

Science, Politics and Gnosticism: Two Essays. By Eric Voegelin, (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1968).

Utopia: The Perennial Heresy. By Thomas Molnar, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967).

The history of political thought has largely been an eternal contest between two schools of thought that differ fundamentally on the nature of man, society and politics. It is conflict between those who "imagine the world to suit their policy, and those who arrange their policy to suit the realities of the world."¹ In response to the current intensity of the utopian drive for predominance in political thinking and practice, a number of thoughtful studies have been produced within the last decade upon the nature and origins of utopian thought. The two books considered in this review can be looked upon as largely complementary, for they offer perhaps the most cogent, lucid, and successful analysis of utopian or ideological thought of this generation. Few books have equalled Voegelin's attempt to expose the logical and philosophical errors that are inherent in the utopian schematic structures.

"Realism and utopianism," writes Molnar, "are two different ways of appraising the human condition, and they will remain in conflict until the end of time."² Utopianism, though, is not to be regarded as a mere naive wish-fulfillment, but as a positive evil. It is an evil, Molnar maintains, because it leads men to commit evil. Utopianism enslaves the mind while simultaneously unfettering it from a decent regard for moral norms. Finding himself unjustly born into a world of imperfection, the utopian condemns its ills and faults not so much on moral grounds as upon ontological grounds. Rising his sights above the seamy reality that he now envisions, he proclaims a world of his own making, uncorrupted by the more distasteful aspects of human life. In his drive to return either to a Rousseauian state of nature or toward some future technological utopia, he finds that no evil is too abhorrent for him to commit in pursuit of his objectives. The very act of violence will be a redemptive force, cleansing the society of its evil and corruption. Any barbarous act will be condoned as long as the end is good.

At the roots of utopian thought, notes Molnar, there is a defiance of God. The utopian secularizes religious terminology. His ideological objective is to achieve by political power and revolution the Christian promise of eternal peace and happiness here on earth. His pride is unlimited and he yearns for enormous power. Full of the righteous hubris of a Savonarola, he assumes that his ideology is a sort of afflatus which has given him justification to manipulate and shape mankind's fate.

His thinking is one-dimensional. Rather than considering the complex configuration of events that history and existing political

¹ Albert Sorel, *L'Europe et la Revolution Francaise*, cited by E. H. Carr in his *Twenty Years Crisis: 1919-1939*, Harper Torchbooks (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 11.

² Molnar, p. 226.

facts have presented him, he transforms all into a single ideological system which has all the worst aspects of the principle of *numerus unius exclusio alterius*. While all political theory is guilty of enumerating some facts while excluding others, utopianism deliberately selects those facts which support its case, while excluding the others which would not be so beneficial to its viewpoint. As Molnar notes, the utopian "is able to fit data into a Procrustean bed of his desires."³ Possessed with this intellectual approach, they transform in their ideological pronouncements the nature of man into something that would be compatible with their visions of the perfect society. Thus, they become involved in an inevitable contradiction. Although they may speak of unrestrained freedom in their future society, they must so organize freedom that they would "turn it into slavery."⁴

While Molnar's book is a highly readable and engaging critique of utopian thought, Eric Voegelin's work is the product of over two decades of scholarly research and analysis of utopian, or gnostic movements, as he prefers to call them. Voegelin's value as an analyst of utopian thought is further enhanced by the fact that he is currently one of the few living political philosophers writing today. Voegelin, though, is not nearly as readable as Molnar. Indeed, he is an intellectual challenge to even the most erudite of scholars. He deliberately obscures the thesis of his work under awesome mounds of scholarship and technical historical references. Few students of political thought have the intellectual dexterity necessary to follow his thought through all the esoteric Hebraic, Greek and German references.⁵ More concerned with achieving some definition of the political good within modern political philosophy, his arguments against gnosticism are more squarely on philosophical grounds than Molnar's.

Dante Gremino has hailed Voegelin as possibly the "greatest political philosopher of our age and also one of the most underrated."⁶ Although his scholarly output has radically reappraised political philosophy, Voegelin has largely gone unnoticed within academic circles. Among some political scientists there seems to be an almost arrogant pride taken in their ignorance of Voegelin. A case in point would be John Roche, intellectual-in-residence for the Johnson Administration, who remarked recently that he had not read Voegelin's *The New Science of Politics* and did not intend to, because it seemed to be about "someone called Saint Joachim of Flora."⁷ However, Voegelin's failure to receive proper recognition for his work cannot be solely contributed to some "conspiracy of silence" on the part of *academia*. For, indeed, much of Voegelin's work waits still to be translated from its original German. Therefore, it might be expected

³ Molnar, p. 206.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 8.

