The concluding chapter is the book's most interesting. Ranieri uses the theories of the French anthropologist René Girard to underscore the weaknesses of both philosophers while answering their critiques of Christianity. In this sense, Ranieri's work continues a recent conversation between these figures that resulted in a helpful collection that brought their thought into dialogue: *Politics and Apocalypse*, ed. Robert Hamerton-Kelly (Michigan State University Press, 2008).

Girard shares with Strauss and Voegelin a countermodern perspective. Yet unlike the latter, Girard argues persuasively that it is not authentic biblical thinking but rather philosophy that is more inclined to adopt a false mythology that leads to violence. Voegelin and Strauss provide test cases for Ranieri, who follows Girard. For Girard, violent episodes within Christendom represent departures from authentic Christianity; indeed the Gospel, though it has taken root unevenly and sporadically, represents humanity's best chance to liberate itself from the violent forces that present such a profound crisis. Even, nay, especially classical philosophy falls for and underwrites the mythic lie that violence provides a real solution. Ranieri remarks: "The horrors of the twentieth century are better explained as a consequence of the lasting hold exercised by sacrificial thinking, rather than as the offspring of a biblical orientation whose effect on Western civilization has been to call our attention to the lies by which we justify our scapegoating" (244).

As wholeheartedly as the reviewer agrees with Ranieri's usage of Girard, his choice seems arbitrary; certainly there are other Christian apologists—John Milbank and David Bentley Hart, to name just two—who brilliantly position Christianity as humanity's best political hope, and who place Greek antiquity along the same agonistic continuity as modernity and Nietzschean postmodernity. This point underlies the more general criticism that the author might have placed his central subjects and the scholarship on them within a wider context, so that the selection of these figures, as well as the subject under discussion, might have seemed more urgent. Still, the book offers a reliable treatment of two political figures of towering genius while bringing them further into conversation with a someone who offers a profound Christian apology for our time.

—Grant Kaplan

GOING BEYOND THE LIMITS

Barry Cooper: *Beginning the Quest: Law and Politics in the Early Work of Eric Voegelin* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2009. Pp. xiii, 262. \$44.95.)

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Barry Cooper is one of Voegelin's foremost interpreters and defenders. His previous monograph about Voegelin, *Eric Voegelin and the Foundations of*

Modern Political Science (Missouri, 1999), is one of several useful commentaries on Voegelin's major writings. Like most of the Anglophone secondary literature, it focuses on Voegelin's life and thought after his flight from Austria in 1938. Cooper's most recent book, *Beginning the Quest*, complements his earlier work on Voegelin's mature thought, and, as a thorough treatment of Voegelin's often-ignored early works, is a welcome scholarly contribution to the understanding of Voegelin's work as a whole. Further, *Beginning the Quest* suggests that there is more unity within Voegelin's corpus than is sometimes thought. Voegelin's early writings within sociology and legal theory treat a wide range of topics, and their methodology differs from that of the works for which Voegelin is primarily known, but Cooper argues that in them one sees a coherent development toward the philosophical views Voegelin took later in life; the early work of Eric Voegelin is properly regarded as the beginning of a lifelong quest for intelligibility in human personal and political reality. Cooper traces the development of Voegelin's earlier thought through the years leading up to the Second World War and succeeds admirably in showing how Voegelin's more mature and better-known writings, beginning with *The Political Religions* (1938) and *The New Science of Politics* (1952), were motivated by a sustained critical engagement with the questions and methodology of European social science in the early twentieth century. Specifically, Cooper seeks to show how during the 1920s and 1930s "Voegelin moved beyond a legal approach to political realities (in which he had been extensively schooled) to a direct encounter and analysis of the mass political movements of the 1930s and of the language by which they expressed and understood themselves" (2).

In *The New Science of Politics*, Voegelin outlined an ambitious—to say the least—"restoration of political science" in the spirit of Plato and Aristotle, a project he continued for the rest of his life in works such as *Anamnesis* and the multivolume *Order and History*. Against positivistic understandings of the scope of social science, Voegelin maintained that the scholarly study of politics, properly understood, leads to and ultimately requires the practice of "philosophical anthropology" (221), the investigation of all dimensions of human existence (biological, cultural, spiritual, etc.). Throughout his mature career, Voegelin insisted that political science could, in fact, address metaphysical and religious questions, like the problem of justice, which is "not a problem of normative science, nor of causal science; rather it is a problem of ontology" (223). In short, Voegelin rejected the disjunction between the normative and the empirical; or, rather, he understood empirical reality to include human experiences of transcendence, which he regarded as morally formative. This epistemological move allowed him to understand his own work in the philosophy of history as robustly empirical, even though he described modern totalitarianism as the result of a "gnostic" attempt to murder God, and argued that the proper source of order in political society is the human soul in its encounter with the divine.

