

TALCOTT PARSONS AND ERIC VOEGELIN,
 “CORRESPONDENCE, 1940-1944”
 EDITED BY PETER BRICKEY LEQUIRE
 AND DANIEL SILVER

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*Note on the Letters*¹

This collection of twenty-five letters combines materials preserved by both Parsons and Voegelin, now stored, respectively, in the Papers of Talcott Parsons, 1921-1979, Box 27, Harvard University Archives, and the Eric Voegelin Collection, Box 28, Folder 12, Hoover Institution Archives. Our text is based on a comparison of both sources. We have corrected several obvious misspellings and typographical errors, and attempted to identify the persons and texts mentioned, but have generally left the text of the correspondence as-is, in the belief that to impose a consistent editorial style on these letters would detract from their spontaneity and charm. All footnotes and bracketed interpolations are ours except where otherwise indicated.

Voegelin's records of the correspondence were more extensive, comprising either copies or original versions of twenty-two of these letters, and lacking only one known letter from Parsons (24, 12/17/1943). Parsons kept a total of fifteen letters (ten from Voegelin, and carbon copies of five of his own), starting with Voegelin's letter of 5/9/1941 (7). This letter marks the beginning of their substantive exchange about Parsons' controversy with Alfred Schütz, who is at least mentioned in nine of the eleven letters from 1941. Parsons requests Voegelin's help with the matter in letter 8 (5/13/41), and explains his reaction to Schütz in letter 13 (8/18/41). Particularly significant to the controversy are Voegelin's explanation of the Austrian methodological debates that informed Schütz's criticism (14, 9/24/41), and Parsons' reply (16, 10/2/41).

The earlier letters (beginning in January 1940) stem directly from the two authors' personal acquaintance and similar, timely research interests. Modern anti-Semitism and its causes are the focus, most notably, of letters 5 and 6, which raise most of the questions that loom large in the remainder of the correspondence. In 5, Voegelin first raises the subject of secularization, prompting a discussion of how the different branches of the Protestant Reformation are responsible for different kinds of anti-Semitic and nationalistic attitudes seen in the present day. The political legacies of Lutheranism and (to a greater extent) Calvinism figure prominently in letters 6, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, and 22.

¹ These letters are published here courtesy of the Harvard University Archives and the Hoover Institution Archives, with the gracious permission of the Parsons Estate and

the Voegelin Literary Trust. The editors welcome comments and queries (pblequir@samford.edu; dsilver@utsc.utoronto.ca).

In letter 16, reflecting on his disagreement with Schütz, Parsons suggests that his own approach to social science might be an outgrowth of his Calvinist heritage, connecting this thread of the conversation back to another set of animating issues. In 6, Parsons explicitly turns to Max Weber for help in understanding the processes of secularization, setting up a discussion of scientific methodology in which letters 7, 15, and 19, in addition to those surrounding the Schütz controversy, are particularly significant.

The reader of the entire correspondence will see not only a pregnant intellectual exchange surrounding such issues, but also hints of a relatively brief but evidently genuine friendship between the two men. For a more extensive discussion of these interrelated scholarly questions and the interpersonal context in which they were raised, please see our article “Critical Naïveté: Religion, Science and Action in the Parsons-Voegelin Correspondence” in the *European Journal of Sociology* 54, no. 2.

1. *Voegelin to Parsons, 20 January 1940*²

January 20, 1940

Professor Talcott Parsons
Adams House
Harvard University
Cambridge, Mass.

Dear Professor Parsons:

It is rather inexcusable that I write to you only after many months, but I trust that you will accept my reasons and apologies. After I had left Harvard I was buried under a considerable amount of work building up my courses first at Northwestern, and now here at Alabama. The necessity of acquiring the English vocabulary in several fields to such a degree that I can express my thoughts freely in speech, causes me still considerable trouble. And besides, I have to teach American Government and American Diplomacy, and you can easily imagine that my general background of American history and civilisation is not yet by far what it ought to be in order to make my courses first rate. The task would be rather desperate if it were not for my colleagues and students; they are so

² Copy in the Eric Voegelin Collection, Hoover Institution Archives.

gracious about my deficiencies that in proper time I think I shall become a quite useful member of the faculty.

In November I read a paper to the Southern Political Science Association on the National Socialist technique of International Relations; they liked it so much that it probably will be published in the May number of the Journal.³ Just now I am working on a paper for [Waldemar] Gurian's Review of Politics on the Growth of the Race Idea; it is supposed to come out in April.⁴ With all this smaller business on hand, my main work, the History of Political Ideas, does not proceed as quickly as it should.⁵ However, I have been able to finish the Introduction and the section on the Orient.⁶ And I regret it infinitely that I do not have the opportunity of an occasional talk with you as continuously new problems of method keep cropping up which I think might interest you, too.

At Christmas, I was in Washington. I saw Dr. [Alfred] Schütz, and I understand that you made his acquaintance; I think he is really an excellent theorist.⁷

Would it be too bold if I ask your permission to send you some time the theoretical section of my "History"?⁸ I should care very much to have your critical opinion.

Our life here is very pleasant. But the social environment, being rather different from the East and the Middle West, is still somewhat bewildering. We plan to come to Cambridge this summer, as I want to work at the Widener library. Will you be there at the time?

Please give our best regards to Mrs. Parsons; I am,

Yours very sincerely,

Eric Voegelin

³ "Extended Strategy: A New Technique of Dynamic Relations," *Review of Politics* 2, no. 2 (May 1940): 189-200; reprinted in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, edited by Ellis Sandoz (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989-2009), vol. 10, pp. 15-26.

⁴ Voegelin, "The Growth of the Race Idea," *The Review of Politics* 2, no. 3 (July 1940), pp. 283-317; reprinted in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 10, pp. 27-61.

⁵ Posthumously published in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vols. 19-26.

⁶ See *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 19, pp. 69-107.

⁷ Throughout the correspondence, Parsons and Voegelin type "Schuetz."

⁸ See "Voegelin's Introduction to the 'History of Political Ideas,'" in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 19, pp. 225-237.

2. Parsons to Voegelin, 8 February 1940⁹

Harvard University
Department of Sociology
Adams House
G 23.
Cambridge, Mass., U.S.A.

February 8, 1940

Professor Eric Voegelin,
Department of Political Science,
University of Alabama,
University, Alabama.

Dear Voegelin:

I was delighted to hear from you. I have often wondered how you were getting on at Alabama and was disappointed not to see you in Philadelphia at Christmas time, as I had hoped you might possibly be there. I very much miss the opportunity of having a discussion with you from time to time. The two articles you have been working on sound interesting and I shall look forward to seeing them when they are published. I myself have recently completed a paper in which you may be interested: a sociological study of some of the sources of anti-Semitism. It is to be published in a symposium on the subject, edited by a man named Graeber.¹⁰ You have perhaps heard of the project. I should be delighted to see any part of the manuscript of your book which you may care to send me, as from what you have told me about it, it sounds most interesting. I might perhaps, though not very soon, ask your permission to send you a manuscript of my own which I completed early in the fall. It is a draft of a restatement of the generalized theory of action in a somewhat different form from that in my book. I do not intend publishing it soon, but wish to have it subjected to critical analysis by a number of people before going back to reconsider and, probably, rewrite most of it.

⁹ Original letter in the Eric Voegelin Collection, Hoover Institution Archives.

¹⁰ Parsons, "The Sociology of Anti-Semitism," in Isacque Graeber and Stuart Henderson Britt, eds., *Jews in a Gentile World*

(New York: Macmillan 1942), pp. 101-122; reprinted in Uta Gerhardt, ed., *Talcott Parsons on National Socialism* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1993), pp. 131-152.

I am glad to hear you intend to come to Cambridge for the summer. We will probably not be here, but at our farm in New Hampshire. I shall, however, come to town from time to time, and I shall hope to see you then, and perhaps you and Mrs. Voegelin could pay us a visit in the country.

With cordial greetings,

Talcott Parsons

—

3. *Parsons to Voegelin, 1 August 1940*¹¹

R. F. D. 1 – Alstead – New Hampshire

August 1, 1940

Dear Voegelin,

Delighted you can come. The enclosed map will show you how to find our place. Suggest this route: Concord Turnpike (#2) to Littleton Common then 119 to Groton and West Townsend. Then turn off going to Mason, Greenville, Temple, Peterborough, Hancock, Stoddard, Marlow, East Alstead.

Cordially,

Talcott Parsons

—

4. *Parsons to Voegelin, 16 August 1940*¹²

R. F. D. 1 – Alstead – New Hampshire

August 16, 1940

Dear Voegelin,

I was in Cambridge most of yesterday but unfortunately things worked out so I did not get time to drop in on you. I had to attend a meeting at lunch and other things worked out badly. I am sorry as

¹¹ Handwritten original letter in the Eric Voegelin Collection, Hoover Institution Archives,

¹² Original letter in the Eric Voegelin Collection, Hoover Institution Archives.

I hoped to get an opportunity to discuss my manuscripts with you. There may not be another opportunity before you get away, so I hope you will be able to take time to write me some of your comments.

We greatly enjoyed having you and your wife here, if only for a brief visit.

I look forward very much to seeing more of your manuscript.

Sincerely yours,

Talcott Parsons

—

5. *Voegelin to Parsons, 11 September 1940*¹³

September 11, 1940

Dear Parsons:

I regretted it very much that our schedules did not permit of another meeting for an extended discussion of your MSS. Let me first tell you what I did with them: I left them in the hands of Dr. [Emanuel] Winternitz and begged him to deposit them with the Secretary of the Sociology department.

This arrangement became necessary because I kept them to the last moment always hoping that I would find the time to give your theoretical MS. more than a cursory glancing through. Unfortunately I was so pressed with my Greeks that a careful reading became impossible. I have studied, however, the MS. on anti-Semitism; and I must say I have never read a more impartial analysis of the social causes of the friction. You will certainly meet with criticism for this very reason, for, as I can tell from my own experience, Jews always get very excited when you say that there are such causes. As is natural under the circumstances, I was mainly interested by your analysis of the features in American society which make for anti-Semitism, because I know least about that part of the problems; but I was also very impressed by the survey of those elements in Hebrew religion and ethics which are conditions for the conflict.

¹³ Copy in the Eric Voegelin Collection, Hoover Institution Archives.

There is not much I have to say concerning your paper, except that I agree with it. I could not venture any criticism, but I should like to draw your attention to an aspect of the problem which you did necessarily not consider, because you exemplified the analyses with American materials. All you say about anomie holds good, of course, for the German case, too. But I think German anti-Semitism is determined in addition by an element which is not to be found either in the British, French, or American case. There never has been a German national "society," a ruling class setting standards of conduct as in the Western political communities. This lack of an acknowledged German social standard, comparable to the British gentleman, the French bourgeois, the American farmer and middle-class type, makes (or made) German society particularly weak; it had considerably less assimilating force than the West. The anomie, and the subsequent inroads of Jews in German society have, for this reason, been much more marked than in the well standardised and more coherent Western societies, and out of a feeling of helplessness much more bitterly resented. The German anti-Semitic literature from Bruno Bauer to Otto Weininger (who was himself a Jew) always harps on the problem of the "Bodenlosigkeit" of the Jews- which I take to be a projection of the acutely felt German lack of firm roots in an established and acknowledged order.

