Research Article

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Revelation and Philosophy in the Thought of Eric Voegelin

https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2022-0199

received October 31, 2021; accepted February 03, 2022

Abstract: The difference between revelation and natural reason seems to be as obvious as it is indestructible. Despite this conventional view, Eric Voegelin claims that this difference must be “swept aside” and “cleared away” as it obscures the sphere of original meaning and manifestation and posits the divine as an object. According to Voegelin, through recourse to the ancient philosophers Plato and Aristotle, we can discover that there is no natural reason at all but instead: “reason is firmly rooted in revelation.” Obviously, this requires a reinterpretation of revelation. It can neither be equated with the content of the Holy Scripture nor should it be confined to the manifestation of God in Jesus Christ. Rather, claims Voegelin, we ought to think of it as a primordial attraction, a movement drawing into the search for truth and the ground of reality. Such an approach may raise objections and provoke accusations of either subordinating philosophy to theology or misusing the language. As I attempt to show in the article at hand, Voegelin insists on revelation because it designates the original manifestation of the ground, and both faith and philosophical elucidation are two modes of responding to this appearing.

Keywords: revelation, philosophy, Eric Voegelin, divine, manifestation, natural reason

In the beginning of the theological turn, there was a question as simple as it was profound: “Is there, in religious experience, a specific form of phenomenality, of appearance or epiphanic rising, that can affect phenomenology itself in its project, its fundamental concepts, indeed its very methods?”¹ The theological turn has long since exceeded the borders of France; however, it may even be that this theoretical reorientation was preceded by a thinking that went largely unnoticed in spite of its radicality and phenomenological character. This was the case with Eric Voegelin, a thinker conventionally associated with the philosophy of history and politics. Yet, he challenged what seems to be a fundamental determinant of philosophy: the difference between philosophy and revelation. In his thought, revelation became the original mode of manifestation and a constitutive component of philosophising.² In the first part of this article, I present the context in which Voegelin proposes a reorientation of philosophy; I then show how he brings out the revelatory character of Aristotle’s thinking and whether there is a noetic component of religion. Later, two counterarguments are formulated, but instead of refuting them, I try to grasp the meaning of Voegelin’s attempt. Lastly, the issue of the presence of God emerges.

¹ Courtine, “Introduction,” 122.
² In recent years, the concept of revelation has become the subject of numerous philosophical analyses. The following list does not claim to be exhaustive: Desmond, Godsends; Marion, Givenness and Revelation; Marion, The Visible and the Revealed; Mezei, Radical Revelation. A Philosophical Approach; Mezei et al., The Oxford Handbook of Divine Revelation; and Swinburne, Revelation.

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1 Neither natural reason, nor revealed religion

We start with a close reading of The Meditative Origin of the Philosophical Knowledge of Order. This is a short text (which is an advantage for us): it firstly introduces briefly some concepts that are crucial for Voegelin and frames the scope of his thought; secondly, it sets the necessity of overcoming the foundational distinction between reason and revelation as one of the tasks of revitalising philosophy. Voegelin claims that, in order to disclose the original event of truth, one has to work through a number of concepts and patterns of thought that have accumulated over the course of Western history. The first of these would be metaphysics, while another is ontology, followed by epistemology, and the philosophy of value. In short, “we are dealing here with incrustations of realities that have to be swept aside today in order to get back to the realities themselves.”³ Clearly, that which Voegelin has in mind is a great clearance of the modern Western tradition of philosophy, a kind of Abbau. The fundamental assumption is that modern philosophy does not provide access to reality and truth, while it instead obscures the sphere of original meaning and manifestation – it posits the divine as an object and misses its role in the event. However, there is another misunderstanding that perhaps has even more profound consequences:

One of the great historical constructions that has outlived its day, and which must be cleared away, is of a theological nature. It is the theological distinction between natural reason and revelation, which goes back to the Middle Ages. In my view there is neither natural reason nor revelation, neither the one nor the other. Rather we have here a theological misconception of certain real matters that was carried out in the interest of theological systematization.⁴

Essentially, Voegelin’s initial thesis is that the difference between natural reason and revelation – philosophy and faith – is a historical and theoretical construct, and does not pertain to any fixed structure of consciousness or phenomenality itself.

Certainly, such an approach goes against the majority of both old and modern apprehensions concerning the aforementioned distinction. From the theological perspective,⁵ the official position of the Catholic Church stands out (heuristically, due to its reach as well as its unified doctrine and organisation, Catholicism offers the most poignant example) as a papal encyclical Fides et Ratio leaves little room to doubt. Although faith and reason are two wings of the human spirit, and in this sense, they make up the unity of the human search for truth, but regarding method and content, there is an impassable gap between theology and philosophy:

the truth made known to us by Revelation is neither the product nor the consummation of an argument devised by human reason. It appears instead as something gratuitous, which itself stirs thought and seeks acceptance as an expression of love.⁶

And it should be remembered – that the encyclical of John Paul II is only the last document standing as the culmination of a millennial long tradition has already made explicit at both Vatican Councils. In just one

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³ Voegelin, “The Meditative Origin of the Philosophical Knowledge of Order,” 391.
⁴ Ibid., 385–6.
⁵ I must make two remarks. Firstly, there is not one theology but multiple theologies. Secondly, as many scholars have noted, revelation became the explicit topic of theological reflection only in the centuries. Therefore, Avery Dulles counted as much as five models of understanding revelation in the two last centuries: “(1) Revelation is divinely authoritative doctrine inerrantly proposed as God’s word by the Bible or by official church teaching; (2) Revelation is the manifestation of God’s saving power by his great deeds in history; (3) Revelation is the self-manifestation of God by his intimate presence in the depths of the human spirit; (4) Revelation is God’s address to those whom he encounters with his word in Scripture and Christian proclamation; (5) Revelation is a breakthrough to a higher level of consciousness as humanity is drawn to a fuller participation in the divine creativity.” For centuries, philosophy defined itself in the opposition to the first model, but, in fact, despite its diversity, all models bear strong resemblance in that they assert (1) that revealed truth cannot be acquired by the natural capacities of the human, (2) that revelation came in the decisive manner in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, and (3) that it requires a certain response in the form of faith, to name only a few. All these assumptions are challenged by Voegelin (Dulles, Models of Revelation, 115).
⁶ John Paul II, Fides et Ratio, Chapter I.
sentence in the constitution *Dei Filius* from the 1870s, it grasps and expresses the most important categories for Christian faith and religion, the categories that distinguish it from a philosophical discourse:

The Catholic Church teaches that this faith, which is the beginning of human salvation, is the supernatural virtue whereby, inspired and assisted by the grace of God, we believe the things which he has revealed as true, not because of their intrinsic truth as perceived by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God himself who reveals them, and who can neither be deceived nor deceive.⁷

On the other hand, philosophy cannot be content with the theological proclamation of God’s authority, because philosophy’s freedom consists, among others, of the possibility of distancing oneself from every authority (no matter how grand it may be) external to reason. Even to such an original thinker as the early Martin Heidegger—who wrote about the necessity of dismantling the basic concepts and patterns of thought of European philosophy—theology (and thus revelation) is absolutely different from philosophy and is as such closer to chemistry than to philosophy itself. Certainly, Heidegger moves beyond the traditional justification for the division between theology and philosophy here. However, he renounces the presence of theological concepts in philosophical discourse and affirms the fundamental insight of philosophy concerning revelation:

Though faith does not bring itself about, and though what is revealed in faith can never be founded by way of rational knowing as exercised by autonomously functioning reason, nevertheless the sense of Christian occurrence as rebirth is that Dasein’s prefaithful, i.e., unbelieving, existence is sublated therein.⁸

Heidegger’s student, with whom Voegelin was arguing and thus formed an epistolary friendship, observed that at the root of Western civilisation lies an irremovable antagonism (which is also responsible for the vitality of the West). Commenting on Yehuda Halevi’s medieval text, Leo Strauss states that a genuine philosopher cannot assert anything that remains non-evident during his investigation and “[...] revelation is for him not more than an unevident, unproven possibility. Confronted with an unproven possibility, he does not reject, he merely suspends judgement.”⁹

However, in reality, this suspension conceals hostility and the incompatibility of philosophy and revelation, each claiming to know the truth of how one should conduct his or her life. Since there can be only one truth (so Strauss assumes), arises the conflict that is the West’s destiny.

