

Bengül GÜNGÖRMEZ (“Uludag” University of Bursa, Turkey)

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REASON AND
REVELATION – CONFLICT OR HARMONY?
Eric Voegelin’s Philosophical Analysis of the Relation Between
Reason and Revelation**

**ОТНОШЕНИЕТО МЕЖДУ РАЗУМ И ОТКРОВЕНИЕ –
КОНФЛИКТ ИЛИ ХАРМОНИЯ?**

**Философският анализ на Ерик Вьогелин на отношението между
разум и откровение**

В модерната теория Ерик Вьогелин (1901–1985 г.) е признат за философ на трансцендентното преживяване и на опита на историческото битие. Той е един от политическите философи, който със своята политическа теория въвежда трансцендентното в политиката. Освен това той е един от водещите критици на секуларизма в обществените науки.

В настоящото изследване е разгледан философският анализ на взаимоотношенията между разум и откровение, направен от германо-американския философ Ерик Вьогелин. Със своята философска и историческа теория той се опитва да „разбие” такива модерни категории като философия/теология, вяра/разум, разум/откровение, светско/свещено, религия/политика.... Вместо тези дихотомии той търси хармония между философия и теология, разум и откровение или вяра и разум, и особено между гръцката мъдрост и библейската мъдрост. За да докаже основната си теза, в най-добрите си работи той открива, че разумът притежава интуитивен аспект, а откровението има рационален аспект.

Интерпретацията на Вьогелин на хармонията между разум и откровение или философия и теология се основава на изследванията му върху гръцката философия и юдейско-християнската теология. Накратко, според Вьогелин стремежът на Платон и Аристотел към бога се допълва от откровение, главно от акта на религиозност на Мойсей и Исус. В този контекст Вьогелин нарича тази дейност „интелектуални преживявания” (Платон-Аристотел) и „духовни преживявания” (пророци). „Духовните преживявания” включват „интелектуалните преживявания”, както и „интелектуалните преживявания” включват „духовните преживявания”. Всички те са теофанични събития. Вьогелин отхвърля съществуването на съществено напрежение между библейските и философските традиции и смята, че библейското откровение и класическата гръцка философия споделят обща „интелектуална” същност. Според него погрешната дихотомия между разума и откровението е деформация, дошла от стоицизма и оказала решително влияние върху християнската теология в посока на оформянето на дихотомията разум/откровение.

За Вьогелин „естественият разум”, разграничен от „откровението”, е идея, развита от отците, когато те безкритично възприели символите за природата и разума на стоицизма като „философия”. От гледна точка на Вьогелин не може да съществува „естествен” разум. „Естественият разум” е „исторически”. Той е интелектуална конструкция на отците на Църквата.

Като резултат от всички тези аргументи Вьогелин решава, че не би могло да съществува конфликт, напрежение или противопоставяне между философия и теология и че може едновременно да бъдеш и философ, и теолог. Ако се обърнем към историята, то съществуването на конфликт, напрежение или противопоставяне между тези традиции е историческо и социологическо. Отвъд това напрежение съществува църковният монопол върху откровението и властовите отношения. Според Вьогелин, ако се абстрахираме от тази дихотомия, интерпретацията на откровението би била различна. В този контекст Вьогелин предлага свой собствен метод на тълкуване на откровението – медитация, т.е. символично и експериментално интерпретиране на откровението.

В този доклад, в допълнение към анализа на Вьогелин на разума и откровението, се спираме и върху неговия метод на разчитане на откровението и в този контекст засягаме проблема за трансформирането на символите в доктрини чрез деградирането и вулгаризирането на символите. Освен това частично засягаме и политическите резултати от тази трансформация. Според Вьогелин проблемът за трансформирането на символи в доктрини засяга съвременната политика, защото, от негова гледна точка, макар че съвременните мислители изразяват философските си разбирания за историята в „светски” термини, тяхното историческо разбиране за човека и неговия свят е „теологическо”. Според Вьогелин съвременните политически идеи в световен мащаб създават „религиозни системи” и заимстват символите си от религията, особено християнството, макар че това се отрича. Вьогелин използва термина „политически религии”, за да обясни този феномен в модерните времена. С техните политически религии съвременните мислители са изгубили връзката с трансцендентността и поради това преследват не божествено изкупление, а иманентно избавление. В съвременната политика нашите спасители са прогресивният супермен Кондорсе, позитивистичният супермен Комте, материалистичният супермен Маркс.... В този доклад, освен върху анализа на Вьогелин на разума и откровението и върху проблема за трансформирането на символите в доктрини, се спираме и на прочита на Вьогелин на съвременната политика като „политически религии”.