A second, peculiarly German point was touched upon by Stefan George in one of his poems when he hinted that the German hatred against the Jews has its cause in an attitude which is very similar to the Jewish belief in the chosen people.¹⁴ Two chosen peoples clash. Bringing this hint down to tangible materials in the German cultural history, I would suggest that this history is characterized by a feature, lacking in the West, which I should like to call Monadologism (the term was suggested to me by Fritz Kaufmann, at Northwestern, with whom I had a correspondence on this point).¹⁵ The term is taken from the Monadology of [Gottfried Wilhelm] Leibnitz, and intends to signify a permanent German tendency to stress the ultimate loneliness and isolation of the human personality, its being closed up within itself, without contacts with an environment. To mention a few high points of this trend: it is to be found in [Johann Gottlieb] Fichte and

¹⁴ See Stefan George, "Ihr Äusserste von windumsauster klippe," in *Der Stern des Bundes*, vol. 8 of *Sämtliche Werke in achtzehn Bänden*, 2nd. ed. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2011).

¹⁵ See Voegelin, letter to Fritz Kaufmann, 31 December 1944, *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 29, pp. 418-419.

the Romantic philosophy, and recently in [Oswald] Spengler's cultural monadology. (Santayana has dealt with this problem somewhat hysterically in his "German Egotism";¹⁶ while he has got hold of the problem, I think that to treat it under the title of "egotism" is a misleading psychologism). This Monadologism has in German history, I think, a function similar to the Jewish belief in the chosen people, and prevents the free formation of contacts and the social openness. In this sense, I think, there is indeed a special cause of anti-Semitism in Germany which is absent in this country. (I hope this is not too aphoristic!).

And then, there is third point which I should like to mention, though with a certain hesitation, because I am not able yet to understand it in all its implications. When the sociological analysis as such is perfected, and the phenomenon of anti-Semitism is neatly dissected into its elements, there still remains the fact that just once in history a phenomenon like the Jews should have occurred. I mean, the analysis of the elements does not satisfy me as to the unique historical "Gestalt" of the Jews in Western history. There remains a problem which can be treated, however, only on the religious level. [Hans] Blüher has dealt with it in a somewhat irresponsible fashion, but there may be something to it nevertheless. The Jews have become what they are through their life in the expectation of the Messiah. Now, through the appearance of Christ, a new element has entered this expectation: the possibility of having missed the Messiah (die Messias-Verfehlung). If we take the world of religious forces serious[ly] at all, then we have to take into account the Jewish problem as it is developed by St. Paul in Romans 9-11; and particularly the formula of the mystery in 11, v.25.¹⁷ The problem of the Jews, as linked to Christianity through missing the Messiah, can only disappear through the Pauline solution or with Christianity itself. The National Socialist anti-Semitism may, under this aspect, be interpreted in two radically different ways: on the one hand it may be an outburst of the Jewish-Christian tension in the traditional sense, as I think anti-Semitism is still in this country; on the other hand, it may be an event which has an entirely new significance and cannot be classified with traditional anti-Semitism: it may be the outburst of new theogonic forces which are directed against the Jews

¹⁶ George Santayana, *Egotism in German Philosophy* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1916).

¹⁷ "So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you

to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in" (New Revised Standard Version).

because they are anti-Christian; it may be religiously, not any more a Christian anti-Semitism, but a movement which wipes out the Jews incidentally to the attack against Christianity.

I hope, you are not bored about this epistle. The problem interests me deeply; and I should be very glad, if sometime you could let me have your opinion, particularly on the last point.

Let me repeat my regret that I could not read your other MS. more carefully. I left it with Winternitz reluctantly because I thought you might need it. But if I could have it now that the pressure of work is less heavy, I should be very happy, indeed, to read it.

With our best greetings to you, Mrs. Parsons, and the children, I am,
yours very sincerely,

—

*6. Parsons to Voegelin, 27 September 1940*¹⁸

Harvard University
Department of Sociology
Emerson Hall
Cambridge, Mass., U.S.A.

September 27, 1940

Dear Voegelin:

I, too, was very sorry not to have an opportunity to see you again and to discuss my manuscripts with you. I received them back safely and thank you for leaving them. I think I shall be able to send you a copy of the longer manuscript soon- as soon as I get one which I lent out back again. I should be most interested in your comments on it, as you are one of the few people I know who has gone furthest in this kind of theoretical problem.

I am delighted that you liked the article on Anti-Semitism. There is very little that is original in it, I think, but it does perhaps bring together a number of different things in a way which is not as yet very familiar. Undoubtedly you will have recognized that the analysis of the historical elements of the Jewish tradition is overwhelmingly indebted

¹⁸ Original letter in the Eric Voegelin Collection, Hoover Institution Archives.

to Max Weber. I have re-read his Antike Judentum three or four times and, I think, am more impressed with it each time. The historical and institutional side of it is, as you will remember, extremely complex and, I think, not particularly well presented from a literary point of view, so that one's first impression is of a confusion in which it is exceedingly difficult to discern any clear lines of analysis. On more careful study, however, it seems to me certain of these things stand out with beautiful clarity and throw a remarkable light on certain of the features even of the modern Jewish problem. My impressions from Weber have, however, been very strongly confirmed from other sources, of which I would like to mention three. In the positive interpretation of Jewish culture I owe a great deal to the works of George Foot Moore, whose three-volume work on Judaism is a remarkable thing, which I am sure would interest you if you have not yet encountered it.¹⁹ I also owe a great deal to personal contact with Professor A.D. Nock here who, through he has not written much on the subject, has some extremely interesting ideas on the place of the Jews in the civilizations of antiquity and the reasons why they constituted a group of "problem children" even then. The other source is, by contrast, the book I mentioned to you last summer by Granet, La pensée chinoise,²⁰ which, it seems to me, if anything, sharpens the contrast which Weber drew between the basic religious orientation of the orient and Jewish-Christian tradition. In the light of Granet's interpretation of Chinese thought, many of the things in Weber's analysis take on an even stronger significance than he seems to have attributed to them.

I am much interested in your remarks supplementing my analysis. I think you are quite definitely right about the relative absence in Germany of a firm national social tradition and the relation of this to anti-Semitism. I have been aware of this in a general way for some time, but unfortunately have not seen any at all adequate analysis of the situation. To a considerable extent it has seemed to me that Germany and the United States were in analogous positions in this respect, as compared with England and France. One of the symptoms of this has seemed to me to be the curious inferiority feeling which has made both Germans and Americans almost hectic assimilators of prestige-bearing foreign cultural elements. One could notice, for

¹⁹ Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927-1930).

²⁰ Marcel Granet, *La pensée chinoise* (Paris: La Renaissance du Livre, 1934).

instance, that Americans and Germans have almost always been very eager to learn the languages of foreign countries, whereas the English and French have been much less apt to be interested in learning languages. I do think, however, that the German case is more extreme than the American, a fact which I would be inclined to attribute in considerable degree to the difference of their religious backgrounds. You will perhaps remember Troeltsch's analysis of the extreme difficulty of obtaining a stable orientation to worldly affairs in the Lutheran and Calvinistic orientations.²¹ In this particular connection it seems to me one consideration is rather important. From a Lutheran point of view the world was accepted as frankly and inevitably evil. Men were expected to sin and were released from the psychological tension by repentance. It seems to me this could easily work in the direction of greatly diminishing the force of the obligation of Christian charity, more generally of universalistic ethics. The Calvinist active positive obligation to build up a kingdom of God on earth, on the other hand, gives a very much stronger sanction for the literal enforcement of Christian principles. It seems to me that in this connection people of a Lutheran background allow their aggressive impulses which are in contradiction to Christian ethics a much freer rein than has been possible so far in societies with a Calvinist background. As long as American society has strong sentiments which follow the Calvinist patterns, I feel we are considerably better protected against mass outburst of this kind of utterly un-Christian aggression than Germany has been. If this analysis is correct it would account for a different outcome, even though the other conditions which I dealt with were closely comparable.

I have also often wondered about the second point you have raised. Isn't it symptomatic of this that in Germany one could sit next to students in the classroom and in the library and meet them in the street for months without ever speaking to them, whereas in this country we carry the fiction that all people who are associated in any way are personal friends who call each other by their first name to almost ridiculous lengths. I once asked a very intelligent German student about this and he replied, "Why should I speak to these people? They don't concern me; I have my own friends. I don't want my privacy interfered with, and I don't interfere with anybody else's." There is certainly a quite radically different orientation in this respect.

²¹ See Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, translated by Olive Wyon (New York: Macmillan, 1931).

Originally published as *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1912).

I think it is also symbolized in other ways; for instance, in the fact that in the New England towns the traditional style of house has a lawn open to the street and displays, generally speaking, its most attractive side to the public, rather than, as throughout most of continental Europe, presenting only a blank wall, having privately enclosed gardens and courts and things of that sort. I don't feel that I have satisfactorily understood the relation of this difference to the idea of the chosen people. Of course that idea is also very important in the Anglo-Saxon world, and I think Weber is right in attributing importance to the Calvinist conception of the elect in forming our version of the idea. One of the essential differences is that in the Anglo-Saxon world this has not been combined with the peculiar Jewish humility, with the acceptance and expectation of persecution and dependency as a punishment for their previous delinquency, combined with the Messianic hope of eventual domination. I suspect, therefore, that not so much for reasons of this sort as for historical reasons the German conception of the chosen people is closer to the Jewish than ours is. This also ties up, I think, with what I previously called the German inferiority feeling which I should think had been considerably conditioned by the combination of consciousness of a great past in the early medieval empire and a century-long condition of political helplessness during the period of domination of Europe by the western states, particularly France. It is altogether possible that this is bound up with what might be called the Lutheran defeatist attitude which regards anything like a kingdom of heaven on earth as intrinsically impossible. Perhaps one source of anti-Semitism connected with this is a kind of spiteful ressentiment which combines these ethical religious attitudes with sheer envy of anybody who can live on that order of hopes. Of course, in the Nazi idea of the New Reich you might almost say that there has appeared a romantic conception of the possibility of a Utopian order, which outdoes anything certainly in the main traditions of western Europe and is at least as unrealistic as the socialists' Utopia. This Utopian element in the Nazi attitude may be open to interpretation as involving an element of overcompensation for the Lutheran type of peculiar religious pessimism. Perhaps the Jews are selected for a peculiar hatred because of their competitive similarity in this respect.

I quite agree that the type of sociological analysis I have attempted cannot, in the nature of the case, be exhaustive. I am certainly not nearly as competent as you to judge the kind of peculiar Gestalt elements which you mentioned in your last point. Of course the

tension between Judaism and Christianity is fundamental in the background, but I would be very much inclined to feel that you were right, that there was emerging a new kind of tension in which the Jews are attacked as constituting the essence of Christianity rather than its antithesis. I do not see this at all clearly, but I might call attention to one or two points that seem to me possibly relevant. I am very much impressed with the intimate relations, from the comparative historical viewpoint, between Christianity itself and positivistic rationalism. It seems to me that anything like modern western rationalism would be utterly incomprehensible on a basis of orientation like that, for instance, of India or China. That, in other words, the conflict which is put, among other things, as the conflict between science and religion in our culture reflects an inner tension in a single great tradition rather than the ultimate conflict of opposed traditions. It is for this reason that I have long felt that Marxist Communism was not in any way as radically subversive as National Socialism because it is, on its ideological side, almost you might say a naïve child of the enlightenment. But if one shifts a little to the sociological point of view, it seems to me one of the most important aspects of the development of positivistic rationalism has been the injury it has done to what may be called the “fundamentalist” sentiments of our society. It is significant, I think, that the Jews have become a symbol of evil in precisely this connection. They are above all the corruptors through their rationalism of true religion, through their business and financial manipulations of common honesty and neighborliness, and so on. There are reasons, of course, in the position of the Jews why, in the process of emancipation, they have been peculiarly susceptible to the tendency of rationalization and there is a real sense in which they form a quite reasonably appropriate symbol. It seems to me that from this point of view National Socialism can be considered, as you say, an outburst of new religious force which centers about a re-orientation of precisely these fundamentalist sentiments. But for just this reason it seems to me that the dropping of the crusade against Communism may yet turn out to have been fatal to the movement as a new mode of organizing the western world. This in turn, of course, is very closely connected with the nihilism in the Nazi elite of which Rauschning makes so much.²² This is about as far as I seem to be able to get in these problems. It seems to me that, largely because of the development of the positivistic type of rationalization to the point it has reached in the

²² Hermann Rauschning, *The Revolution* by Ernest Walter Dicks (New York: Alliance of Nihilism: *Warning to the West*, translated Book Corporation, 1939).

western world, the original basis of the Jewish-Christian tension has very largely evaporated, and that any movement which can embody the Christian heritage in the present world situation is more likely to be pro-Semitic than anti-Semitic.