But what if, Voegelin argues, we go back behind the fixed dichotomies to the historical origin of philosophy, i.e. noetic differentiation, and the so-called pneumatic differentiation (the term *pneuma*, associated with the Hebrew *ruah*, pertains both to the religion of ancient Israel and to Christianity), we find ethnic cultures, Greek and Hebrew, for which philosophy and revelation, respectively, were forms in which the cultural pursuit for truth and ground of reality took place. Then, over the course of history, these forms were changed into the natural pursuit of truth and God’s revelation and the former was subordinated to the latter. In fact, the historical documents provide us with quite the opposite view, for Hellenic thinkers, according to the author of *Order and History*, expressed their effort to understand reality as a struggle for truth that proceeds from “divine revelation.” From Homer to Aristotle, each major Hellenic thinker was aware of living “in the tension of seeking and receiving, that is to say, in the dual movement of the godly and human type, in which a human *responsio* takes place in answer to a movement that originates in God.” To think otherwise, Voegelin boldly argues, is an “inadmissible falsification of the historical documents.”¹⁰

The approach presented in The Meditative Origin of the Philosophical Knowledge of Order is hardly an exceptional case in Voegelin’s writing. In 1974, in the Ecumenic Age, he claimed that the symbol of “revelation” had been monopolised by theologians of various denominations. Thus, the awareness in ancient times regarding the “revelatory discovery” of reason, of logos, is eclipsed.¹¹ In *The Gospel and Culture*, a similar view is expressed.

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⁷ Vatican Council I, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith*, Chapter III.
⁸ Heidegger, “Phenomenology and Theology,” 51.
⁹ Strauss, “The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy,” 222.
¹⁰ Voegelin, “The Meditative,” 386.
¹¹ Voegelin, *Order and History IV*, 300–1.
with reference to symbols: the human–divine character of symbols has been largely forgotten due to the efforts of Christian theologians. Here, too, Voegelin speaks of the Christian monopolisation of the divine component under the term “revelation” of which, supposedly, philosophy is deprived as it depends solely on “natural reason.”¹²

But, what about the “pneumatic differentiation” of Christianity and Judaism if revelation is not exclusively ascribed to it? The Greek pursuit focuses on the human search for the ground of being that is divine, and new discovery of truth is assisted by a kind of historical consciousness for which the earlier truth is now being relegated to the status of being pseudos. Things appear quite different in the context of pneumatic movement where the accent falls on the divine’s arrival. Here, predecessors are not in error, but rather, as they have seen the truth, their experiences need to be supplemented and corrected by a new, more adequate truth. The historical chain of intellectual and spiritual successors is seen as a chain of reinterpretation, even when the later insight seems to have little connection with the old.

The differences should not be overlooked however, as philosophy performs its efforts through scientific search, philological clarification and careful argument, and it comprehends reality in manners other than religion. However, what Voegelin is trying to say is that both enterprises have the same “object” and share some identical structural and existential elements that eventually lead to the troublesome distinction.

When the political order of ethnic cultures succumbs to the new, polyethnic, “ecumenic” (as Voegelin prefers to call it), these two types of searching for truth came into vivid contact. One way of searching for truth incorporates elements of the other in order to revitalise itself. A Jewish theology was born alongside with the person and work of Philo, and later, the great host of Christian theologians combined the revelatory truths of gospel with the concepts and arguments inherited from the Hellenic tradition. Eventually, in the Middle Ages, this initial clash resulted in a fixed difference of what can be acquired by means of natural reason and what can become known only through special actions of God. As such, the distinction became the foundation of the modern, Western culture.

Today, such a systematic doctrine, which attempts to bring revelation and natural reason into a construct, belongs to the things that have to be cleared away. This has to take place, not out of an anti-theological or anti-Christian emotion, nor for pro- or antiphilosophical reasons, but simply because, today, it is no longer needed. Today our historical knowledge is much greater. We know the histories of Israel and Hellas. We can draw historical parallels to India, Persia, and China, and we can precisely describe the problems involved. It would be senseless in the present ecumenic scientific situation to want to scientifically maintain this categorisation.¹³

Voegelin argues that the artificial constructions must be swept aside in order to give space to the event that reality might be disclosing itself to the human search for truth.

From the one side, namely, from the human, the search can be accentuated. I would call this the noetic posture. From the other side, the revelatory side, one can emphasise the motivational factor. I would call that the pneumatic position. Both are present in the problem of meditation. The tension exists between being moved from the godly side and the search from the human side. Thus, the godly and the human sides are assumed in a process of seeking and being moved [to seek].¹⁴

Here, the seeker finds an existential “complex” instead of empty concepts and fixed realities whose [the ‘complex’] parts are not independent fragmentised entities but rather elements of the whole that are given only within that whole. There is no man living without the context of comprehensive reality – be it society, history, or the divine arche. Moreover, there is no point in considering God or the divine aitia or causa sui as something outside man’s tension towards it: the ground is given only within the tension. To think otherwise, Voegelin claims, is to give oneself away to hypostatisation and the deformation of the experiential context.¹⁵ In the event and meditation that explores it, one faces “the process that actually takes place” – here, reality is given in its original meaning.

¹² Voegelin, “The Gospel and Culture,” 187.
¹³ Voegelin, “The Meditative,” 388–9.
¹⁴ Ibid., 389.
¹⁵ This is a constant theme in Voegelin’s thinking. In What is Political Reality, a text to which we will frequently return in the present essay, the author briefly explains the process of deformation: “(a) the termini of participatory knowledge turn into data
Voegelin here neither offers a definition nor an extensive elucidation of the term “revelation.” From the text, we know that it is supposed to be a part of some complex, of event, that it involves something called “tension” (appeal and response) between two realities that are called “poles.” From the human pole, there is the search for the ground of reality, while the other pole – either called God or divine ground – is where revelation takes place. The revelation is metaphorically called a “movement” and the man’s response to it is named a “countermovement.” Furthermore, revelation is not simply a case of God’s activity alone as there is simply no subject outside the context of tension. Therefore, the issue of revelation must be pursued with regard to the “In-Between” category – the event takes place neither in the interiority of man nor in God. The event, and thus revelation, occurs between man and God – the “In-between” that is also called “metaxy.”

Obviously, one may become sceptical at this point; the text is controversial, imprecise, and of modest dimensions that hardly justify the range and importance of the issues that it raises. Considering the alleged divine origin of Hellenic thinking, one can ask whether Voegelin has simply not failed to recognise the metaphorical character of language as deployed by Plato or Aristotle or any other Greek thinker. Secondly, the idea of revelation employed in the texts is in desperate demand of clarification of the terms used to apprend it: “movement that originates in God,” “tension of seeking and receiving” or simply an “appeal” – all these expressions are in want of elucidation. Furthermore, why is “pneumatic differentiation” regarded as search for truth at all, and why is the Greek arche or aitia called “God” and even capitalised? The list is by no means exhaustive. We must look elsewhere for the answer.