⁵ It has been suggested to this author in private conversation with Russell Kirk, a noted American political thinker, that Voegelin's apparent obscurantism is due to a habit that he nurtured while living under the Nazi regime. If one's political doctrines are too well known, then he runs the risk of inciting enemies that someday "will get you."

⁶ "Revival of Political Theory," *Journal of Politics*, XXV (August, 1963), pp. 437-460.

⁷ Russell Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things: Observations of Abnormality in Literature and Politics* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1969), p. 264.

that his influence will increase in America as more of his books become available in English.⁸

His latest book, reviewed here, is a continuance of the theme that he established in *The New Science of Politics*. Here he offers a philosophical analysis of contemporary gnostic movements. "By gnostic movements we mean such movements as progressivism, positivism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, communism, fascism, and national socialism." Also included are intellectual movements such as "positivism, neo-positivism, and the variants of psychoanalysis."⁹ He calls these ideological mass-movements gnostic movements primarily due to their similarity with the medieval gnosticism. Noting the common philosophical and psychological outlook of medieval and contemporary gnosticism, he observes that gnosticism is always characterized in a thinker if he believes the world to be an alien place from which he must be delivered. The gnosis is the knowledge of where we were, where we are going, where we have been flung, and how we might be delivered. It is characterized in modern thought by the fact that its aim is the destruction of the old world and the passage into the new.¹⁰

The proper role of political science then must be to "assist in exorcising the demons—in the modest measure of effectiveness that our society grants to *episteme* [the political wisdom] and its therapy."¹¹ His objective, therefore, is to strain the gnostic ideology out of contemporary political philosophy and return philosophy to its proper ontological bearings.

Utopian or gnostic thought has permeated not only contemporary political philosophy, such as Herbert Marcuse or the Marxist theorists, but has also affected the study of history in respect to the recent outgrowth of revisionist historians and theory in international relations. As Molnar and numerous other writers have noted, there are many who when faced with the prospect of a universal holocaust today "would avert it through equalization of atomic power," or "who see universal disarmament as the only answer. No matter which of the two positions prevail, they say, peace can be preserved only by a supranational agency, ultimately world government".¹² Each believes that man through a simple political act can establish peace and happiness, eternal upon this earth. Only the unreasonable or uninformed few prevent Mankind from achieving this humane ideal.

Through their impressive historical and philosophical analysis of utopianism, Voegelin and Molnar have contributed a significant amount to the exorcism of some intellectual demons from political

⁸ The most notable interpretative essays on Voegelin include: Kirk's *Enemies of Permanent Things*, pp. 253-281 and his review of Voegelin's *Orders and History: Volume 1, Israel and Revelation in The Yale Review* (March, 1957), 446-476; Ellis Sandoz, "Eric Voegelin and the Nature of Philosophy," *Modern Age* XIII (Spring, 1969), 152-168 and his review of Voegelin's *Science, Politics and Gnosticism in The Intercollegiate Review*, V (Winter, 1968-69), 117-123; and an uncompleted PhD dissertation at Tulane University by Vincent M. Byrnes entitled "An Analysis of Gnosis as the Symbolic Form of Western Political Consciousness in the Work of Eric Voegelin," which was reported in the *American Political Science Review Newsletter*, 1, (Summer, 1968). Books by Voegelin translated into English include his *The New Science of Politics* (1952), *Order and History: Volume 1, Israel and Revelation* (1956), Volume II: *The World of the Polis* (1957), and Volume III: *Plato and Aristotle* (1952).

⁹ Voegelin, p. 83.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹² Molnar, p. 216.

science. Although, if utopianism is to be exposed generally as the devious intellectual fraud that it is, then Voegelin's and Molnar's works must be regarded as the mere bare beginnings of the struggle against demons and other intellectual freaks.

W. WESLEY McDONALD,
Graduate School of Public Affairs
State University of New York, Albany