I hope you will pass on to me any ideas on this range of problems you have because, difficult as it is to think clearly, it seems to me these are among the most crucial questions of our time.

Sincerely yours,

Talcott Parsons

—

7. *Voegelin to Parsons, 9 May 1941*²³

University of Alabama
University, Alabama
Department of Political Science

May 9, 1941

Professor Talcott Parsons
Department of Sociology
Harvard University
Cambridge, Mass.

Dear Parsons:

With an extremely bad conscience I am writing this letter. It is six months that I have left you without an answer to your last letter which raised several points of great importance for the understanding of Communism and National Socialism. My only excuse, which I beg you accept, is my somewhat precarious situation with a time-limit for my "History of Ideas". I am working hard, and I feel for the first time the strain physically. Some of the problems with which I am dealing may interest you, and I am enclosing the table of contents of the chapters on which I have been working for the last six weeks.²⁴

²³ Voegelin's enclosure and original letter in the Papers of Talcott Parsons, Harvard University Archives; copy of the letter only in the Eric Voegelin Collection, Hoover Institution Archives.

²⁴ Voegelin's original enclosure is reproduced below. Cf. the later version of this outline printed in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 19, pp. 251-252.

The immediate cause of this letter is my reading of your MS. on “Action, Situation and Normative Pattern”, which Dr. Schütz gave me a few weeks ago at Philadelphia.²⁵ I have studied it carefully for the last fortnight, and I have to express my admiration for the carefully elaborated system of concepts; your essay seems to be, indeed, a comprehensive outline system of the problems of social action reaching from the elemental categories to the institution.

Personally, I have not dealt with purely theoretical problems now for several years, and it would be, therefore, presumptuous on my part if I indulged in an appraisal. But you will perhaps consider it not too arrogant if I mention a few points which struck me as particularly important advancements beyond the state where Max Weber left the questions pending.

- (1) You based your analysis definitely on the construction of “systematic” type concepts and discarded the earlier attempts of Max Weber to construct “historical” ideal types. “Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft” is vitiated by the oscillation between the two approaches to the subject. (The one used in Weber’s ch.1, the other in ch.8).
- (2) It is certainly a great step forward to have discarded W’s classification of the types of social action in his ch.1,§2, and to have subordinated such categories as the means-end relation to the larger “teleologically directed activity”.
- (3) W’s somewhat abrupt introduction of the Legitimate Order you have replaced by the analysis of the “situation” with its empirical and “residual un-empirical” elements.
- (4) The somewhat narrow Weberian cumulation of concepts to the apex in the concept of the “modern state”, you have replaced by the analysis of your chapters V, VI, VII.

By these four steps you have, as I see it, achieved the systematic unit of the basic concepts which in Weber’s treatise remained sadly in suspense.

It is, of course, impossible to enter into details within the scope of a letter considering that your essay is practically a system of theoretical sociology which for a fair analysis would need a critique of the same volume. But I may refer perhaps to your analysis of the “cognitive” element (replacing the unclear “rational” of Weber) as particularly happy, because it permits the employment of the larger category of

²⁵ Parsons, *Actor, Situation, and Normative Pattern: An Essay in the Theory of Social Action*, edited by Victor Lidz and Helmut

Staubmann (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Press, 2011).

“teleologically directed activity” under which may be subsumed beside activities based on conscious cognition, also “instincts” and “habituation”. The integration of personality in the social system seems to be a section which in Weber is entirely missing - probably because W. paid scant attention to the psychology of emotions.

I do not see that I could criticize anything fundamental in your approach, and I have to risk that you will be somewhat bored by my complete agreement. Let me add, therefore, at least that I would have accentuated through terminological means a bit stronger the positive character of the “un-empirical” elements. But you will see easily that this remark is conditioned by my preoccupation with the questions of social and political myths. The problems themselves have their full weight in your analysis.

Let me thank you for the privilege that I could see your MS. I shall send it tomorrow by registered mail.

The semester is drawing here to its close this week. I hope I shall be through with my work by the end of July, and then we plan to make a trip without knowing yet where it will take us. Maybe to the East. I have a great desire to see you again; Alabama is charming, but it is not particularly stimulating. What are your and your family’s plans for this summer?

With my best regards I am,

Very sincerely yours,

Eric Voegelin

§I. Machiavelli

- a. His Solitary Position Between Medieval and Modern Thought
- b. The Position of Italy Between the Orient and Christian Civilization
- c. The Work of Machiavelli
- d. The Thought of M. compared With The Ideas of the Greek Disintegration
- e. The Call for The Savior – Political Tension Without Religious Tension
- f. The Psychology of Disoriented Man
- g. The Tension Between Italian Disintegration and National Aspiration
- h. Religion – Despair of the Church – Hope for the Reformer
- i. The Character of The Prince in the Città Corrotta
- j. The Emergence of Power Outside the Christian Charismatic Order

- k. Reaction Against Non-Charismatic Power – “Power is Evil”.
- l. Max Weber – “Ethics of Responsibility” and Raison d’Etat
- m. Machiavelli’s Anthropology – The Irreligious Man
- n. Elite and Mass
- o. Transformation of Polybius – Open Power Field and Eternal Circle
- p. The Myth of Machiavelli
- q. The Model of the Ruler – Virtù
- r. Fortuna
- s. The Key-Position of the Vita di Castruccio Castracani
- t. The Vita as a Genus
- u. The Vita Tamerlani
- v. The Asiatic Background of Machivelli
- w. The Myth of the Demonic Hero vs. The Myth of the Soul

§2. The People of God

- a. The Problem
 - aa. The Two Planes of Western Civilization
 - bb. The Category of Reformation
 - cc. Difficulties of Approach
 - dd. The Range of the Undercurrent Movement – Edward Gibbon
- b. Institution and Movement
 - aa. The Institutionalization of the Church
 - bb. The Church as the Basis of Western Civilization
 - cc. The Reaction of the Movement
- c. Effects of the Movement on the Institution
 - aa. Spiritual Reformation
 - bb. Civilizational Destruction – The Fragmentary Civilization
- d. The Phases of Disintegration
 - aa. Dissolution of Charisma and Rulership
 - bb. The Bourgeois State and the Proletarian Movement
 - cc. Sectarian Ignorance
 - dd. The Disintegration in the Realm of Ideas
 - ee. The Disintegration in the Realm of Science
- e. The Social Structure of the Movement
 - aa. Movement and Town – The Middle-Class Character
 - bb. Peasant, Feudal and Bourgeois Support
- f. The Structure of Sentiment of the Movement
 - aa. The Problem of Oriental Influences
 - bb. Cathars and Paulicians
 - cc. The Paulician Puritanism

- dd. The Cathar Manichaeism
- ee. Scotus Eriugena – The De Divisione Naturae
- ff. Amaury of Chartres – The Third Dispensation
- gg. The Worlds of Darkness and Light – Extreme Cases
- hh. Puritan Ideas – Hanserd Knollys, Thomas Collier
- ii. The Changing Content of the World of Light
- g. Methods of Conviction
 - aa. The Muenster Kingdom – The Display of Luxury
 - bb. Sensual Conviction
 - aaa. Drugs
 - bbb. Body Movements, Drums, Threats of Death
 - cc. The Ritual Speech
 - dd. Propaganda
 - aaa. The Original Concept of Propaganda
 - bbb. The Nihilistic Idea of Propaganda
 - ccc. Totalitarian Propaganda
- h. Postscript

§3. The Great Confusion

- a. General Characteristics
 - aa. The Theoretical Positions
 - bb. The Structure of the Revolution
 - aaa. The Spanish Reformation
 - bbb. Relation between Spanish and German Reformation
 - ccc. German and Swiss Reformation
 - ddd. French Reformation
 - eee. English Reformation
 - fff. Counter-Reformation
- b. Luther
 - aa. The Release of Forces
 - bb. The Occasion of the 95 Theses
 - cc. Justification through Faith
 - dd. Good Works
 - ee. Secular Authority
 - ff. The Explosive Character of the Doctrine – The Twelve Articles
 - gg. French and American Parallels
- c. Calvin
 - aa. Calvin's Authoritarianism
 - bb. The Selection of Geneva
 - cc. The Doctrine of Predestination
 - dd. Calvin and Marx

- ee. The Geneva Theocracy
- ff. Calvin's Discipline – The Dynamics of Capitalism
- d. The Controversy Concerning Royal Power
 - aa. Luther and Calvin
 - bb. The Magdeburg Tract – Knox
 - cc. Calvinist Controversialists – The Vindiciae
 - dd. Jesuit Controversialists – Suarez
 - ee. Catholic Controversialists
 - ff. The Divine Right of Kings
- e. Internationalism and Imperialism
 - aa. The Protestant International – The Great Design
 - bb. The Conception of Interstate Law – Vitoria-Suarez
 - cc. The Community of Mankind
 - dd. The Relectiones de Indis – the Instrument of Imperialism
 - ee. The China Case
 - ff. National Socialist Application
- f. Utopia
 - aa. The Literary Genus – The Discovery of America
 - bb. The Sentiment of Utopia
 - cc. The Commonwealth Idea – Economics
 - dd. The Commonwealth Idea – Religion
 - g. The Christian Commonwealth
 - aa. Richard Hooker
 - bb. His Construction of the Church of England
 - cc. The Victory of the Nation

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*8. Parsons to Voegelin, 13 May 1941*²⁶

Harvard University
 Department of Sociology
 Emerson Hall
 Cambridge, Mass., U.S.A.

May 13, 1941

Dr. Eric Voegelin
 Department of Political Science

²⁶ Original letter in the Eric Voegelin Collection Hoover Institution Archives; copy in the Papers of Talcott Parsons, Harvard University Archives.

University of Alabama
University, Alabama

Dear Voegelin:

I was delighted to get your good letter this morning. I had wondered how you were getting on, and heard only indirectly from Schütz about you.

Thank you very much for your remarks about my manuscript. Your formulation of the improvements on Weber's formulation is most interesting and helps me a good deal to see it in perspective. As you know, the whole thing is to be subjected to a thorough revision before there is any thought of publication. My own feeling is that this is particularly necessary in the latter part. My intention at present is to organize the thing roughly as follows: the first section will lead up from the analytical fundamentals to the conception of an institutionalized social system, the main difference from the present being the introduction of the concept of institution at this point rather than nearly at the end. Though I don't see very clearly how it can be done, I think I shall probably also make an attempt to alter the formulation in the direction of [George Herbert] Mead's type of analysis of the close interrelation of the actor's own definition of self with his relations to others. This may possibly involve some questions that have come up in my discussion with Schütz, about which more presently. I think before anything of this sort is attempted I shall have to do a good deal more work along those lines. The second section, considerably briefer than the first, will be concerned with the very broad outline of the theory of personality as part of the total theory of action. It seems to me that this is one of the most notable fields of development since Weber's time. Finally, the third section will be devoted to the modes of differentiation on the structural level of social systems. This subject matter I think I have considerably better in hand than when I wrote the draft you saw and will be able to do a considerably more systematic piece of work. I consider it extremely important because I wish above all to show that it is possible to derive a systematic treatment of social structure on levels of consideration which are in current use from the fundamentals of the actor-situation analysis. It may be that it is there rather than in the first section that a place should be found for a further development of the analysis of the non-empirical elements. I look forward to your book as an important guide to that kind of development.