2 Aristotle and revelation

The meaning has been lost in history and it seems that truth is nowhere to be seen. However, Voegelin claims, “If the destruction can go back for centuries, we can go back for millennia to restore the question so badly damaged in our time.” Thus, he turns his attention towards the ancient authors, namely Plato and Aristotle, who supposedly reached and expressed insight into the truth of reality in an undeformed fashion – including the issue of knowledge of the divine.

However, here, it is time to sketch out a certain type of interpretation against which Voegelin implicitly argues. Thus, according to Lloyd P. Gerson, for Greek philosophers, God frequently functioned as a hypothetical entity, similar to the hypothetical entities of modern science. As such, it provided the principle for understanding the unity of being but unlike other beings, it is itself a non-evident reality, inaccessible by experience. The knowledge of such an entity could only be indirect, as we could know (of) it only through the effects it causes. Thus, Greek philosophers were in pursuit for arche, beginning, and aitia, ground of being, which is not a component of experience and can be apprehended only through reasoning.

[...] philosophical theology and the theories of causality it rests on are at the heart of Greek philosophy. When Aristotle identified Logos with wisdom about the gods, he was not expressing idiosyncratic and pious sentiment but rather giving a

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16 Voegelin, “The Gospel,” 179.
17 Hans Georg Gadamer also notices the difference between the notion of natural theology and the Greek theological enterprise. The former is in tension with the revealed theology in regard of priority and certainty. On the other hand, “Greek thought manifests no such problem. Greek religion is neither a religion of the book nor a religion of true doctrine, but rather a cultic tradition the theological systematisation and integration of which are matters for poets [...]” (Gadamer, “On the Divine in Early Greek Thought,” 39).
Both Voegelin and Gerson agree concerning the importance of God (understood as divine archē and aitia) for Greek thinkers. However, they would clash about the givenness of the divine – for Voegelin, it would be precisely after the non-objective mode of givenness of the divine. In other words, revelation is understood as the source of an imaginary conflict within ourselves.

The issue at stake first appeared in What is Political Reality published in German in 1964. Here, Voegelin was pursuing the essence of both epistēmē politīkē and philosophy as such. In classical philosophy, the search was directed by a “desire [for] a true knowledge of order.” The search is a necessity because the knowledge of order is nowhere to be seen. The surrounding society is in a state of disorder that designates corruption, oppression, violence, populism, and so forth. It is precisely under such conditions that the search for truth is born. When the psyche, claims Voegelin, wants to elevate itself to the level of self-awareness, it undertakes the endeavours of analysis and an interpretation named “exegesis.”

In such circumstances, Voegelin deploys the hermeneutics of the human’s relations to the ground which are presented in Aristotle’s Metaphysics. Interestingly enough, the author of Order and History pays no attention to the notion of the Unmoved Mover as the cause of movement in the universe, and therefore, completely ignores the issue regarding the proof of the existence of the Unmoved Mover, which was developed in books VII and VIII of Physics, and parts of Metaphysics concerning the position of the divine Nous in the cosmos. His interpretation is carried out in the sole interest of the existential reference of the thinking being to the divine Reason.²¹

Of course, Voegelin refers to Aristotle’s famous sentence “All men by nature desire to know” (pantes anthropoi tou eidenai orekontai fysēi, Metaphysics 980a), but he really is asking where the desire to know arises in the first place.²⁰ Therefore, Voegelin starts his interpretation from acknowledging that, according to Aristotle, the human remains ignorant (agnōia, amathia) with regard to the ground of existence (here, not the foundation of the cosmos but human existence is in question). However, man would not be aware of his own ignorance unless he were already “moved by a sense of restlessness to escape from ignorance.”²² Here, Voegelin uses the terms “anxiety” and “unrest” that result in questioning this state of confusion. Aristotle is quoted on this occasion: “Ho d’aporon kai thaumazon oietai agnoein” (Metaphysics 982b18), which he translates as “a man in confusion and wonder is conscious of being ignorant.”²² What instils the desire to know is both confusion and wonder – designated by the modern term Anxiety – in regard to the ground of being. This results in the restless quest (zetēsis) for archē. After establishing this, Voegelin jumps from book Alfa to the analyses carried out in the fragments of the book Lambda, wherein Aristotle considers the movement induced by the object of desire and thought. Both the human desire (oregeshtai) and thinking (noein), as well as that which is desired (orekton) and the object of thought (noetōn), are interdependent moments of the same process, namely, zetēsis. However, despite the fact that noein leads zetēsis, the search may miss the ground or find something that only appears as ground. This is the key moment in Voegelin’s
interpretation: the search for ground may find its fulfilment in various areas of reality – a person may come to the conclusion that there is no ultimate “goal” in life apart from physical pleasure, or power over others; the search for such may even lead to the identification of one with some political movement or to the apprehension of life as a meaningless enterprise. How should such confusion be dealt with, and how should one ground be chosen from so many? The proper recognition and selection of the true ground would be possible: firstly, due to the fact that the ground manifests itself (in a mode that should be determined as “nonobjective”) and, secondly, because the ground does not allow further inquiries about “where from.” Voegelin does not quote any specific fragment of *Metaphysics*, but rests on two passages: 1) “kinei de ode to orekton kai to noiton: kinei ou kinoumena” (1072a26), which William Ross translates as “and the object of desire and the object of thought move in this way: they move without being moved.” 2) “nous de ypo tou noitou kineitai” (1072a30), “And thought is moved by the object of thought.”

Obviously, Aristotle distinguishes active thinking from passive sense perception. But he also employs the term *kinein*, movement, to designate the influence of the object on the organ or cognitive faculty. As Leo Elders has pointed out, the mind can be affected by the object of thought only under the condition that there is some kind of community between that which is thought of and the one that is thinking – both being and intelligibility precede intellect and thought. This is also applicable in case of the relationship between the inquiring man and the ground. For, the possibility of even thinking of the ground has a condition: the aforementioned prior community between the object of thought and the thinking subject, and the very act of thinking, as well as the search which presupposes the movement, i.e. the influence of the ground on the mind of the human being. Therefore, both truth and the direction of the search are provided by the ground itself – for the ground itself moves (*kinetai*) man through “attraction.” Voegelin is quite clear on that matter, pointing out that without the original movement of attraction from the ground (“without the kinesis of being attracted by the ground”), the desire for the ground would be impossible. In reverse order: without the movement of attraction, there would be no *zetesis*, and as a consequence, no awareness of ignorance, and, ultimately, no anxiety that is sensed by man as the first step in the process of searching. Attraction from the ground, from the divine *Nous*, it is that which comes first in the search as such, so argues Voegelin: it is identical to that which is first experienced by the human, i.e. *aporon* and *thaumazon*, the anxiety or restlessness of not knowing the ground. In short, the anxiety “manifests” the human knowledge of being out of ground, and therefore, it manifests a ground. The restlessness of mind is instilled or stirred by the ground itself. This is “[...] the existential tension toward the ground, the participation of man in the divine, *metalepsis* in Aristotle’s sense [...]”

However, neither in *What is Political Reality*, nor in any of the other texts that were written in the 1960s, did Voegelin use the term revelation to signify the movement of ground. Voegelin had his own reservations and did not introduce revelation in his discourse hastily. Still, in the late 1960s, he was convinced that philosophy’s task was to render the revelation intelligible, but also that it could not happen at the cost of replacing revelation as it was the case in Hegel’s system. The distinction between noetic and pneumatic experience was thus maintained based on the difference between revelation and noetic pursuit, although both were recognised as kinds of “man’s consciousness of participation in the divine ground of his existence.”