Ключови думи: Ерик Вьогелин, разум, откровение, трансцендентност, размисъл, символ, политически религии.

Introduction:

In the modern theory Eric Voegelin (1901–1985) is recognized as the philosopher of the transcendent experience and experience of historical being. He is one of the political philosophers who have invited the transcendence into politics with his political theory. He is also one of the leading critics of secularism in social sciences.

In this paper, entitled “The Relationship of Reason and Revelation: Conflict or Harmony?” I would like to consider German-American political philosopher Eric Voegelin’s historical and philosophical analysis of the relationship between Reason

and Revelation. With his philosophical and historical theory he wants to break down the modern categories such as “traditional/modern”, “philosophy/theology”, “faith/reason”, “reason/revelation”, “secular/sacred”, “religion/politics”... And instead of these dichotomies he sees the harmony between philosophy and theology, reason and revelation or faith and reason; particularly Greek wisdom and Biblical wisdom. For the purpose of proving his main argument, he reveals that reason has intuitive dimension and also revelation has rational dimension in his master works.

Reason and Revelation: Tension or Harmony?

Voegelin rejects the fundamental tension between reason and revelation which modern thinkers like Leo Strauss accept. Unlike Voegelin, Leo Strauss claims that “when we attempt to return to the roots of Western civilization, we observe soon that Western civilization has two roots which are in conflict with each other, the biblical and the Greek philosophic... The very life of Western civilization is the life between two codes, a fundamental tension”. Strauss, with this argument decides that “no one can be both a philosopher and a theologian or, for that matter, a third which is beyond the conflict between philosophy and theology, or a synthesis of both” (Strauss 1993b: 217). Leo Strauss also claims that “we must try to understand the difference between biblical wisdom and Greek wisdom. We see at once that each of the two claims to be the true wisdom, thus denying to the other its claim to be wisdom in the strict and highest sense. According to the Bible, the beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord; according to the Greek philosophers, the beginning of wisdom is wonder (Strauss 1993a: 112). Strauss’s claims are also modern thinkers’ claims and modern vision depends on this argument about revelation and reason.

Voegelin challenges this argument and does not accept Strauss’s claims. Firstly, Voegelin’s interpretation of the harmony between reason and revelation or philosophy and theology depends on his investigations about Greek philosophy and Jewish-Christian theology like Leo Strauss. In brief, according to Voegelin unlike Strauss, Plato’s and Aristotle’s philosophical act of seeking God is to be completed with revelation namely, religious act of Moses and Jesus. In this context, Voegelin calls these activities as “noetic experiences” (Platon-Aristotle) and “pneumatic experiences” (prophets). For him “pneumatic experiences” include “noetic experiences” and also “noetic experiences” include “pneumatic experiences”. All of them are “theophanic events”¹. Voegelin rejects the fundamental tension between the biblical and philosophical traditions and he sees biblical revelation and classical Greek philosophy as sharing a common “noetic” core. Voegelin claims that in his essay with the title “The Gospel and Culture”, we can see these theophanic events in the Parable of the Cave with the Plato’s experience. Voegelin asks, “Why is the prisoner fettered in the Cave in the first place? Why must the force that binds him be overcome, be a counterforce that turns him around? Why must the man who ascended to the light return to the Cave to suffer death at the hands of those who did not leave it? Why does not