The outline you sent me looks exceedingly interesting, though it is a little difficult to understand much of it from the mere titles. It would seem that you are interweaving in a most interesting way the elements of the history of thought with categories of analysis oriented to the contemporary situation. I expect your book to throw a great deal of light on a great many of the problems respecting the latter which have been bothering me. I might throw out, just to see if it seems to evoke any response, two lines of thought which have struck me recently. Both are in a sense an outgrowth of an attempt to throw light on the relatively greater resistance of the Anglo-Saxon peoples to the encroachments of totalitarianism. The first is on a relatively superficial institutional level, but yields what seems to me a rather interesting comparison between England and France. After all, France came out of the post-Reformation struggles as superficially a united nation with the Catholic supremacy restored. At the time this might have been compared favorably with the situation in England, with at least three important unreconciled religious groups – the Catholics, the Church of England, and the Non-Conformists. Why, then, a few centuries later should France turn out to be so much less stable? My suggestion is that the deeper-lying tensions were not eliminated in France, and that the very fact that the new integration was in terms of the extreme Catholic wing created a situation unfavorable to national solidarity. Since Protestantism was eliminated the opposition to the existing regime became polarized intellectually into radical positivism, politically into anti-clerical radicalism. The whole thing came to an eruption in the Revolution, and since then it has never been possible to restore a genuine national unity. France has been fundamentally divided into the two camps of the revolutionary radicals (of whom the recent Communists seem to be simply a new version) and the legitimist clerical Catholic groups.

By contrast with this, I wonder if some significance is not to be attributed for England to the fact that the religious organization to which the state became committed did not stand at either pole but in the middle of the road. At the same time the constitution of the Church was latitudinarian so as to include all elements which could possibly subscribe to its barest fundamentals – on the one hand loyalty to the crown against the Papacy, on the other the episcopalian structure and the establishment of the Church. This meant that while not dropping the advantages of an established church, it was impossible for the tensions to become directly polarized against the politico-religious regime because the two extreme wings could never unite and important elements were always being won back to the latitudinarian center. It would really seem that, in spite of the

fact that Elizabeth presumably worked out this constitution largely from motives of shrewd realistic policy, it has provided a far more favorable framework for the preservation of the essential religious character of the British people than would either a Catholic regime or a dis-established Congregational one. Naturally, this is only one factor, but I wonder if it isn't one of considerable importance.

The second problem is essentially an extension of Weber's Protestant Ethic analysis. The extent to which the Anglo-Saxon peoples seem to have become the overwhelming heirs of the main continuous great tradition of the western world suggests that in the Calvinistic branch of Protestantism there has been a kind of synthesis of the deeper religious orientation with the circumstances of a highly mechanized civilization which the Catholic heritage is notably incapable of achieving, and which also the Germans seem incapable of standing without going off into such a nightmare as Nazism. It is difficult to formulate exactly what I have in mind, but with all the modifications and qualifications which the Calvinist attitude must undergo it seems to me to provide a far firmer basis of the orientation to the modern situation than any other of the great movements of our history. I wonder if you agree.

I feel somewhat uneasy about my "controversy" with Schütz. I wonder how much he has told you about it. I think it altogether probable that I have not fully understood some of the things he has been talking about, but at the same time I feel quite definitely that he did not adequately grasp what I have been doing. My fundamental point is that he did not seem to be able to think in terms of a generalized theoretical system but tended to re-interpret all of the problems in terms of a philosophic level. I would really very much like to have an impartial critic go over the exchange and wonder if you would consider doing so, if he has not shown you all the documents already. I have a complete set of them and would send them to you. Perhaps, however, you would rather wait until the book is off your hands. There is certainly no hurry. I should hate to leave any permanent misunderstanding if it can possibly be avoided.

Another thing that occurs to me - quite unexpectedly I have a number of mimeographed copies of the complete manuscript of my Weber translation (W&G Part I). Some time ago I gave [Howard P.] Becker, of Wisconsin, permission to have certain excerpts mimeographed, and he surprised me by going on and doing the whole thing. Of course you would rather use the German for your own use, but I wonder if for some special students you might care to have a copy of the translation. If so, I should be very glad to send you one.

I very much hope you will come up this way during the summer. We shall be making our headquarters at our place in New Hampshire, though I may well be down here a certain proportion of the time, which is unpredictable at present. We shall be delighted to see you either there or here in Cambridge.

With cordial regards,

—

*9. Voegelin to Parsons, 28 May 1941*²⁷

University of Alabama
University, Alabama
Department of Political Science

May 28, 1941

Professor Talcott Parsons
Department of Sociology
Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Dear Parsons:

My best thanks for your kind letter – I was a bit afraid that you would take my long, impolite silence in ill.

Of course, I shall be very happy to receive a copy of your Weber translation; and not only for my students, but for myself; I am permanently struggling with the proper English expression of sociological concepts to which I am accustomed, and your translation would be a great help, indeed. Please let me have it by all means, if you can spare a copy.

I saw Schütz in Philadelphia only for a couple of hours. He indicated that he had a “controversy” with you, but he did not come around to the issue. He seemed rather to regret the affair, as having a controversy with you is probably the last thing in the world he is after. I would be very much interested in the discussion, and if you could let me have it, say in August, when I hope to be through with my present work, I could give it a careful reading.

²⁷ Original letter in the Papers of Talcott Parsons, Harvard University Archives; copy in the Eric Voegelin Collection, Hoover Institution Archives.

I delayed the answer to your letter for a week, because I was putting the finishing touch on my Reformation chapter. It deals precisely with the problem which you raise in your letter, and I enclose a copy of it which you may read at your convenience. It is the best I can do at present on the question, but I am not yet satisfied. I would be particularly interested to hear what you think of the treatment of predestination; it baffles me still, and I am not sure I have got at the core.

Yours very sincerely,

Eric Voegelin

*10. Voegelin to Parsons, 17 June 1941*²⁸

Tuscaloosa, Ala.

June 17, 1941

Dear Parsons:

This is to acknowledge the arrival of your Weber-translation. I was at first quite surprised at the bulk because somehow I had misunderstood you and believed it would be a translation only of the first chapter. Now I am rather overwhelmed; this is a tremendous piece of work. I have sampled a page here and there, and I have compared all the chapter-heads with the original; the rendering of the meaning seems to me perfect. It would be desirable to have it published as soon as possible. - For me this translation is really very valuable; German scientific language permits logical neologisms which the English does not allow; your translation is at the same time an interpretation which makes more explicit the formulae of Weber. The examination of your technique in unravelling German concepts helps me greatly with my personal language troubles.

Let me thank you once more for the copy.

I do not know yet when I shall be through with my work; I'm plodding my way through the centuries. I always find new intriguing problems which delay the progress. At present I am stuck in the neighborhood of [Oliver] Cromwell.

²⁸ Handwritten original letter in the Papers of Talcott Parsons, Harvard University Archives.

With my best greetings, I am,
Yours very sincerely,
Eric Voegelin

—

*11. Parsons to Voegelin, 1 August 1941*²⁹

Harvard University
Department of Sociology
Emerson Hall
Cambridge, Mass., U.S.A.

August 1, 1941

Dr. Eric Voegelin
University of Alabama
University, Alabama
Dear Voegelin:

I hope this catches you before you leave for the north. In the first place, I very much hope you will be able to drop in on us in the country or, if your time is too short for that, that we can arrange to get together in Cambridge when you are in these parts.

Thank you for your comments on the translation. At last I am about to clear up that obligation. I contracted to write a critical introduction, which I have kept putting off but have been working on lately and have now almost finished. I should like very much, if there was an opportunity, to submit it to you before I send it off, though I ought not to delay very much as it is long over-due at the publishers.³⁰

In that I have dealt with some methodological problems of Weber's work, but have given by far the greatest amount of space to what might be called his institutional sociology in the economic and political spheres, which special reference to his interpretation of the modern western social order and its sources of instability. It seemed to me particularly important to lay stress on this aspect of his work since Weber is, as you know, known here either as the naïve idealist of the

²⁹ Original letter in the Eric Voegelin Collection, Hoover Institution Archives; copy in the Papers of Talcott Parsons, Harvard University Archives

³⁰ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, translated by A. M.

Henderson and Talcott Parsons, edited with an introduction by Talcott Parsons (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), pp. 3-86.

Protestant Ethic or the methodologist of the ideal type. This institutional aspect of his work has hardly penetrated the English-speaking scholarly world.

I read your chapter on the Reformation with great interest. I must say I was a little surprised by the position you took on the doctrine of predestination. I have certainly been far from clear about that problem myself. I have tended in general to accept Weber's view that "psychologically rather than logically" predestination (in the context of the Calvinistic theology as a whole) was a great stimulation to the "active orientation" of mastery over the world. At the same time this is certainly not the whole story.³¹ It seems to me there is in that basic orientation associated with "ascetic Protestantism" an underlying attitude which cannot be by any means exhaustively explained in terms of rationalized religious concepts. This would seem in the first instance to be made clear by the relative constancy of the attitude over a considerable range of theological difference precisely with respect to the doctrine of predestination and other important dogmas of Protestantism. Perhaps one could put it better that the attitude depends not on the acceptance of the doctrine but rather upon the attribution of fundamental religious and emotional significance to a certain range of religious problems revolving about the state of grace.

With respect to these it seems to me one can discern a very definite difference between the ascetic Protestant attitude and that of either Catholicism or Lutheranism. To me the key point is that grace is treated in such a way that it cannot be made dependent on the summation or balancing of particular good works which could be built into a traditionalistic ethic, nor can it be, as in the Lutheran case, dissociated from active moral responsibility in secular affairs. It would be my guess that the radical doctrine of predestination was one polar solution of the theological problems that revolve about the rationalization of the basic religious attitude. I do not feel really competent to develop the problem of how it fits logically into a total philosophy of religion. That, however, as you suggest, there are insuperable logical difficulties would not be surprising, but at the same time it seems to me that your treatment probably over-stresses the rational impossibility of consistent adherence to such a doctrine. I wish you could find time to elaborate more fully on these philosophical difficulties, but at the same time it seems to me that probably the doctrine ought to be placed in a broader functional context as expressive of the basic attitude I have spoken of.

³¹ The parenthesis in this sentence is Parsons' handwritten addition to the original letter.

I really would be very grateful if you could find time to go over the Schütz material. I will have it all gathered together ready to give you or send you, as you may suggest.

Sincerely,
Talcott Parsons

Do you want the MS of your chapter back? I should be glad to send it.³²

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*12. Voegelin to Parsons, 4 August 1941*³³

University of Alabama
University, Alabama
Department of Political Science

August 4, 1941

Professor Talcott Parsons
Department of Sociology
Harvard University
Cambridge, Mass.

Dear Parsons:

I am very happy to have your letter and I hurry to answer it as long as I have a typewriter at hand, for tomorrow morning we shall leave in the general direction of the Smokies to take some rest. We have no further plans as yet, but considering the little time we have at our disposition I doubt that we shall come all the way East. But if we should do it, I shall certainly let you know in advance so that, if possible, we can meet.