Those analyses were repeated in the next decade to the greatest extent in the fourth volume of *Order and History*, in *Ecumenic Age*. In chapter three, entitled, *The Process of Reality*, Voegelin restates that the human was in a state of ignorance concerning the ground of his existence, and at some point, one becomes aware of that. There then arises the search for knowledge that it is directed by the object of knowledge and once found is recognised as an object of true desire, and the *noeton* is present in the very search as its mover. This train of thought arrives at the same conclusion as it does in *What is Political Reality*: without

23 Elders, *Aristotle’s Theology. A Commentary on the Book of Metaphysics*, 168.
24 Voegelin, “What.” 350.
25 Voegelin, “Immortality.” 78–9.
26 Voegelin expressed himself succinctly in yet another way in his essay *Reason: The Classic Experience*: “The reality experienced by the philosophers as specifically human is man’s existence in a state of unrest. Man is not a self-created, autonomous being carrying the origin and meaning of his existence within himself. He is not divine causa sui; from the experience of his life
the primordial *kinesis* – the movement of attraction from the “divine side” – there is no desire to know and no search at all. At first glance, Voegelin’s reading of Aristotle remained the same, but the context of interpretation had changed and that did change the interpretation.

In the introduction to the *Ecumenic Age*, Voegelin reflected, while he was working on the first three volumes of *Order and History*, he laboured under the popular belief that Israelites and Christians held a special place in history, for they were favoured with “revelatory events,” while the pagans – including the Hellenic philosophers – received no such distinction. But now, claims Voegelin, he finds no reason to any longer support this belief. For, history of all mankind is permeated with the “revelatory process” of a hidden God. The Ground’s manifestation can become effective either through religious (pneumatic) experiences or through the “meditative probing of the seeker,” i.e. the philosopher. In the latter case, the philosopher discovers on the occasion of an event (the event of the ground’s manifestation and the human response to it) that one is endowed with psyche or consciousness as both the sensorium, the organon of experiences of transcendence, and the site wherein the event occur.

When he participates in a theophanic event, his consciousness becomes cognitively luminous for his own humanity as constituted by his relation to the unknown god whose moving presence in his soul evokes the movement of response. I have circumscribed the structure of the event as strictly as possible, in order to make it clear how narrowly confined the area of the resulting insights actually is: The new truth pertains to man’s consciousness of his humanity in participatory tension toward the divine ground, and to no reality beyond this restricted area.²⁷

Thus, Aristotle’s *zetesis* is labelled as a special mode of theophanic event or noetic theophany; while *kinesis* remains a “moving presence,” it also becomes a “revelatory movement.”²⁸ To designate the object of search, Voegelin uses the name “divine ground” and “divine *Nous*” as well as “hidden god” to manifest in the psyche or consciousness. In the *Ecumenic Age*, we can find the following statements:

> [...] the hidden or unknown god who reveals himself in the movements of the soul²⁹ and [...] finally, since it is the structure of reality that becomes luminous on occasion of the noetic theophany, the openness of man’s existence toward the *Logos* of reality is constituted by god when he reveals himself as *Nous*.³⁰

Voegelin, then, distinguishes noetic theophany from pneumatic one – but Christianity then loses its privileged position: and revelation is thought of as constituting every kind and every instance of the search for truth. With this new attitude – later exploited in the previously analysed *Meditative Origin of Philosophical Knowledge of Order* – Voegelin is ready to clear away the historically effective distinction between natural theology and revelation. He strongly asserts that there is nothing natural in the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle for both of them were conscious that their thinking had “theophanic character.”³¹ Philosophising is not an autonomous action of the human, but a moment – not an independent part belonging essentially to a theophanic event that is irreducible to (other) parts. Eventually, Voegelin finds that there is no reason to hesitate when speaking of a “constituent of reason through revelation” and to claim that “the life of reason is firmly rooted in revelation.”³² In short, the dialectical process of discovering the structure of reality (being), gaining knowledge of man’s constitution (*psyche, nous*), and finding the principles according to which moral life can be conducted and a political order established, is said to be constituted by the

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²⁷ Voegelin, “Order,” 52–3.
²⁸ Ibid., 280.
²⁹ Ibid., 52.
³⁰ Ibid., 290.
³¹ Ibid., 96.
³² Ibid., 292.
revelation – the kinesis of Nous, movement or manifestation of the ground. Ground is no longer a hypothetical entity given only through its effects and accessible solely through indirect reasoning, as Gerson claimed. It is rather, Voegelin argues, a hidden reality that manifests itself in the kinesis, a movement of attraction known also by the name “revelation.”

3 Noetic components in religion and philosophy

Much remains to be clarified, but we already know how Voegelin introduces the category of revelation into the philosophical discourse, and we can widely comprehend what is meant by revelation. I think that it would be illuminative to look at how Voegelin discerned the presence of the noetic component in Christianity, a religion traditionally regarded as revealed.

In Matthew 16, Jesus is on his road to Caesaera Philippi, and at some point, asks his disciples who the common people consider him to be – one of the prophets, the disciples reply. Jesus then asks what they, the disciples, thought of that matter. According to Voegelin, there then was a pause as the disciples knew that Jesus is someone beyond a prophet and yet they did not know who exactly he was. Finally, Peter speaks: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Mt 16:16). To this Jesus replies: “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 16:17). According to Voegelin, the reason why Peter can “see” and comprehend that Jesus is the Son of God is because in Peter’s consciousness, divine presence is already operating – and this operating presence moves Peter to experience the presence of God in Jesus. A similar notion appears, as Voegelin claims, in the Gospel of John. In J 6:44, Jesus speaks: “No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him.” Here appears the Greek verb helkein, translated into English as “drawing,” which expresses the dynamics of revelation: no one can “see” God’s presence in Jesus unless they are already moved or drawn by the divine reality that is also moving within them.³³ Faith is a response and it requires – as its condition – an original revelation from the divine. Voegelin treats the Christian helkein as partially overlapping with the Aristotelian kinesis as both of them signify the non-objective movement of the divine ground. Briefly speaking, in Aristotle’s Metaphysics and Christian gospels (as well as in the writings of Plato that we have left aside till now), the same structure as well as phenomenon operates: revelation of the divine is the moving presence of divine in the human consciousness. In the former case, it manifests itself in seeing God’s presence in Jesus,³⁴ while in the latter, it manifests in the form of anxiety and desire to know the ground. The former is faith, the latter is philosophy.

All kinds of participation (i.e. of being in conscious relationships to the ground) either in the form of cosmogonic myth, or Christian religion, or Greek philosophy – all instances of it entail a certain degree of self-knowledge. According to Voegelin, there is no instance of lived participation without at least a minimum of self-awareness – which, in this case, would be the knowledge of being affected by something that is somehow divine. Obviously, the level of this invariant differs greatly even within the same spiritual tradition.

We do not need to enumerate the exhaustive list of noetic components in religions. In all cases, the noetic core can be reduced to the self-knowledge of being moved, of being attracted by the divine, of being pulled into the search, of an appeal that results in the emergence of awareness of existing in the “in-between” metaxy of the mundane and the divine.³⁵

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³³ Voegelin, “Wisdom and the Magic of Extreme,” 368.
³⁴ This, of course, raises the question of understanding Jesus Christ – a problem that is not only theological but is also philosophical. Its examination is beyond the scope of the present study. One quotation from Voegelin should suffice: “The visions see in the Christ the historical event of God’s pleromatic presence in man, revealing the suffering presence of the God in every man as the transfiguring force that will let mortal reality rise with the God to his immortality. The pleromatic metaxy seen in the Christ reveals mortal suffering as participation in the divine suffering.” Ibid., 369.
³⁵ Voegelin, “The Gospel,” 192.
The desire for knowledge is not only the reality of noesis but also of every experience of participation, as Aristotle already recognised. ... It is always man existential transcending toward the ground, even if the ground is not consciously apprehended as the transcendent pole of this desire.⁴⁶