Because of such bold claims, especially regarding the nature of political science and philosophic knowledge, many first-time readers unfortunately, if understandably, pigeonhole Voegelin as a reactionary or religious thinker, perhaps an intellectual curiosity, but not a major figure in twentieth-century political thought. Voegelin's subsequent writings from the 1960s and onward are even more demanding, and while rewarding, they can alienate all but the most dedicated students. There are several helpful introductions to Voegelin's mature works, each with its merits, but few of them pay as much attention as does Cooper's work to the intellectual seedbed from which Voegelin's later thought arose. Cooper modestly prefaces *Beginning the Quest* by anticipating that perhaps only readers with an antecedent interest in Voegelin will be interested in an account of the development of Voegelin's thought in the years before Voegelin (by his own account) found his intellectual voice (xi). Yet in focusing on the development of Voegelin's early thought, Cooper in fact opens up Voegelin's later writings in a fresh way.

Cooper's approach is both exegetical and biographical, situating Voegelin's early intellectual development in historical and personal contexts. His account begins with Voegelin's involvement in the methodological controversies in the German social sciences in the early 1920s, and then follows Voegelin to America from 1924 to 1926. Voegelin studied under the neo-Kantian jurist Hans Kelsen and the economist and sociologist Othmar Spann at the University of Vienna, holding Kelsen and his pure theory of law in particularly high regard. Yet during the early 1920s Voegelin felt a growing dissatisfaction with the methodologies of the German-language social sciences. Voegelin began to regard sociological knowledge as subjective, or, as Cooper glosses it, "participatory" (27), that is, conditioned in part by the perspectives of its producers. Kelsen's ostensibly a priori legal theory and Max Weber's purportedly value-neutral science were, it seemed, dependent on the particular circumstances surrounding their formulation. They lacked the universal scientific validity they claimed. The "great break" in Voegelin's scholarly life did not occur, however, until he received a fellowship for research and study in the United States. His period of study there led to his first published book, *On the Form of the American Mind* (1928). During this time Voegelin was exposed both to a different kind of society and a different kind of social-scientific method. His study of American scholars who judged human existence to be open to the divine (49), along with his study of American culture, confirmed his suspicions about the limitations of European social science, and showed him what an alternative approach to social science might look like (72).

Upon his return to Europe, Voegelin sought to move beyond Kelsen's approach to legal theory. He did not reject it out of hand, but came to believe that a full understanding of political reality required not only an account of the logic of legal systems, but also a philosophical and

anthropological understanding of the human beings and political societies that produced laws and government institutions. Central to such an understanding was the study of “political ideas,” that is, the concepts through which societies understand and constitute themselves. Accordingly, in the 1930s Voegelin undertook to study two key ideas in the European (especially German) political environment, namely, the concepts of race and state. By the time he composed *The Political Religions*, he had come to regard such political ideas as themselves the products of “fundamental experiences of reality” (217), including religious experiences. Kelsen’s *Staatslehre* was incapable of analyzing such experiences, or the political ideas they engendered. This view that a comprehensive political science must address these experiences, along with the empirical conclusion that the totalitarian movements of the day were religious in character, led to Voegelin’s mature position that the scientific study of politics should legitimately be able to speak about metaphysical and religious questions.

There is an ongoing debate among Voegelin scholars about how to understand the theological terminology in his writings. Some argue that Voegelin was more or less a theologian; others maintain that he was a strict empiricist, seeking to understand human experiences of the divine as significant events in political history. Cooper does not definitively resolve this debate. However, his account of Voegelin’s intellectual development shows decisively that for all his often off-putting originality, Voegelin was no mere eccentric, nor a reactionary antimodern. Rather, his mature methodology, including the analysis of religious experience, was a direct response to what he saw as the constricting limitations of positivistic European social science. Cooper’s book is unlikely to make any converts—such is not its goal. But it does serve to show concretely how Voegelin’s grand attempt to reestablish political science was, in fact, the result of a deep engagement not only with the Western philosophical tradition, but with the excruciatingly precise tradition of German-language legal theory and sociology. In so doing, *Beginning the Quest* makes Voegelin’s oeuvre more accessible to an English-speaking audience, and at least more plausible to readers skeptical of Voegelin’s radical attempt to reestablish political science on the basis of a philosophical, and often seemingly theological, anthropology. It lacks some of the detail of Hans-Jörg Sigwart’s *Das Politische und die Wissenschaft* (Königshausen und Neumann, 2005), yet as a broad study of Voegelin’s diverse earlier works, it is a seminal contribution to the study of Voegelin, and warrants careful attention from anyone interested in the development of Voegelin’s thought. And since it puts Voegelin’s intellectual development in a wider context, Cooper’s book is also worthy of notice by scholars generally interested in the history of twentieth-century European and American political thought.

—Peter Brickey LeQuire