Your "Introduction" to the Weber translation would interest me very much; if you can spare a copy I should greatly appreciate the privilege of having it. Please, let me have also the Schütz materials; send it to my office, they will forward it to me.

The problem of predestination rests heavy on my soul, and your letter has added to the weight. I can readily understand that the

³² This line is a handwritten addition by Parsons to the original letter.

in the Eric Voegelin Collection, Hoover Institution Archives.

³³ Original letter in the Papers of Talcott Parsons, Harvard University Archives; copy

attitude which I take surprises you because the spatial limits which I had to observe did not permit of giving in full the reasons which induced me to take it. Let me, by way of explanation, detail a few points, particularly as the remarks of your letter leave me with the impression that there is not much difference of opinion, if any, between us on the issue:

- (1) I am in complete agreement with you as well as with Max Weber that the doctrine is a great stimulant to the active orientation of mastery over the world. I would add only the following qualifications:
 - (a) The doctrine is essentially expressed in the Letters of St. Paul and formed part of the Christian doctrine all through the Middle Ages; it is, therefore, necessary to explain why the doctrine did not have its peculiarly activating force before Calvin, and why all of a sudden with Calvin it became activating;
 - (b) The Calvinist theological literature to this day comes back monotonously to the problem that the doctrine should not be mistaken as a free pass to licence; apparently the doctrine can have effects rather different from the stimulation of disciplined activity;
 - (c) From this I conclude that the interest in the doctrine in general as well as the activating effect depends on the disposition of the person who believes in it and permits itself to be stimulated by it.
- (2) With this general conclusion, I take it, you agree; at least, this seemed to me the meaning of your remark that the attitude of ascetic Protestantism is relatively constant in spite of theological differences with regard to the doctrine.
- (3) Which now is the "broader functional context" (of which you speak) in which the doctrine develops its peculiar effectiveness? I suggest the following characteristics of this context:
 - (a) The interest in the state of grace (mentioned by you) as a problem of the individual person which cannot be solved by the assistance of the Sacramental Church; the decisive point seems to me the break with the sacramental idea of grace, particularly the break with the sacrament of penance which isolates the individual; grace is strictly personal after the break, the social clearing of grace between the members of the Body of Christ is abolished. This fixes the difference from Catholicism.
 - (b) The difference from Lutheranism, as far as the spiritual (not the ethical) question is concerned, I would try to characterize as the absence, in Calvin, of the personal mysticism of Luther. There is no dogmatic difference between Luther and Calvin

on the doctrine of justification through faith, of the assurance of the state of grace through faith. There now arises the interesting question, which puzzles me still: if the problem of grace, as far as the personal religious experience is concerned, is exhausted through personal faith; and if, in terms of religious experience, the doctrine of predestination (admitted by Calvin) does not add anything to the assurance of grace; if furthermore Luther (expressly) discarded the doctrine for these reasons as irrelevant for the faith and the state of grace of the individual (as far as its religious experiences are concerned)- why, then, does Calvin take it up and insist on its importance? As I had not run across a treatment of this decisive point anywhere (which does not mean much, as my knowledge of theological literature is, of course, scanty), I made up my own answer on the basis of the Institutes: because he was not interested in predestination as a problem of the personal state of grace, but in predestination signifying membership in the People of God which collectively acts in history; predestination stresses the soldierly aspect of the person in the collective action against the “enemy”.

- (4) My answer which, indeed, may be surprising is, therefore, that the doctrine of predestination is not introduced by Calvin because the religious experiences connected with the state of grace required it, but because secondary problems, problems of action, recommended it as a creed for the army of the fighting elect. In this respect, now, a distinction seems to be necessary:
- (a) Calvin’s creed was in its imagery strongly Old Testament; the chosen people, not the chosen individual captured his imagination. He selected from the Epistle to the Romans as primarily important the symbols connected with the fate of Israel, and not like Luther the assurance that, predestination or no predestination, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10:8ff);
 - (b) This preference of Calvin I would explain, rather crudely, by his character; he was a statesman and ecclesiastical imperialist. He liked the doctrine because it suited his temperament and his plans for organizing a Protestant International in rivalry with the Catholic Church;
 - (c) The actual effectiveness of the doctrine in stimulating rational commercial activity was not the idea of Calvin. I would again

say (with some hesitation, as you may consider my explanation again somewhat crude), it came in handy for business activism as it had been handy for the rather different activism of Calvin, who, after all, wanted to restrict the rationality of business rather severely.

- (5) A word on the philosophical difficulties. My remark, in the chapter on Reformation, that Calvin's treatment of the doctrine was not particularly penetrating had in mind a comparison with the exposition of the doctrine by Thomas Aquinas (Summa Theologica).³⁴ The comparison does not reflect on the dogmatic differences between Thomas and Calvin, but on the complete elaboration of the speculative contents of the doctrine by Thomas, while an elaboration of this kind is missing in Calvin. The speculative contents of the doctrine is the problem of time-eternity, the old Augustinian problem that the stream of world events which appears to finite man under the category of time, is coaeternum, a simultaneous eternal presence before the mind of God. There is no contingency in the world for God. The predestination of man for salvation is only one specific case of the general predestination of the stream of world events in the mind of God. To make of this problem of predestination a problem affecting the individual human being implies the consideration of finite life sub specie Dei, while actually we have no other possibility of viewing it but sub specie hominis: a procedure which is philosophically a confusion of the divine and human level, and would be religiously an irreverent and hopeless attempt to pierce the mystery of creation. I would add that the unusual interest in predestination would indicate that Calvin's personal religiousness must have contained a good deal of insecurity; one root of his activism may have been, as frequently in such cases, the desire to overcome through the intoxication and success of action a doubt in his state of grace.³⁵ The access to the problem of grace does, in the sphere of religious experience, not go over speculations concerning predestination, but through faith alone. The speculative approach is, of course, perfectly legitimate; only it does not lead to a state of grace, but to the intellectual understanding of the border-problems of time and creation.
- (6) All this, of course, still leaves open the origin of activism and Protestant asceticism in our society- but I think I have taken enough

³⁴ *Summa Theologiae* I.23.1-8.

³⁵ This sentence is Voegelin's handwritten addition to the original letter.

of your time for one letter. I only beg you not to misunderstand the explanations: I do not want to make a point; I freely admit that I do not feel on safe ground in the whole question; the implications go beyond my knowledge. My motive in writing at some length was the desire to show that the attitude which I took was not lightly taken; and if my interpretation differs in some points from Weber's I at least believed to have reasons, however unsatisfactory they may prove if an expert starts tearing them apart. In this sense, if your time permits, I hope you will do a little tearing and help me in getting clearer in the question.

I remembered that I had once written an article on Max Weber, containing some comparisons with Nietzsche which might interest you; I am sending it separately; in case you know it, excuse me.³⁶ If you don't need it any more, please, let me have it back; please, send also the MS. of the Reformation at your convenience- I am short with copies.

With my best wishes for a pleasant vacation for you and your family,

Yours very sincerely,
Eric Voegelin

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13. *Parsons to Voegelin, 18 August 1941*³⁷

Harvard University
Department of Sociology
Emerson Hall
Cambridge, Mass., U.S.A.

August 18, 1941

Dear Voegelin,

I am sending you today under separate cover a large package containing the following: 1) Your chapter on "the Great Confusion", 2) A copy of my Introduction to the Weber translation and 3) Schütz'

³⁶ Probably "Rasse und Staat," in *Psychologie des Gemeinschaftlebens*, edited by Otto Klemm (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1935). Translated by M. J. Hanak as "Race and State," in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 9, pp. 40-53.

³⁷ Original letter in the Eric Voegelin Collection, Hoover Institution Archives; copy in the Papers of Talcott Parsons, Harvard University Archives

MS on my book, and the correspondence about it.³⁸ The Introduction I sent off to England immediately on its completion along with the MS of the translation since I was far behind schedule in getting it to them. I should, however, have an opportunity for at least minor revisions in proof, and would appreciate your comments on it to this end, as well as for my own enlightenment. Thank you for sending me the reprint of your article on Weber, which I also enclose. I had not seen it and found it most interesting- I am returning it also.

The Schütz material is complete except for one item - my reply to Schütz' last long letter, which I failed to find when I looked for it on one of my hurried trips to Cambridge.³⁹ It does not contain anything new, but an attempt to assuage his feelings a bit, which seemed to have been somewhat hurt. I apologized for the rather sharp tone of my criticisms. To me the fundamental issue concerns the status of the theory of action as a system of scientific theory. It seemed to me that he was unwilling to discuss problems on this level and continually failed to understand the logic of a system in this sense. Until he had done so, it did not seem to me fruitful to get into the deeper underlying philosophical problems which he wanted to raise directly. From that point of view to me a decisive point is the problem of motives. I have a few remarks in the Weber Introduction which also bear on that point. But I am very much interested to have your reaction to the whole thing. I have been meaning to get back to Schütz' book this summer but so far have not managed it.⁴⁰ I certainly should before attempting to carry the discussion farther.

Thank you for your long explanation about Predestination. In general I think I agree thoroughly with you. Certainly there is something sound in your emphasis of the "collective" aspect of Calvinism. Apart from Calvin himself you will recall the persistent emphasis in the English Puritan literature on the common good, and the idea of the Commonwealth. There seems to be a very definite difference from Lutheranism in this respect- it sounds paradoxical, but Calvinism is, in an important sense, far less individualistic than Lutheranism, the individual's fundamental status is, to be sure independent of sacramental dispensing of grace, but apart from salvation as such his life has meaning only as a member of a Christian

³⁸ Richard Grathoff, ed., *The Theory of Social Action: The Correspondence of Alfred Schutz and Talcott Parsons* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).

³⁹ Parsons' handwritten insertion: "Even this turned up and is included."

⁴⁰ Alfred Schütz, *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt: eine Einleitung in die verstehende Soziologie* (Vienna: J. Springer, 1932).

commonwealth. Perhaps the decisive point is that there are basic religious motives for public responsibility. Responsibility is not, as in the Lutheran pattern, handed over to an Obrigkeit which, being part of a sinful secular world, is expected to be unethical. The relation of this to the Old Testament with the collective religious status of the people of Israel is interesting. One wonders whether the German antipathy to Anglo-Saxondom, so pronounced even before the Nazis, is not connected with this. In Nazi terms you might put it that the Anglo-Saxons, i.e. the Calvinists, are really Jews (Perhaps the converse is also partly true - one source of Anti-Semitism in Germany lies in the feeling that the Jews are really Anglo-Saxons, i.e. Calvinists. The two are identified.)⁴¹ because in this fundamental respect they follow the patterns of Old Testament Judaism. But just as this collective element seems to me to be one of the principal sources of the amazing ability of the Jews to survive as a cultural unit, so the analogous element probably has a good deal to do with the superiority in this respect of the Anglo-Saxons as compared to the more "individualistic" (for different reasons) Germans and French. The Germans, that is, could only achieve power by adopting patterns which run deeply counter to their Western Christian heritage. The tensions involved in Anglo-Saxon power are, of course great, but it is possible for them to hold power relatively speaking "with a good conscience". For the German with [a] Lutheran background, on the other hand, power is inherently Satanic. Hence as Nazi he emulates Faust and gives himself over completely to Satan. This seems to me to be an important aspect of the background of what is to the Anglo-Saxon the incredible ethical nihilism of the Nazis. One suspects, however, that in it we see only one side of the German mentality- the other side is represented by a terrific sense of guilt which is now largely repressed, but may well break out again. It would seem to go a long way to explain the strident assertiveness in self-justification, the "protesting too much" aspect of the whole German nationalist mentality. It seems essential to them to pin the absolute maximum of guilt on their opponents, and to convince themselves that there is no such thing as guilt anywhere in German history- Hitler's portrait as the "white knight" - white as the symbol precisely of moral innocence, is perhaps symbolic. What do you think of all this?