Revelation is a constitutive element of both religion and philosophy, and in both cases, it entails a noetic component of self-knowledge. So, is there any difference? One might ask if Voegelin in consequence of his analyses does (not) equate philosophy with theology.⁵⁷ In both attitudes towards the ground, claims Voegelin, different components play crucial roles: in philosophy, it is a nous, while in Christianity, it is pneuma. Philosophy lives in rational clarification and elucidation of the human response to the original movement of the arche/aitia, while pneumatic experience embraces the soteriological dimension of God’s arrival in human existence. Philosophy differs from every other form of relating oneself to the divine for it is per se a gnoseological and reflective inquiry – here, the human in their response to the original kinesis coming from the ground turns their attention towards the reality of being human and the world in order to investigate the “logos of participation,” the intelligible structure of relation to ground. “Noetic interpretations arise when consciousness, for whatever reason, tries to become explicit to itself.”⁵⁸ Every instance of the theophanic event includes a minimum level of self-consciousness, but only philosophy arrives at that which Voegelin calls “optimal clarity” of noetic differentiation of consciousness. As Gadamer also put it, the early Greek thinkers took over the religious language, including the adjective “divine,” not to tell another tale of gods, but to express “the order of being about that which they are inquiring, the whole, the all, being.”³⁹ The boldness of the Greek enterprise aimed at the whole of being and eventually, in the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, found the principle of unity in the elusive aitia. Therefore, the difference between Christianity and philosophy is to be drawn sharply:

The movement that engendered the saving tale of divine incarnation, death, and resurrection as the answer to the question of life and death is considerably more complex than classic philosophy; it is richer by the missionary fervour of its spirituals universalism, poor by its neglect of noetic control, broader by its appeal to the inarticulate humanity of the common man; more imposing through it’s imperial tone of divine authority, more restricted by its bias against the articulate wisdom of the wise, more imbalanced through its apocalyptic ferocity, which leads to conflicts with the condition of man’s existence in society; more compact through its generous absorption of earlier strata of mythical imagination, especially through the reception of Israelite historiogenesis and the exuberance of miracle working; more differentiated through the intensely articulate experience of loving-divine action in the illumination of existence with truth. The understanding of these complexities by which the gospel movement differs from the movement of classic philosophy, though cannot be advanced by using such a topical dichotomies as philosophy and religion, metaphysic and theology, reason and revelation, natural reason and supernaturalism, rationalism and irrationalism, and so forth.⁴⁰

We must note, however, that according to Voegelin, faith is not an extra-philosophical phenomenon or attitude. In the third volume of Order and History, Voegelin comments on Aristotle’s “On prayer”:

36 Voegelin, “What,” 381.
37 Voegelin treated modern theology with suspicion. According to him, theology applies to the revelatory symbolism of Christianity’s metaphysical argumentation and concepts that are detached from the experiential basis. This eventually obscures the original event and deforms its meaning. “In view of the intellectual confusion in our contemporary “climate of opinion,” it will be not superfluous to state again that I am not dealing with the problems of theology.” However, there are commentators who believe that in the case of Voegelin, theology and philosophy overlap, and in this see a great opportunity to renew theology: “I believe Voegelin’s entire philosophical enterprise is actually a veiled reconstruction of theology that I think theologians have by and large yet to recognize. In the name of philosophy Voegelin has reproached and renewed, rebuked and rebuilt, theology... (by) successfully annexing faith and reason, reason and revelation, philosophy and theology, Athens and Jerusalem, in a critical theory of consciousness, has reconstructed the authentic foundations of theology.” Voegelin, “Conversations with Eric Voegelin the Thomas More Institute for Adult Education Montreal. I Theology Confronting World Religions?,” 268; and Morrissey, Consciousness and Transcendence. The Theology of Eric Voegelin, 5–6.
38 Voegelin, “What,” 346.
39 Gadamer, “The Divine,” 39.
40 Voegelin, “The Gospel,” 189.
the cognitio Dei through faith is not a cognitive act in which an object is given, but a cognitive, spiritual passion of the soul. In the passion of faith the ground of being is experienced.⁴¹

Reason differentiates from faith, but not in the sense of replacement – one cannot simply get rid of faith as it is bound to the human condition,⁴² man exists in the metaxy, between the poles of immanence and transcendence. So, faith is not an exclusively Christian or religious attitude, but an existential openness towards transcendence and the divine; faith is a condition for the possibility of a philosophical inquiry.⁵³

On the other hand, faith in Christ as a Son of God is certainly faith in the sense of cognitio Dei, but the two cannot be identified. Voegelin mentions that the Christian concept of faith is richer than its Greek counterpart in so far as faith is understood in the Thomistic sense as fides caritate formata:

The Aristotelian position does not allow for a forma supranaturalis, for the heightening of the immanent nature of man through the supernaturally forming love of God.⁴⁴

Although the Aristotelian human experiences the divine, grace does not transform their soul in anticipating the beatific vision after death. Despite these differences, we must be clear that both an existential faith and the Christian fides caritate formata depend on revelation – faith is a kind of cognitive participation in divine reality, and any “access” to the divine requires prior movement of drawing or attraction – meaning revelation.

4 Counterargument

Voegelin certainly knew that his thesis about revelation as source of reason is controversial and goes against the dominant trends that have shaped modern Western thinking. Moreover, it may be understood as an onslaught on the difference that constitutes the identity of philosophy and determines the autonomy of reason. The question is whether Voegelin blurs the dividing line between philosophy and religion, and whether by enacting revelation into the life of reason, he disposes with the idea of the mind’s sovereignty.

He knew that the proposed reorientation would be met with resistance:

The issue of revelation as the source of reason in existence is conventionally anesthetized by carefully reporting the philosopher’s <ideas> without touching the experiences that have motivated them. In a philosophical study, however, philosopher’s theophanies must be taken seriously. The question that the revelatory experiences impost must not be dodged; they must be made explicit: Who is the God who moves the philosophers in their search? What does he reveal to them? And how is he related to the God who revealed himself to Israelites, Jews, and Christians?⁵⁵

Those are a lot of questions and we cannot answer them all here.⁴⁶

Let us now assume the position of an imaginary sceptic and formulate what seem to be the most fundamental counterarguments against including the category of revelation into a philosophical discourse.

1. What Voegelin achieves from this introduction is, at best, nothing more than the subordination of philosophical discourse to the religion or theology and, at worst, the complete dissolution of the

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⁴¹ Voegelin, “Order and History III.”
⁴² “[...] philosopher ... knows the tension of faith toward God to be not a Christian privilege but a trait of human nature.” Voegelin, “Immortality,” 78.
⁴³ Voegelin, Anamnesis, 382.
⁴⁴ Voegelin, “Order and History III,” 419.
⁴⁵ Voegelin, Order, 292.
⁴⁶ Regarding Voegelin’s last question: “Unless we want to indulge in extraordinary theological assumption, the God who appeared to philosophers, and who elicited from Parmenides the exclamation “Is!,” was the same God who revealed himself to Moses as the “I am who (or: what) I am” as the God who is what He is in the concrete theophany to which man responds.” Ibid., 292.
autonomy of reason. This is a serious objection, to which the imaginary opponent might say that, actually, Voegelin’s philosophy is not a philosophy at all but rather theology in disguise.

2. The second refutation seems to prove to be no less important: all of these issue(s) come down to the improper use of language. One might say that, perhaps, if Voegelin would clarify the meaning of what he intended by the term “revelation,” it would become obvious that the term itself was used inappropriately. There might be specific phenomena to which Voegelin alludes and they might even be constitutive for philosophising, but they should be designated by other, appropriate terms.

The first counterargument concerns the confusion of discourses, and the second – the misleading usage of language. Still, both share the same premise and lead to identical conclusions: there is neither space for the category of revelation in philosophical discourse, nor for the event of revelation in the act of thinking. Philosophy here equals the autonomy of reason, and revelation is a threat to that autonomy, while it belongs to religion and theology.