everybody leave, so that the Cave as an establishment of existence would be abandoned? Beyond the search that receives direction from the pull (*helkein*) of reason there extends the larger existential field of “counterpulling” of *anthekein* (Laws 644-45)” (Voegelin 1993: 151). For Voegelin the main questions are these: “Why the prisoner turns? Who “forces” him? (zwang)”. According to Voegelin the prisoner is pulled to divine pole and then to immanent pole. He is in “*metaxy*” – that is Platonic term, namely “in-between”. Following this Voegelin compares this event with the event of Moses in the Bible. Moses “turns” to God’s voice when he calls him. He can not reject God’s voice and he turns. As a result of all these arguments Voegelin concludes that all actors “turn” to both human and divine poles. From Voegelin’s perspective “turning” or with the German term “Umkehrung” or “Kehre” is main point of this matter: with this event of “turning” biblical revelation and classical Greek philosophy share a common “noetic” core. With Voegelin’s words, “there is no Saving Tale other than the tale of the divine pull to be followed by man; and there is no cognitive articulation of existence other than the noetic consciousness in which the movement becomes luminous to itself” (Voegelin 1993: 153).

According to Voegelin the false dichotomy between reason and revelation was the Stoic deformation and had a decisive influence on Christian theology in fostering the dichotomy of reason/revelation. For Voegelin, “natural reason” as distinguished from “revelation is a conceit developed by the *patres* when they accepted the Stoic symbols of nature and reason uncritically as “philosophy” (Voegelin 1974: 48). From Voegelin’s perspective there can not be “natural” reason. “There is nothing “natural” in the noetic illuminations of consciousness of Plato and Aristotle.” Natural reason is “historical”. Natural reason is the intellectual construction of *patres*, namely the Fathers of the Church.

As a result of all these arguments, Voegelin decides that there can not be a conflict, tension or opposition between philosophy and theology and at the same time one can be both a philosopher and a theologian. When we look at the history, if there are conflict, tension or opposition between these traditions, these are historical and sociological not “natural”. Behind these tensions there are Church’s monopoly on revelation, “the will to power” of the modern thinker and power relations.

For Voegelin, today faith and reason require reconsideration because the ancient and intimate relationship between faith and reason was damaged in history with the power relationships. So, the relationship between faith and reason itself was an instrument of power in history. Sometimes (early) *patres* have used this relationship for their interest, sometimes the thinkers of Enlightenment and other thinkers have used and misinterpreted, distorted and even manipulated the relationship between them according to their interests as “natural reason” or “autonomous reason”.

Symbols and Doctrines:

Voegelin also draws his attention to the ways of interpretation of reality in history according to power relationships. So, Voegelin writes: “the one truth of reality,

as it emerges from the metaxy, ... (into) danger of dissociating into the two verities of Faith and Reason (Voegelin 1990: 210) with each being considered only source of truth about reality or existence in opposition to the other. Early patres often gave primacy to revelation especially Christian Revelation and modern thinkers gave primacy to “autonomous reason”.

This process involves degeneration and vulgarization of symbols, the symbols of reason and revelation also involves the problem of doctrine. With Voegelin’s analysis of the reason and revelation we will deal with Voegelin’s reading techniques of revelation or philosophy and in this context we will concern the problem of transforming symbols into doctrines with the degeneration and vulgarization of symbols. According to Voegelin, “the reality of existence, as experienced in the movement, is a mutual participation of human and divine; 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 participation itself. The ontological status of the symbols is both human and divine... This double status of symbols which express the movement in the metaxy has been badly obscured in Western history by Christian theologians who have split the two components of symbolic truth, monopolizing, under the title of “revelation”, for Christian symbols the divine component, while assigning, under the title of “natural reason”, to philosophical symbols the human component. This theological doctrine is empirically untenable – Plato was just as conscious of the revelatory component in the truth of his logos as the prophets of Israel or the authors of the New Testament writings. The differences between prophecy, classical philosophy, and the gospel must be sought in the degrees of differentiation of existential truth” (Voegelin 1993: 153).