⁴¹ The parenthesis is a typed insertion by Parsons in the Hoover Institution's copy of the letter.

In explaining how this activist attitude, combined with a strong ethical sense and a strong sense of community came about, I imagine that other than strictly religious elements played an important part. It seems significant that it was in those areas of Europe, the maritime fringes, where there was participation in the overseas expansion that Calvinism took strongest and most permanent root- namely Holland and England, and that outside them its greatest development was in a colonial area, namely New England. Germany on the other hand was an enclosed, continental area- the period of pioneering vis-a-vis the Slavs was over and the border stabilized in terms of a rigid class system closely related to the Prussian Obrigkeit. France was all mixed up in continental politics which made the intervention of the Counterreformation there much easier- even so France was nearer the maritime fringe, and Calvinism took strong root there- its defeat by the Catholic reaction was, I have been taught to believe, a fairly close thing. This, to be sure leaves unexplained why the development in Spain and Portugal was so different- probably the earlier date of their maritime adventuring had something to do with it- as well as the internal balance of forces. Once things began to crystallize after the Reformation, however, perhaps one can say that the very different activism of the Jesuits had a similar functional significance to that of the Calvinists farther North.

About the philosophical problem- it seems to me that the whole tenor of Calvinistic religiosity is deeply opposed to philosophical refinement. Faith is the keynote, and he who has faith in that sense does not speculate- to do so would suggest that his faith was not sufficiently strong. Insecurity tends, as you suggest, to be taken out in action, not in speculation. This, it seems to me, has a good deal to do with the basis of the Weber-Merton observation of the relation between Calvinism and science.⁴² You may remember [Alfred North] Whitehead's remark that, compared with the "rationalism" of the Schoolmen, the early scientists believed in a very simple faith.⁴³ It was one, in its pattern of the physical world, which fitted the Calvinist theology admirably. But it concealed very difficult and embarrassing philosophical problems. The fact that instead of getting bogged down in these philosophical problems these men proceeded with scientific observation and generalization is at least partly to be attributed to the fact that their faith directly inhibited philosophical refinement.

⁴² Robert K. Merton, "Science, Technology and Society in Seventeenth Century England," *Osiris* 4 (1938): 360-632.

⁴³ A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926).

(Possibly one of my troubles in my discussion with Schütz lies in the fact that by cultural heritage I am a Calvinist. I do not want to be a philosopher- I shy away from the philosophical problems underlying my scientific work. By the same token I don't think he wants to be a scientist as I understand the term until he has settled all the underlying philosophical difficulties. If the physicists of the 17th century had been Schützes there might well have been no Newtonian system.)

These are somewhat random reflections suggested by your letter. I should be greatly interested in your reaction to them, but do not consider an answer in any sense obligatory. We are very sorry you have not been able to come North this summer. I look forward to seeing you before too long.

Cordially yours,

Talcott Parsons

P.S. You can return the copy of the Weber Introduction and the Schütz material to me at my office. By that time I shall be settled down again in town.

By the way on the lack of "individualism" in England you know Adolf Löwe's pamphlet "The Price of Freedom" don't you?⁴⁴

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14. *Voegelin to Parsons, 3 September 1941*⁴⁵

University of Alabama
University, Alabama
Department of Political Science

September 3, 1941

Professor Talcott Parsons
Emerson Hall
Harvard University

Dear Parsons:

Thanks for your letter of August 18th. Yesterday we returned from our vacation and I found your package containing the Schütz

⁴⁴ Adolph Lowe and Paul Tillich, *The Price of Liberty: A German on Contemporary Britain*, translated by Elsa Sinclair (London: The Hogarth Press, 1937).

⁴⁵ Original letter in the Papers of Talcott Parsons, Harvard University Archives; copy in the Eric Voegelin Collection, Hoover Institution Archives.

materials, your introduction to Max Weber, and my chapter on the Great Confusion. (I did not find, however, the copy of my reprint on Max Weber which you said you had enclosed). Your letter has interested me very much because of your remarks concerning the Calvinistic attitude towards power, but I presume that my reaction to your exchange of letters with Schütz does interest you more at the moment. Let me confine myself this time, therefore, to the problem of the Schütz materials; in a few days I shall be able to deal with the other questions.

You will not expect me, of course, to express my own opinions on the technical details of Schütz' critique and your answer to them and thus to continue the discussion. I take it you want me rather to state what I think about the reasons of the misunderstanding which has crept up, considering that I know Schütz for a long time. In your letter you have laid yourself I believe, the finger on the problem: you and Schütz are interested in different levels of abstraction of social theory; your focus of interest is nearer to the empirical problems, his interest is nearer to the level of abstraction where the time-structure of human action becomes central. While your counter-critique was justified insofar as you sensed, I think, correctly that Schütz did not enter into the spirit of your work, I do not think he meant any harm but that he criticized your work precisely as you might expect it from a man with a strong intellectual temperament who is deeply absorbed in his own approach to the problems of social theory and believes this approach to be of paramount importance. (As Schütz did not touch upon the point in his letter, let me say only a word concerning his use of the term naïve which seems to have displeased you; the term in the context of Schütz is not meant as a criticism of your efforts, but is used in the sense of the Kantian dichotomy naïve-critical, meaning by naïve the attitude of direct attention to the object of science, by critical the attitude of self-conscious reflexion on the instruments of perception and conception).

What I have to say concerning the issue, I should like to put in the form of reminiscences concerning the history of German and Austrian development of social theory as I have experienced it myself. The facts are, of course, known to you, but you may be interested in the reaction of somebody who has gone through the problems in his own environment, I have the feeling that the misunderstanding between you and Schütz has the same roots as some of the tensions which I shall try to describe.

The trouble in German methodology began, as far as I can see, with the neo-Kantian movement of [Hermann] Cohen, [Paul] Natorp and [Ernst] Cassirer which dealt with the methods of physics. The next step was the attempt of the south-west Germans [Wilhelm]

Windelband and [Heinrich] Rickert, to emulate the achievements of the Marburg school and to establish for the historical and social sciences a firm methodology of the same dignity as the method which produced such impressive results in physics. This attempt at an imitation of the methods of physics is, I think, the most important single factor which caused the later difficulties. In the natural sciences the scientist is confronted with the materials of the external spatial and temporal world; the form of his system as a whole, as well as of the single propositions depends on the conceptual instruments which he uses in interpreting the materials; the materials themselves are not preformed by action of the human mind. In the historical and social sciences the situation is fundamentally different, because the materials with which the scientist has to deal have a human constitution of their own, the constitution which they have received through human action; his most important task is the analysis of the constitution of social reality through human action. From the time of the neo-Kantian schools German social theory is vitiated in one of its main trends by the neglect of the Realkonstitution of society (your theory of action); the theory of society is replaced by the theory of social science; the neglect was due to two factors: (a) the imitation of the model of the theory of physics, (b) the fact that the theory of social science was developed by philosophers who had not more than a smattering of the empirical problems (by which I mean the constitution of social reality through human action).

From this initial false start followed a number of other difficulties. The conceptual instruments of the empirical social sciences are developed in close connection with the language symbols which are developed in pre-scientific social reality. We are interested in “democracy” or “dictatorship” in political science because political reality evolves forms of organization under these names; the language symbols exist as part of the social reality independent of the language symbols which we use in science. The consequence in German social sciences was the evolution of methodologies which transposed the language symbols found in the actual self-constitution of society as concepts into the field of science itself and erected them into scientific absolutes. We find methodologies which are hitched to concrete historical phases of society, such as the more radical form of economic theory which has been grafted on the liberal economic system (typical case: [Ludwig von] Mises) or the multitude of law theories which were grafted on the constitutional state of the late 19th century (typical case: the German positivists from [Paul] Laband to [Hans] Kelsen). The

methodologists of this type had an inclination to identify their “method” (which actually was a type construction of a particular social organization) with the only true scientific method and to stigmatize any other approach to social sciences as “unscientific” or “irrelevant”. German methodology had, therefore, in the last two generations a clear political tinge because the several “methods” expressed the political interests of the respective scholars in a particular constitution of society. This political tension played a considerable role in recent events in Germany insofar as the neo-Kantian methodologists were, as a rule, liberals, while those scholars who were interested in other problems than the liberal economic and political constitution of society had, as a rule, nationalist, if not outright national-socialist inclinations (as far as they were not communists).

A further interesting problem is presented by Husserl. The Kantianism of Husserl expresses itself in his radical epistemological subjectivism. The world is constituted, in good Kantian fashion, by the structure of the human mind. A careful description of the constitutive function of the human mind (the phenomenological description) will be practically a delineation of the constitution of reality. This has, for the philosopher, the great advantage that he need not know anything about reality at all, but can simply describe introspectively the constitutive functions of his mind and will thus arrive at a replica of the constitution of the external world. This leads to certain interesting results in the description of spatial and temporal phenomena of the physical world, but it creates difficulties in the social theory because social reality cannot be accepted as an object “naively”, but has to be constituted in the subjective flux of the ego. The later work of Husserl, particularly the Meditations Cartésiennes, which deal with the constitution of the alter ego, is, therefore, in my opinion, a hopeless mess;⁴⁶ and I think even Schütz is now inclined to admit it. I do not think I have to enlarge the point; you will easily draw the inferences concerning some of the deeper causes of misunderstanding between you and Schütz.

Finally, a word on the peculiar Austrian problem. Vienna has produced within the last two generations four important contributions to the social sciences in a wider sense: (1) the Austrian form of the marginal utility theory, (2) psychoanalysis, (3) the pure theory of law,

⁴⁶ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, translated by Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950). Originally pub-

lished as *Méditations cartésiennes: Introduction à la phénoménologie*, translated by Gabrielle Peiffer and Emmanuel Levinas (Paris: Armand Colin, 1931).

(4) the Kulturkreis theory of [Oswald] Menghin. The sequence in itself is worth some investigation; I do not think it is accidental, but a closer analysis is impossible now. Anyway, the economic and the legal theory show certain characteristics which distinguish it from the contemporary German. There is a definite Austrian bias towards social theory on a level of high abstraction which has led to outstanding controversies with the more empirically minded Germans. The first great clash was the famous Methodenstreit between [Carl] Menger and [Gustav von] Schmoller, the second great clash was between Kelsen and the Germans, particularly Carl Schmitt, in the 20ies. Internally, the empirically minded Austrians, like [Felix] Stoerk and [Friedrich] Tezner, were rather ruthlessly pressed to the wall by the abstractionists ([Hugo] Bernatzik); and I myself am regarded as something like a queer monster, practically a Fascist, by my friends of the more radical Kelsen persuasion (in 1936 I got furious and tore the pure theory of law to pieces in my Autoritaerer Staat;⁴⁷ Kelsen did not speak to me after the performance for more than a year and is still very cool). The attitude of Schütz is, I think, to a certain extent characteristic of the Austrian abstract interests, though tempered greatly in his case by his interest in Max Weber and by his considerable empirical interests (he has made excellent, unpublished, studies of the Opera and the Novel⁴⁸).

