Through the resurrection, Christ effected a restoration of Being and infused the *metaxy* with His Divine Being such that a radical reorientation was made possible. Thus, in the death and resurrection of Christ, the *metaxy* is restored to its proper orientation toward the positive nodes. Yet, it is obvious that such a restoration has not yet been consummated, for man is still at war with God and himself. Thus, Paul writes:

God, having become man, could reorient the metaxy *toward His Divine Being.*

> We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. . . . [W]e ourselves . . . [also] . . . groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.[76]

The already and the not yet is the temporal *metaxic* dyad differentiated in Christ's passion. Thus, Paul is anticipating that which has not yet come to fulfillment. But this anticipation does not necessarily imply, as Voegelin claims, that Paul is denying (or at least neglecting) the reality of existence in the *metaxy*. Participation within the *metaxy* is not negated by the anticipation of ultimate consummation. Instead, participation attains its highest differentiation as the *telos* of human existence becomes luminous.

Paul's anticipation of ultimate reorientation does not deny current reality of metaxic *existence.*

The soteriological question, then, ultimately brings us to the question of historicity. Did God become man? Did Christ rise from

"The Gospel and Culture" and "Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme: A Meditation"; also Michael P. Morrissey, *Consciousness and Transcendence: The Theology of Eric Voegelin* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

[74] John 1.

[75] Philippians 2:6-11.

[76] Paul's Letter to the Romans 8:22-25.

For Voegelin, whether the Incarnation and Resurrection are historically real is unimportant.

the dead? These are precisely the types of questions Voegelin dismisses as irrelevant and ultimately dangerous. According to Voegelin, an event is real if it constitutes meaning in history and "if any event in the Metaxy has constituted meaning in history, it is Paul's vision of the Resurrected." But he goes on to clarify the point: "To invent a 'critical history' that will allow us to decide whether Incarnation and Resurrection are 'historically real' turns the structure of reality upside down."[77] In other words, since Paul's vision of the resurrected has served to constitute history, it is beside the point, even damaging, to inquire whether the vision he saw was actually an appearance of the same Jesus who suffered and died at the hands of Pilate. In fact such discussions actually are indicative of what Voegelin terms an "egophanic deformation of history." Thus, "the debate about the 'historicity of Christ' is not concerned with a problem in reality; it rather is a symptom of the modern state of deculturation."[78] This deformation is an attempt by those who are not content with the reality of the *metaxy* (*genesis* followed by *phthora*) to escape that existence by postulating its termination. Thus, "the 'history' of the egophanic thinkers does not unfold in the Metaxy, i.e., in the flux of divine presence, but in the Pauline Time of the Tale that has a beginning and an end."[79]

The question of Christ's identity is crucial.

But as we saw with the second alternative above, the radical nature of the problem necessitates a radical solution, and that solution, according to that alternative, is the historic Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection of the God-Man Jesus Christ. Thus, if it is the case that the first alternative is insufficient to restore the orientation within the *metaxy*, and the second alternative requires an actual historic event in which the transcendent pierces the immanent and in meeting the demands of justice restores the immanent to a proper orientation with the Itself, then the obvious question is none other than one that has been asked for two-thousand years: Who is this Jesus? Thus, the soteriological question leads us to the question of history, and the question of history brings us now to the question of Christology.

In terms of our trilemma, if it is the case that the first option is closed due to the reality of cosmic justice and the radical nature of

[77] *Order and History*, IV, 243.
[78] *Ibid*., 265.
[79] *Ibid*., 269.

the Fall, then we must, indeed, consider the question of the historical identity of Christ. For if the first horn of the trilemma is a dead end, there are still two viable possibilities: If Christ truly was God incarnated, and if He did somehow satisfy the demands of cosmic justice with His death, and if He did, through that event, provide for the reorientation of human existence within the *metaxy*, then Paul's anticipation of ultimate consummation was entirely warranted; but if Jesus was not all of these things, and if he did not accomplish what Christians claim he did, then cosmic justice, the *phthora* of non-being, will be meted out to each person, in the words of Anaximander, "according to necessity . . . in accordance with the ordering of time" and without any "on going transfiguration" which "restores the balance of consciousness" as Voegelin hopes. Thus, *the* question around which all other questions must necessarily turn is the very one Voegelin is reluctant to entertain: Who is Jesus? But, if the line of argument I have developed is correct, Voegelin's is the one option that is simply inadequate. And, in light of cosmic justice and the damaging effects of the Fall, we must consider whether the old story of a God becoming man and dying so that men may live is, indeed, rooted in historic events or merely a soothing tale repeated through the centuries as a lullaby to a strangely uneasy race.