I do not intend to defend Voegelin’s position and therefore I am not going to refute the aforementioned counterarguments. My goal is rather hermeneutical: I prefer to show why Voegelin chose to use the concept of revelation and what he achieved through it. To do so, I will have to repeat some remarks from the previous pages, but this will help to extract the meaning that Voegelin inscribed to revelation.

5 Between theology and philosophy

In order to more precisely determine what Voegelin understands by “revelation,” let us contrast his account once more with the theological and philosophical approaches. The Dei Verbum constitution of the Vatican Council II explicitly states that revelation is possible through Christ and that through Christ, human beings are able to participate in the divine.

By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both mediator and the fullness of all revelation.⁴⁷

The obedience of faith is expected in one sense as nothing less than the full submission of both intellect and will. For this, the primordial grace of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit within are required. Furthermore, revelation is believed to be transmitted not only through the “sacred scripture,” but also through the “sacred tradition” lasting from Christ to the last days.

But the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, (8) has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, (9) whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed.⁴⁸

And the constitution asserts that all writings of the scripture have been committed by the Holy Spirit and thus they are sacred and canonical, meaning that there is no error contained in them.

Protestantism is too diversified a tradition for us to be able to refer to one such unambiguous and authoritarian document. Paul Avis emphasises that modern Protestant theology considers revelation a much more elusive reality than it is understood by the official teaching of the Catholic Church, a reality that can be discerned only through the eyes of faith. Alvis argues that this is the case because revelation occurs in the mysterious and invisible realm of the conjunction of man and the divine, a realm that remains

⁴⁷ Vatican Council II, Dei Verbum, Chapter I.
⁴⁸ Ibid.
invisible for human perception and, if I understand him correctly, also for the human mind.⁴⁹ Although much of Protestant theology of the last century (Tillich and Pannenberg are examples), revelation is put in the context of overall human existence and therefore it escapes the danger of being confined to the past; the final and fullest of God’s revelations was embodied in the life, work, and person of Jesus Christ. Moreover,

The consensus of modern theology is that we do not have direct, unmediated access to this original revelation. It is always mediated to us ..., principally through a collection of literature, the Scriptures, which has canonical or normative status.⁵⁰

But, what does revelation include? What is its content? For most of modern theology, both Catholic and Protestant, it definitely does not consist of communication of some eternally valid theological propositions that would remain unknown for sole human understanding. In short,

It is understood as an event of divine self-disclosure, and approach of the divine presence whose purpose and outcome is to enlighten the mind and stimulate the conscience in ways that are in tune with the mind and will of God.⁵¹

Definitely, revelation cannot be reduced to pure information, the stating of the facts for its purpose is not to import theoretical information concerning divinity, but rather to transform the human(s) in their being; it is an event in the sense of forming one’s existence, influencing one’s moral life, and reforming one’s social life. If the human being gets to know God through revelation, one acquires knowledge about His love and will.

Surely, Voegelin was very far from equating the divine revelation – either pneumatic or noetic – with the content of the Holy Scripture or with any kind of propositional truths. Moreover, Voegelin assumes the position of a philosopher by refusing to acknowledge the binding character of any ecclesiastical authority. He does not understand revelation as a one-time event, a matter of the past available through the presence of the Holy Spirit in the institution or community – whether the divine manifests in the form of a call, an appeal, inspiration, possession, or otherwise, it remains a constant in history that arises and fades away, unexpectedly reappears or barely flickers on the horizon of search, and abates to the point where it becomes imperceptible. The author of Order and History admits that Jesus Christ occupies a special place in the history of revelations, and that in his life and teachings to form an individual relationship between God and the human was rendered for the first time, and in them dwells the fullness of the divine. But, most importantly, for Voegelin, revelation is not confined to the manifestation of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Rather, all instances of the divine’s attraction/drawing/movement are considered to be instances of this revelation. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the Immortality essay, in which Voegelin refers to Chalcedonian Definition concerning the union of the two natures in the one person of Jesus Christ. According to Voegelin, the definition designates the same structure of existence that philosophy calls metaxy, in which the theophanic event (revelation) occurs. “The reality of the Mediator and the intermediate reality of consciousness have the same structure,”⁵² and this leads to the conclusion that “History is Christ written large.”⁵³ Now, putting this in a phenomenological context – according to Jean-Luc Marion, “attraction holds as revelation only because it allows seeing Jesus as the Christ, that is to say, as the Son of the Father, as the visibility of the invisible,”⁵⁴ according to Voegelin, attraction holds as revelation as it allows us to experience (“to see”) the divine in a variety of manifestations. Alvis emphasised that “original revelation” is mediated through the Scripture – for Voegelin, each and every case of revelation is original as the self-revelation of God occurs in all instances of it.

⁴⁹ Alvis, “Revelation, Epistemology, and Authority.”
⁵⁰ Ibid., 172. Obviously, both catholic and protestant approaches affirm the human partner of revelation in that the all books are the product of concrete man living in particular culture at particular time and reflect on the presuppositions, imaginaries, and ideals of those cultures.
⁵¹ Alvis, “Revelation,” 176.
⁵² Voegelin, “Immortality,” 79.
⁵³ Ibid., 78.
⁵⁴ Marion, Givenness and Revelation, 41.
On the other – philosophical – hand, let us note that it was not Voegelin’s idea to introduce the concept of revelation into the philosophical vocabulary. One cannot avoid to mention the work and person of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in this context. Although Voegelin heavily criticised the latter, there are striking similarities between the two thinkers as both of them intended to philosophically rehabilitate the concept of revelation. As Cyril O’Regan notes, after Kant’s and Fichte’s efforts of reconceptualising the divine, Hegel noticed that the issue of thinking that God does not properly belong to the realm of epistemology or solely to ethics but rather is an existential and ontological problem. Furthermore, for both Hegel and Voegelin, revelation is a historical process of disclosing and unveiling the relationship between God and the world, and as such, it is an ongoing process that cannot be enclosed to any determinate fact or event of history; reflection on the facts of religion is undoubtedly in itself a part of the very revelatory process. Finally, and here crucially so, for the first time in history, we find that Hegel expressed the notion of self-revelation: “Spirit is an absolute manifesting.” The first level of God’s self-revelation consists of creating the Other, including the world and subjectivity. But on a higher level, the Other appears as not-so-other, for what God creates God is himself:

[… ] God is manifestation of his own self, that God is for himself – the other (which has the empty semblance of [being] an other but is immediately reconciled), the Son of God or human being according to the divine image. Here for the first time we have consciousness, the subjectively knowing spirit for which God is object.

Here we arrive at the most fundamental notion of the man–God relationship – man can know God for it is God’s nature to reveal himself, to self-reveal.

But the idea of self-revelation also serves Voegelin as a departure point from Hegel because for the latter thinker, the self-manifestation of God was governed by the dialectic of the spirit which seeks to sublate religion through a philosophical mind and disposes God of mystery. Thus, Voegelin writes about the thought of the creator of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: “Philosophy becomes the ultimate revelation of the new “primordial identity,” and the old God of revelation is declared to be dead for good.” In the same text, he notes that in the speculative system, God seems to be perfectly revealed and the past form of revelation (i.e. Christianity) should be counted as a kind of “hiddenness” rather than genuine revelation. Voegelin argues that in order to make this transformation possible, Hegel must have designed an immanent, gnostic vision of history in which he assigns himself the role of the messiah of the ultimate, never-ending epoch of humanity. Contrary to this, divine transcendence and mystery correlate with the infinite openness of history – including openness to any further self-revelations, while Hegel’s “immanent apocalypticism” is understood to be responsible for the ultimate identification of revelation with concept. For Hegel, revelation essentially is of conceptual character which results in the emergence of “immanent apocalypticism.” But Hegel’s deformation runs even deeper as the transformation also pertains to philosophy (since the love of knowledge is expected to turn into “real knowledge”). Once again, Voegelin calls Plato for help – philosophy is the search for truth in the erotic tension towards the divine ground of reality:

The philosopher’s eroticism implies the humanity of man and the divinity of God as the poles of his existential tension. The practice of philosophy in the Socratic-Platonic sense is the equivalent of the Christian sanctification of man; it is the growth of the image of God in man.