I hope you will not think it a mistake that I have reacted towards the theoretical difference between you and Schütz by remarks of a more sociological nature. It seems to me, indeed, that the environmental features at which I hinted are mainly responsible for your differences of approach and interest. My personal scientific attitude makes me naturally biased in your favor; I have broken away from the indicated methodological trend even in my student days because I could not get much help out of this type of methodology for the empirical problems of politics which interested me, but I have to admit that the training in the school of Kelsen has made me aware of complications of social theory which otherwise would have escaped me. My own quarrel with Schütz about Husserl and the relevance of the phenomenological method for the social sciences is of old standing; I amicably disagree with him on all his basic tenets, but again I have to say that the cleanliness and

⁴⁷ *Der autoritäre Staat: Ein Versuch über das österreichische Staatsproblem* (Vienna: Springer, 1936). Translated by Ruth Hein as *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 4.

⁴⁸ See Schütz, "Meaning Structures of Drama and Opera," in *Collected Papers*,

vol. 6, *Literary Reality and Relationships*, edited by Michael Barber, pp. 171-195, and Lester Ebee, ed., *Alfred Schütz's Sociological Aspect of Literature: Construction and Complementary Essays* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1998).

clearness of his work has aided me considerably in my own, if in no other way, at least in avoiding pitfalls.

Your discussion with Schütz has brought home to me again the complex stratification of social theory, and I thank you sincerely for having made the correspondence accessible to me.

I shall read in a few days your Weber-MS. and then write you again.

Cordially yours,

Eric Voegelin

15. Voegelin to Parsons, 24 September 1941⁴⁹

University of Alabama
University, Alabama
Department of Political Science

September 24, 1941

Professor Talcott Parsons
Department of Sociology
Harvard University

Cambridge, Mass.

Dear Parsons:

Other work has prevented me from reading your Introduction with due care until last Sunday. The net impression is very strong. I think you have brought out convincingly the character of Weber's work as an analysis of the structure of our civilization. The Protestant Ethics alone do not give a sufficient idea, as you remarked some time, of Weber's importance as a critic of rational civilization. There is not much that I have to say beyond that statement of my full agreement with your exposition; your criticisms and the lines which you draw for the future development of the Weberian problem make me hope that you will find the time soon for further elaboration. There is only one technical suggestion which I would care to make. On p. 70, last paragraph, you refer to recent contributions to a sociology of occupation. It seems to me

⁴⁹ Original letter in the Papers of Talcott Parsons, Harvard University Archives; copy in the Eric Voegelin Collection, Hoover Institution Archives.

that a reader who is not well acquainted with the particular development to which you refer in this passage may not catch the full significance of your remark. Later, in the great footnote beginning on p. 75, it becomes perfectly clear what you mean. I would suggest that you add on p. 70 a footnote, referring to p. 75 for further elucidation of your point.

Otherwise I have to raise only one question which, however, is of no importance for your Introduction because the economy of your essay would not permit of entering on it anyway. From your chapter II (on Methodology) I received the impression that you attribute to the theory of the ideal type more consistency than it actually has in the work of Max Weber. I think we can distinguish in Weber's work two phases of the ideal type. The first centers around the methodological essays of 1904 and neighboring years, the second is represented by the opening paragraphs of Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. The first ideal type, which may be called the "historical", is elaborated in close contact with a limited section of historical materials, leading to such concepts as the "medieval town", or the "Macedonian military monarchy", etc. An agglomeration of such types would have no internal systematic coherence. The second attempt of Weber's was concerned with introducing a systematic order into the types, and this attempt resulted in the "rational" ideal type as the fixed point around which other types could be organized as "deviations". The recognition of such an evolution would have certain consequences for the interpretation of Weber's work as a whole. (Unfortunately I do not recall at the moment whether you have not dealt with all this in your Structure of Social Action). You bring out clearly in your Introduction that this second phase, of the "rational" type, is still very unsatisfactory from a systematic point of view, because Weber lacked a good psychology as well as a system of the functional structure of society. I wonder, however, whether the systematic defects would and could have ever been remedied by Weber himself. His way of attack on the problems went always from the historical materials towards their systematization; he never placed himself in the center of systematic thought in order to organize the materials from such a center. The dynamics of Weber's approach have been characterized by [Karl] Jaspers (in his essay on Weber) as determined by his personality; if I remember correctly, Jaspers characterized Weber as the grosse Fragmentarier.⁵⁰ If we accept the interpretation of Jaspers, that would mean that not death alone has left Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft a fragment, but that it would have remained a fragment, like

⁵⁰ See John Dreijmanis, ed., *Karl Jaspers on Max Weber*, translated by Robert J. Whelan (New York: Paragon House, 1989).

Weber's other works, even if he had lived another twenty years. The failure of his attempt at systematization would probably have become clear to a mind of his penetration and honesty, and he would have dropped the work at some stage.

These considerations induce me to venture an idea on the relation between your own work and that of Max Weber. From your Introduction it appears to the reader that you are on the way to a system of social theory which could be historically understood as a fulfillment of what Weber left unfinished. In the light of the preceding remarks it would seem to me that biographically your own thought may be determined to a certain extent through your analysis and criticism of Weber, but that essentially your approach is new. You attack Weber's problem, the analysis of our civilization, from the pole that is opposite to his, and that was never accessible to him, from the pole of primary systematic thought. I permit myself to disagree with you, therefore, on a remark which you made once to me in a conversation: that your Structure of Social Action is a "secondary" treatise, because it deals with the "primary" work of Weber, [Emile] Durkheim, etc. I rather see your book now as a means for you of arriving in due course of elaboration at your very primary systematic position. Your dynamics of scientific attack are, as far as I can see, entirely different from that of Weber though your problems are related to his.

The suggested peculiarities of Weber's personality and work are probably also the cause why he has no "school". The prerequisite for having a school in science seem to me the development of a "method", of an "approach" on the part of the man who functions as the "head" of the school. (I am aware that there are other types of schools, for instance schools determined by value attitudes etc., but they are not relevant for the point in question). Weber's work is grandiose in its results, but the "approach" is precisely its weak point. Anybody who wishes to follow in the path of Weber, has first of all to create a new instrument for dealing with his materials. And the man who can do that is no "disciple" but inevitably a "head" in his own right.- The evolution of social theory has taken in Germany after Weber a significant turn in the movement of the Philosophische Anthropologie, so represented by [Max] Scheler (Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos [Darmstadt: Reichl, 1928]),⁵¹ [Helmuth] Plessner (Macht und Menschliche Natur [Berlin: Junker und Dünnhaupt, 1931]), Jaspers (Psychologie der

⁵¹ Translated by Manfred Frings as *The Human Place in the Cosmos* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009).

Weltanschauungen [Berlin: Springer, 1922], Metaphysik [Berlin: Springer, 1932]), Landsberg (*Philosophische Anthropologie*),⁵² etc. Everybody who had an active mind had the feeling that a new interpretation of man was required which would furnish the conceptual framework for the interpretation of the civilizational materials. The movement seems to me particularly important under the aspect that it presents a concerted effort to furnish a theory of man which could not be obtained from professional psychologists. (the masterpiece in this respect is Scheler's critique of psychoanalysis in the later editions of *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*. [Bonn: Cohen, 1931]). Your own work seems to go in a similar direction. You do not elaborate a Philosophische Anthropologie as an independent discipline in preparation for the analysis of social phenomenon, but in reading pp. 32-37 of your Introduction I had the impression that your completed theory of social action would practically incorporate its results. (In your earlier MS. which I had this spring you have gone already very far in this direction).

What I have said is not more than an attempt to make clear to myself what you are doing and I can only hope that I have not misunderstood you too grossly. Let me thank you very much for the opportunity which you have given me of reading your MS. I am sure that the translation with your Introduction will be of the greatest importance for the understanding of Weber in this country.

I remain,

Yours very sincerely,

Eric Voegelin

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16. *Parsons to Voegelin, 2 October 1941*⁵³

October 2, 1941

Dr. Eric Voegelin
University of Alabama
University, Alabama

⁵² Paul Ludwig Landsberg, *Einführung in die philosophische Anthropologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1934).

⁵³ Original letter in the Eric Voegelin Collection, Hoover Institution Archives; copy in the Papers of Talcott Parsons, Harvard University Archives.

Dear Voegelin:

Thank you very much for your two extremely interesting and to me illuminating letters. I feel rather guilty at having imposed such a burden of critical work upon you, but I am certainly greatly rewarded by what you have said. Your comments on my controversy with Schütz have helped me a great deal to understand the situation and have made me feel a great deal better about the whole thing. Before making one or two comments I should like to ask what you think would be a desirable next step to take. I really feel that I could not profitably carry the discussion with him further without doing a great deal of work which I have not yet had an opportunity to do and see no immediate prospect of being able to do. On the other hand, I should like to do anything I could to make him feel better about it and I realize that sometime I shall have to go considerably deeper into his problems than I have done so far. I do not, however, think that apart from pragmatic pressures, I am altogether ripe for that step.

On the other hand, I wonder whether there is any real hope of his carrying on the discussion closer to my level of interests. I agree with you that he did not, as you say, "mean any harm," but I did feel quite strongly that he very seriously failed to understand some of the most crucial problems of a system of theory on my level, and it seems to me very difficult to lead into his range of problems through a discussion where some of these at least cannot be taken for granted. I think, for instance, of the whole problem of norms and values in their specific relation to the structure of action, again on my level. I am grateful to you for pointing out the specific technical meaning of "naïve" which I had not thought of in this connection, though I had known of the usage. The connotation, however, of "uncritical" in the sense of not having thoroughly considered a range of implications is so common, at least in English, that my misunderstanding does not seem to be altogether unnatural.

I think your letter clarifies a good deal in my own intellectual experience, which has I imagine been in at least some respects parallel to your own. I certainly never had anything like the thorough grounding in philosophy which you have had, but when I was plunged into the German intellectual world at Heidelberg, I think I can say that I went through a period of considerable intellectual conflict as to where my real interests lay. By contrast with the naïve (in the naïve sense) empiricism of so much of American and English social science, I was initially attracted by the atmosphere of serious concern with methodological issues. But, looking back, I think it is fair to say that I

never really became profoundly interested in those things. Undoubtedly the most important single intellectual experience of that period was reading Weber's Protestant Ethic, which from the very first made a tremendous impression upon me; in the first place I suppose because the phenomena he was talking about were basic to my own cultural tradition, and at the same time he discussed them in a perspective which was new and fascinating.

There is a sense in which ever since I have been trying to organize and systematize that perspective, but I think the attempt has taken me progressively farther away from the methodological world in which Weber was involved, and in one sense back to the "western" traditions of science. The important thing about the latter, greatly modified as they have come to be, seems to me the possibility they present of dealing directly and fruitfully with so many of the critical empirical problems of our time, and yet doing so in a way which makes a high level of generalization possible. However important from various points of view of philosophy and Weltanschauung the other level of abstraction may be, I feel considerable confidence that it is not capable of the same order of empirical fruitfulness, at least in its present state of development. If I am correct your work has gone farther in that sort of direction than anything else that I know.

I am delighted to have your favorable judgment on my Introduction. There is a very real sense in which it seems to me that this institutional analysis contains the most important of Weber's scientific contributions, along with the studies in the sociology of religion. If I can help to make the quality of his work in this field better understood I shall be quite satisfied.