“Revelation or Reason!”; “Jerusalem or Athens!”; “Faith or Reason!” According to Voegelin, if we abandon these dichotomies, our interpretations of revelation and reason will be changed. In this context Voegelin offers his own method of reading revelation; *meditation*, that is to say symbolic and experimental interpretation of revelation. In the meditative process we must accept these experiments as symbols, not as doctrines or creeds. For Voegelin meditations have a historical dimension and they try to clarify the formative centre of existence, the *metaxy*. Also with *meditation* we can challenge all ideologies.

Political Religions:

In this paper, in addition to Voegelin’s analysis of reason and revelation or the problem of transforming symbols into doctrines we will also deal with Voegelin’s reading of modern politics as “political religions” (Voegelin 2000). For Voegelin, symbols can become opaque and when this occurs they must be made luminous again by penetrating to the experience they express. For example when classical reason transforms to “natural reason” that doesn’t content theophanic dimension, there is a radical opposition between Bible and philosophy and between philosopher

and theologian. This conflict is characteristic of the West since the early *patres* and for Voegelin,

“Christian theology has denatured the Platonic Nous by degrading it imaginatively to a “natural reason”, a source of truth subsidiary to the overriding source of revelation... But history has taken its revenge. The non-revelatory reason imagined by the theologians as a servant has become a self-assertive master. In historical sequence the imagined non-revelatory reason has become the real anti-revelatory reason of the Enlightenment revolt against the church” (Voegelin 1987: 43).

Now we are coming to problem of ideology and political religions in Voegelin’s philosophical and political thinking. According to Voegelin, this problem of transforming symbols into doctrines and the imagined non-revelatory reason effects also modern politics because, in his way of thinking, although the modern thinker expressed his philosophy of history with the claim that they were in secular terms, his historical understanding of man and his world was “theological” or “religious”. There is not reason but only “belief”. Because he defends his argument in the doctrinal and ideological position philosophy/theology”, “faith/reason”, “reason/revelation”, “secular/sacred”, “religion/politics”, etc.

According to Voegelin, modern political world-view produces “religious system” and it takes its symbols from religion, namely Christianity although it rejects it. Voegelin uses term of “political religions” for explaining this phenomenon in modernity. With their political religions or “pseudo-reality” modern thinkers lost contact to transcendence and therefore pursued not divine redemption, but immanent salvation. In modern politics, with the sacralization of the reason or Man who has Reason, our saviours are the progressive superman of Condorcet, the positivistic superman of Comte, the materialistic superman of Marx... The character of modern politics was prepared by all utopian dreams of inner-worldly fulfilment. So, communism, national socialism, fascism and scientism have in common the dream of innerworldly perfection. With our saviours that are the progressive superman of Condorcet, the positivistic superman of Comte, the materialistic superman of Marx we can establish modern-ideal-perfect society and instead of living for the otherworldly perfection “we can be save” in this new society.

NOTES

¹ *Theophany* – a visible manifestation of a deity. – Short Eric Voegelin Glossary. – <<http://watershade.net/ev/ev-glossary.html>>

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Strauss 1993à: Strauss, L. Jerusalem and Athens: Some Preliminary Reflections. – In: Faith and Political Philosophy. The Correspondence Between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934–1964. Ed. P. Emberley, B. Cooper. The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Strauss 1993á: Strauss, L. The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy. – In: Faith and Political Philosophy. The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934–1964. Ed. P. Emberley, B. Cooper. The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Voegelin 1974: Voegelin, E. The Ecumenic Age. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

Voegelin 1987: Voegelin, E. In Search of Order. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

Voegelin 1990: Voegelin, E. The Beginning and the Beyond. – In: What is History? And Other Unpublished Writings, 28. Baton Rouge&London: Louisiana State University Press.

Voegelin 1993: Voegelin, E. Gospel and Culture. – In: Faith and Political Philosophy. The Correspondence between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934–1964. Ed. P. Emberley, B. Cooper. The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Voegelin 2000: Voegelin, E. The Political Religions. – In: Modernity without Restraint. The Political Religions, the New Science of Politics, and Science, Politics, and Gnosticism. Ed. M. Henningsen. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press.