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55 O’Regan, “Revelation in German Idealism,” 240. O’Regan is also the author of perhaps the best paper devoted to Voegelin’s ambiguous reference to Hegel. O’Regan, “Voegelin and the Troubled Greatness of Hegel.”
56 Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 129, 129–30.
57 “[…] logic is to be understood as the system of pure reason, as the realm of pure thought. This real mis truth unveiled, truth as it is in and for itself. It can therefore be said that this content is the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and of a finite spirit.” Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 29.
58 Voegelin, “On Hegel.” 218.
59 Ibid., 223.
According to Voegelin, whether we mean religious, pneumatic, or noetic revelation, it is always an event of manifestation in which divine transcendence and mystery are kept (in other words: transcendence). In the context set out by the divine reality, revelation signifies the manifestation through which the divine can be given and become known, but this manifestation always remains partial and it cannot be reduced to the realm of conceptual (being). If there were no self-revelation — that is, the manifestation from the selfhood of the divine — there would be no revelation at all and, therefore, no knowledge of God at all. For, both the lived experience of God and the thinking of the divine, there is no God outside of revelation in a theophanic event, outside the movement of kinesis or helkein.

The tension (as a polar tension) [and] the poles (the ground pole and the human pole) belong together. One cannot, therefore, hypostatise ... the ground, as the divinity, into a god whom we know something, short of that tension. In fact, Voegelin comes closest to formulating a definition of revelation when, in the essay The Gospel and Culture, he writes that the term “revelation” was designed to “express the dynamics of divine presence in the movement [...]”.

6 Singularity and universality

In the broader philosophical framework, we discover a pressing issue of how to reconcile the singular character of revelation as a historical and factual event with the universality of conceptual apprehension, “of the gift character of revelation and its inherent intelligibility.” Voegelin deals with this under the headline of self-revelation and the content of revelation. No matter how profound the claim may be that revelation is the self-revelation of God, it seems that the question is: what does it actually mean? As we remember, Voegelin claims that philosophy is deeply rooted in revelation and thus has its beginnings as well as its essence in the singular event. However, we must also keep in mind that for the author of Order and History, “God” is one name for divinity among others, and it can also be called the ground of existence, atitia or arche, designating the underlying and active unity of reality.

Voegelin leaves little room for doubt about the content of the revelation: “the fact of the revelation is its content” and if one wants a more elaborate description, Voegelin provides it:

As far as the experiences are concerned, the movement has no other than its questioning, the pathe of pull and counterpull, the directional indices of the pulls, and the consciousness of itself.

Certainly, there are different kinds of revelation — noetic, pneumatic, mythical, and perhaps other — and in each instance, revelation occurs in highly individual fashion which makes it unpredictable and irreducible to the repetitive operations of the reason. But Voegelin argues that revelation has no specific content beyond its event, its coming, and the movement of kinesis and helkein. This is the reality of (such) tension. The reality of tension is “intangible,” but precisely because of this, it cannot be said to be “ineffable”; tension “leaves room for a multitude of modes of experience that motivate a corresponding multitude of

60 “In historical drama of revelation, the Unknown God ultimately becomes the God known through revelation.” Voegelin, “The Gospel,” 199.
61 Voegelin, “Structures of Consciousness,” 363.
62 Voegelin, “The Gospel,” 195.
63 Desmond, “God sends,” 240. “If the revelation cannot be anticipated, how do we grant it as such if and when it comes? Must one not already be in anticipation and so open to its coming, before it comes? But does this do away with the problem of recognizing and granting what comes, when it comes? For it might come, and we might not recognize it. We might hear and hear not, understand and yet not understand at all. ... We are between not being able to anticipate and yet in some secret way already beings in anticipation. Unanticipated revelation can break into us, but even if it breaks into us, we must be a space of some porosity or hospitality to it; and be prepared.”
64 O’Regan, “Revelation,” 279.
65 Voegelin, Order, 297.
66 Voegelin, “The Gospel,” 186–7.
symbolic expressions of experience.”⁶⁷ The object is finite and definite, and it has specific properties and definite appearances; thus in its manifestation, it is identical to each man. The object in its bodily self-presentation is always given as the same. God is not an object within the world, he cannot be pointed at, a definition of God cannot be made. In this sense, God is not present in revelation.

All those experiences reveal the ground, i.e. the divine’s arrival. Revelation is the arrival of transcendence and being drawn into transcendence – it does not reveal any other – or supranatural world. When Voegelin claims that the human experiences tension, he does not indicate that the human experiences the divine indirectly, but on the contrary, the divine is not given as an object among other similar objects of the world, given only in its movement (kinesis and helkein), in revelation, thus solely in tension. The movement is revelation and self-revelation is moving presence.

The terms seeking (zetesis) and drawing (helkein) do not denote two different movements but symbolise the dynamics in the tension of existence between human and divine poles. In the one movement there is experienced a seeking from the human, and being drawn from the divine pole.⁶⁸

Revelation signifies the original mode of mind (or rather the human as a whole) being affected by the ground of being. Affection does not signify a mere feeling, mood, or even passion here – affection is the manifestation of ground, its movement, or kinesis, or attraction. Or simply: revelation.⁶⁹ When Voegelin claimed that reason is constituted by revelation, he meant that the core of existence is equal to the tension towards the divine ground of existence that can be approached insofar as it manifests on its own, i.e. self-reveals.

Participation in the noetic movement is not an autonomous project of action but the response to a theophanic event (the Promethean light exceeding bright, the Socratic daimon) or its persuasive communication (the Platonic peitho). To this revelatory movement (kinesis) from the divine ground, man can respond by his questioning and searching, but the theophanic events itself is not as his command.⁷⁰

This does not mean that revelation lacks any existential meaning or fails to render any knowledge of God. On the contrary, it is an event of man’s opening to the Good, of establishing conscious participation in the divine reality; revelation signifies the permeating yet elusive presence of the divine in man and thus the process of forming (or re-forming) one’s moral and social life. For example, Dikaiosyne, the highest virtue in Plato’s Republic, according to Voegelin, indicates the phenomenon of ordering of the soul through the experience of divine.

The soul of the Platonic model is no longer an open field of forces whose action can be attributed by man to the gods, but a closed entity with an ordering power that does not draw its strength from any of the three forces located by the model within the soul. The Dikaiosyne that imposes right order on the forces within the soul has its origin outside the soul. The place of Dikaiosyne in the model points toward transcendent reality as the source of order.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Voegelin, “What,” 345.
⁶⁸ Voegelin, “The Gospel,” 193.
⁶⁹ The concept outlined in this way brings to mind recent efforts of Jean-Luc Marion. The French phenomenologists argue that revelation and givenness (his main philosophical concept) are not only not mutually exclusive but, in fact, converge. To Marion revelation conceived of as concept is a paradox, i.e. a concept that contradicts the conventional concept and nevertheless remains rational; and this concept is said to play out in the terms of phenomenality. Manifestations of God in Jesus Christ are taken as instances of saturated phenomena and therefore placed on a larger scale of degrees of givenness. The question is, whether we can make a provisional indication of the biggest difference between Voegelin and Marion? The latter thinker emphasizes the difference between the two orders of thought and appearing, aletheia and apokalypsis, therefore the knowledge either proceeds from the subject and aims at certainty of a clear and distinct representation of the object in the evidence, or the knowledge is assured by the charity in that its conditions of possibility come with the very manifestation. In other words, there is a knowledge that is gained through gaze and reasoning and there is a knowledge acquired by the attraction acting firstly on the will. In my opinion, Voegelin intends to remove this dichotomy, according to him both noetic and pneumatic approaches are forms of the existential tension, which always manifests itself originally as attraction. Marion, Givenness.
⁷⁰ Voegelin, Order, 280.
⁷¹ Voegelin, “Order and History III: Plato and Aristotle,” 164–5.
Revelation is part of the theophanic event, it is a movement from the divine pole of tension, but the integral part of the event is the realisation of revelation, and this is only possible as a response to the drawing and pulling as a countermovement of man. In revelation, man recognises that he is not simply an immanent creature, but rather a being that exists in-between, in a platonic *metaxy* — therefore, through revelation, the human gains the possibility of acknowledging themselves as being open to mystery and the desire to know (more).

Clearly, the event of revelation occurs at the intersection of time and eternity, finite and infinite, immanence and transcendence — but this does not mean the absolutization of some element of immanence, of some content of the world. The event is singularity. However, *kinesis* and *helkein* denote the event of the human’s opening to the comprehensive reality, of being enabled to intellectually penetrate the reality. The revelation of transcendence enables the human being to transcend, that is: revelation enables a conceptual, rational search for unity, hidden under the multitude of phenomena. The philosophical questions presuppose an opening of the mind to that which is extra-phenomenal and transcendent. In this sense, revelation denotes an opening to the intelligible depths of being. In *Reason: The Classic Experience*, Voegelin in yet another manner formulated his fundamental conviction: “The philosopher feels himself moved (*kinein*) by some unknown force to ask the questions, he feels himself being drawn (*helkein*) into search”⁷² and adds that this basic tension manifests itself in different modes — from the Aristotelian *tou eidenai oregntai* to Plato’s *periagoge*, when in the Parable of the Cave, the philosopher feels himself moved to turn towards the mysterious light. In any case, this “unknown force” is a kind of ground, an *arche*, that manifests itself in the aforementioned experiences of unrest and desire to know, which are the beginning of a theophanic event. The crux of Voegelin’s approach is that a philosophical search — which proceeds by the way of argument, clarification, and justification — is a responsive search for what aroused the very search in the first place. By reflection, the mind recognises its own tension as a pursuit for the *arche* which makes itself present in the consciousness as the mover.

So when we speak of *nous* as reason, we should be aware that reason is not world-immanent operations or faculty but always the consciousness of the in-between, of ignorance with horizon that always has to be transgressed in order to find more Beyond.⁷³

In *Ecumenic Age*, Voegelin pinpoints to the fact that Plato was not a priest but a philosopher and as such lived not in a past of long belief and tradition but in active response “to the movement of divine presence and allowing the soul to become the site of the revelatory event.”⁷⁴ In the work of Aristotle, God eventually is the divine *Nous*, and consequently, the initial revelation allows the philosopher to discern the intelligible structure of reality.

When man responds to God’s appearance as the Nous, the *psyche* is constituted as the sensorium of reality in the full range from sense perception to cognitive participation in the divine ground. This omnidimensional <desire to know,> the unobscured openness toward reality, the readiness to move apperceptive hither and thither (*diaphora*) in order to participate through distinguishing knowledge (*diaphorein, gnorizein*) in the structures of reality, has been crystallized by Aristotle as the character of noetic consciousness in the opening paragraph of *Metaphysics*.⁷⁵

### 7 In place of conclusion

The distinction between natural and revealed theology can be rendered as the difference between that which can be known by human reason alone in any given circumstances through reflection on the data of

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⁷² Voegelin, “Reason,” 269.
⁷³ Voegelin, “Structures,” 363.
⁷⁴ Voegelin, *Order*, 290–1.
⁷⁵ Ibid., 300–1.
both internal and external reality, which are accessible to all human beings, and what can be known exclusively through God’s special acts of self-manifestation that remain solely at divine disposal. In other words, according to natural theology, reason is the agent of thinking that ultimately arrives at the concept of God, and in the revealed theology, God is the agent and the human is the recipient equipped with the possibility of response through faith and, in some version of Christianity, deeds. This is challenged by Voegelin – for him there is no thinking of the divine without the original, prior movement of the divine which is called revelation. God is operative in all searches for God and operates in revelation.

However, philosophy remains. Voegelin does not expect philosophy to give up on reasoning, argument, or method. Revelation does not imply that the efforts of reason are limited by tradition based on any kind of authority. It is still an endeavour to transcend the phenomenal, present, and constituted, in order to reach that which is essential and common to the plurality of the world and operates as constituting; philosophy no less strives for coherence of its claims and rational justification of its statements. However, philosophy cannot proceed without the prior manifestation of the ground, which is experienced as divine.

Unsurprisingly, we have arrived at the conclusion with the third argument that could have been directed against Voegelin (which we have so far avoided, but it presents itself now into consideration): how can this thesis be proven? – Even if we agree that the term revelation is understood correctly and it finds an application within philosophical discourse without being dissolved, there remains the question of demonstration. In short, how can Voegelin prove that thinking really proceeds from revelation?

There is no other way (methodos) than the recourse to the tension which is given only within tension. Voegelin’s thinking remains defined by phenomenology and hermeneutics: “Insight into reality is insight from the perspective of man who participates in reality,”⁷⁶ which is supplemented by the claim that in producing the concept of reality, one must remember that “images are not more or less correct representations of a reality existing as a datum that is independent of the experience of participation; they are, in fact, more or less adequate expressions of these experiences can be exposed, pointed to, analysed and interpreted.”⁷⁷ This means that one cannot simply prove the existence of tension or the existence of the ground itself, posit them as an explanatory hypothesis. Tension towards the ground is already given, even if it is hidden at first sight.

In The Beginning and the Beyond, Voegelin refers to Republic (365b-3) and Laws (X, 888), wherein Plato argues against the claims of atheists, whose thinking might be ordered as follows: 1) it seems that no gods exist; 2) even if they do exist, they do not care about the human race; 3) even if they care, they can be bribed. Voegelin delineates the condition of such an argument: “general loss of experiential contact with cosmic-divine reality”⁷⁸ that must have already penetrated a great portion of society, and especially the sophistic thinkers. According to the author of Order and History, Xth book of Laws was dedicated to refute this argument. Since the atheistic argument assumed that all movement in the universe has material nature, Plato had to show that divine, self-moving psyche is the source, an arche of movement.

The argument, of course, is not a “proof” in the sense of a logical demonstration, of an apodeixis, but only in the sense of an epideixis, of a pointing to an area of reality that the constructor of the negative propositions has chosen to overlook, or to ignore, or refuses to perceive.⁷⁹

According to Voegelin, Plato’s argumentation would be invalid if it had the divine psyche were not experienced through the human psyche, if there were no revelation. Each argument concerning the divine already presupposes Aristotle’s kinesis and Voegelin’s revelation. This seems to be Voegelin’s final conclusion: to truly think of the divine always means to be in touch with the divine. This takes place on the condition of revelation.

⁷⁶ Voegelin, “What,” 362.
⁷⁷ Ibid., 363.
⁷⁸ Voegelin, “The Beginning and The Beyond,” 201.
⁷⁹ Ibid., 202.
Funding information: The article was written as part of the research project 019/33/N/HS1/01868 “Filozofia religii Erica Voegelina – pomiędzy fenomenologią a hermeneutyką,” financed by National Science Centre (Narodowe Centrum Nauki) in Poland.

Conflict of interest: Author states no conflict of interest.

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