As to your view that the theoretical difficulties of Weber's work were intrinsic rather than a matter of circumstance, I rather wonder. Undoubtedly there is a good deal in it, but I certainly feel that there is a very strong element of continuity from his work to the frontier problems which interest me most strongly at the present time. Unquestionably his empirical insight in relation to historical material is a critically important component, but it seems to me that precisely the difference between Weber's treatment of such material and any number of competent historians whose works I have read lies in their relation to some level of scientific theory. Granted that there were many respects in which the focus of his theory was uncertain and possibly his character had been too completely set to overcome the difficulties, but it seems to me one must credit him, given his starting points, with a very remarkable level of theoretical achievement, and

however great the necessary modifications we can go on from where he stopped. Whatever independence there may be in the position I have finally arrived at seems to me would not be possible without the theoretical insights of Weber, of course in their interaction with those which I have derived from other sources, perhaps most notably Durkheim. All this seems to me to be well within the rubric of the continuous development of a system.

I should also like to continue the discussion of predestination and similar subjects when an opportunity offers. Since our last correspondence I have written a brief memorandum on some aspects of Germany, some parts of which are rather close to this subject.⁵⁴ I do not have a copy available just now, but when I get one I'll send it on to you, as I shall be greatly interested in your comments on it and it might serve to further that line of discussion we have already started.

You are quite right; I have failed to return your reprint on Weber and hasten to send it along now.

Sincerely yours,
Talcott Parsons

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*17. Voegelin to Parsons, 19 October 1941*⁵⁵

University of Alabama
University, Alabama
Department of Political Science

October 19, 1941

Dear Parsons:

Thank you so much for your kind letter of October 2nd. You ask me what I would consider a reasonable step to bring the discussion with Schütz to a satisfactory end. This is a somewhat delicate question, and I might easily err in an answer because I am not sufficiently clear about the external circumstances which led me to the MS. of Schütz. As far as the subject-matter of this discussion itself is concerned, I do not believe that

⁵⁴ Possibly Parsons, "Memorandum: The Development of Groups and Organizations Amenable to Use Against American Institutions and Foreign Policy and Possible Measures of Prevention, in Uta Gerhardt, ed., *Talcott Parsons on National Socialism*, pp. 101-130.

⁵⁵ Original letter in the Papers of Talcott Parsons, Harvard University Archives; copy in the Eric Voegelin Collection, Hoover Institution Archives.

a continuation at the moment would be particularly fruitful. You have noticed that Schütz did not sufficiently enter on the problems which are the most important to you; the reason why is, in my opinion, that he did not recognize them as such because they do not come within the focus of attention to which he is accustomed. Only time and closer acquaintance on his part with the “Western” approach will bring a change.-

As far as the practical side is concerned, I believe to remember that he wrote his article for publication in an English periodical; this plan was suspended by the discussion. If my recollection is correct, one possible solution would be that you write him that whatever your disagreement on basic questions may be, this should not stand in the way of the planned publication. If the publication, however, should seem to you undesirable, you can drop this point by simply not touching upon it, and write him that after a reconsideration of your correspondence you still think that his critique did not touch the essential points of your position, but that you felt that the misunderstanding was due to tenets of his theory which you had not yet fully appreciated in their import, and that you hoped future exchanges of opinion would lead to a closer mutual understanding of the respective positions. These are mere suggestions, based on an entirely insufficient knowledge of the circumstances, and made with all due reserve; they may justly seem unacceptable to you; but I felt that your intention was going somewhere in this direction. About Schütz’ attitude I know nothing beyond the remarks he made this spring when I met him in Philadelphia; he was sincerely sorry about the state of things and would certainly be very happy about any word from you.

But let us now come back to predestination. I have looked over our discussion of this point, and I thought it might be helpful, before going farther in the subject-matter itself, to clarify a point of method. Reading again your reaction towards the MS. on the “Reformation”, I felt that your surprise at my treatment of predestination was less caused by any innovation on my part in the traditional treatment, but by the fact that I was talking of a problem entirely different from that of Max Weber. I should like to distinguish, therefore, more clearly between the following two questions: (1) The doctrine of predestination as formulated in the Institutes of Calvin is a datum; what were the effects of this doctrine on members of the Calvinist community, and particularly on their ethical, commercial and political attitudes; (2) The doctrine of predestination is a fixture in Christian dogmatics since St. Paul; what elements in the environment and personality of Calvin induced him to pick on this hitherto not primarily important

doctrine and to make it a centerpiece of his theology. The first question is treated by Weber, [R. H.] Tawney and others; and while the results may need considerable readjustment, I am in substantial agreement with their approach. The second question is, as far as I know the literature, a terra incognita. Nobody seems ever to have been seriously concerned about the causes of this momentous break in Christian history which brought the practical identification between the people as a spiritual community and the people as a political community by means of the collectivist idea of the predestined community of Saints. As my historical analysis did not start with Calvinism as a datum, but had to place it in the flux of events leading up to it, I ran into this second question. As yet I am rather bewildered by the problem; and in the MS. which you have seen I did nothing but draw attention to some points which were meant to show that here, indeed, is a problem which needs elucidation.

The "History of Ideas" is progressing now steadily. One great stumbling block has been removed: the chapters on Jesus and the Apostolic period.⁵⁶ Curiously enough, I have been unable to find any specific treatment of the Gospels and of the personality of Jesus under the aspect of their political contents and function. I had the impression that most people were afraid of touching on the delicate subject.

Quite a bit of time I lost recently because of an Austrian Free National Council is in formation, and the promoters wanted me to become by all means a member of it. Now they are rather sore at me, because I had to convince them that I preferred to find my way in the American community and did not care to look backwards. It seemed to me rather silly, indeed, to become all of a sudden an Austrian cabinet member in exile. I thought the story might interest you as a sociologist. The history of the European emigration which is centered on the East coast, may some time become an interesting topic; I am piling up all the materials that I can lay my hands on.

I am looking forward to your Memorandum on Germany; please let me have a copy, when there is one available.

Yours very sincerely,

Eric Voegelin

—

⁵⁶ See *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 19, pp. 149-185.

April 2, 1942

Dear Parsons:

Enclosed you will find the reprint of an article on the Mongol Orders of Submission which I wrote when I was at Harvard three years ago; it has been published finally.⁵⁸

You may remember that I told you at X-mas that I would be at Louisiana State for the current semester. It is an interesting experience, and I have to rectify humbly some misconceptions of corruption. The [Huey] Long-era was apparently a golden age as far as the University is concerned; everybody who has any qualities was appointed during this time. The preceding administration and the present "honest" régime compare rather unfavorably. The people whom I meet look eagerly forward to the end of the present governor's term (who is considered politically dead),⁵⁹ and hope for a more intelligent, if more corrupt, administration.

My position at Alabama, on the other hand, is becoming precarious. The sinking enrollment makes economies inevitable, and it seems that I may become the victim in our department because I am the most recent addition to the staff, because I am a foreigner, and because- as I was assured candidly- I had the best chances of finding a position elsewhere. I am not dismissed, and the crisis may pass for this year, but I am distinctly on the look-out for something new. If anything should come to your attention, you would oblige me greatly if you could let me know.

How is your and [Edward Y.] Hartshorne's study on Germany coming?⁶⁰ I just obtained a volume by Rohan D'O. Butler on *The Roots of National Socialism, 1783-1933*, which gives some interesting points.⁶¹ He is an Englishman, and I have not seen the book observed in this country.

The History is progressing. I had a terrible time with the Middle Ages. It was my ambition to give a precise type-study of the growth of

⁵⁷ Copy in the Eric Voegelin Collection, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁵⁸ "The Mongol Orders of Submission to European Powers, 1245-1255," *Byzantion, International Journal of Byzantine Studies* 15 (1940-1941): 378-413. Reprinted in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 10, pp. 76-125.

⁵⁹ Sam Houston Jones.

⁶⁰ The collaborative study, a book entitled *German Social Structure and National Psychology*, was never completed, but Parsons published parts of it under his name. Uta Gerhardt, *The Social Thought of Talcott Parsons: Methodology and American Ethos* (Farnham, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), p. 152.

⁶¹ London: Faber & Faber, 1941.

spiritual consciousness from the reform of Cluny to the Mendicant Orders. The result is not quite what I should like it to be. But it looks presentable and I have to let it go for a lack of time. I got some help for understanding the period from a comparison of the Military Orders with the fusion of Zen-mysticism and warrior-discipline in the shogunate of Kamakura. It is a pity that no Max Weber has dealt yet with Japan, as the parallels seem to merit attention.

With my best wishes, I remain,

Yours very sincerely,

Eric Voegelin

—

*19. Parsons to Voegelin, 15 September 1942*⁶²

September 15, 1942

Dear Voegelin:

I am really ashamed that I have not answered your letter before this. Somehow in the last days at the farm I was involved in a hurry-up review, and on coming down here hoped to see you personally, but somehow did not make connections before you got away.

The problem you pose is certainly not an easy one. I wonder whether for Bildungswissen “humanistic knowledge” would be a possibility. I myself have been good deal bothered by the term Bildung, and wish we had a real English equivalent. I should think, however, that the humanistic tradition of learning and culture came fairly close to describing what Scheler means, at least for western civilization.

Heilswissen seems to me still more difficult. I suppose “religious knowledge” is too broad. Indeed I doubt very much whether one can find a single term which is at all satisfactory. Possibly one could take a cue from Max Weber with some such circumlocution as “knowledge of the ultimate meaning of life” or existence or something in that direction. I certainly do not see any single satisfactory term, and I am sorry not to be more helpful.

⁶² Original letter in the Eric Voegelin Collection, Hoover Institution Archives.

I really was sorry not to see you again, but wish you the very best of fortune at your new permanent job. Let's hope it won't be long until we can get together once more.

Sincerely yours,

Talcott Parsons

—

*20. Voegelin to Parsons, 31 December 1942*⁶³

December 31, 1942

Dear Parsons:

I do not wish to let the old year pass without wishing you and your family all the best for the new. Many thanks also from my wife and me to you and Mrs Parsons for your charming X-mas greetings.

The last three months were a bit exacting for various reasons, or I should have written earlier. First we were rather occupied with finding a house and organizing it. Then, in October, I was ill for three weeks, participating in a local epidemic. And then our whole life was somewhat unsettled by the expectation that I should have to join the Army by February 1st. This disruption is now deferred indefinitely because I am over 38, but the situation here at the University is still rather unclear though as yet the administration seems to have the intention to carry on as before with a reduced number of students.

My job as such is very agreeable. The number of good students is much higher than in Alabama and the general level of the faculty is also much higher. The financial situation of the University is apparently very good so that the economic difficulties are not a permanent source of unrest as in Alabama. I have a seminar in political theory that meets once a week for an evening at my house with four registered students and about six or seven who come regularly without taking it for credit. The background of the students is thin, to put it mildly, but their intelligence and eagerness to learn is very pleasant.

⁶³ Copy in the Eric Voegelin Collection, Hoover Institution Archives.

The “History” is progressing, slowly but visibly. I am finishing now the Middle Ages; William of Occam is just now giving me a lot of trouble because I want to bring out that the shift in scholasticism towards nominalism is determined by the necessity of safe-guarding the realm of faith against the encroachment of critical intellect. I think that with William begins the great schism of our civilization between a secular, laicistic civilization and the idea of a Christian civilization as represented by the Catholic Church. Unfortunately, the Sacrum Imperium of Dempf, which is otherwise excellent, breaks down for the fourteenth and fifteenth century;⁶⁴ and the great work of the Carlyles is a brilliant collection of footnotes without the book that should be written over them.⁶⁵

I have to thank you yet for your letter concerning Bildungs- and Heilswissen. “Humanistic knowledge” is probably the only way out; I have tried also “forming” or “personality-forming knowledge”; but my instinct for English is, of course not strong enough to make me feel sure whether this is a possible translation or not.

Curious things are going on in the world of politics. The other day I received a letter from Count Degenfeld, secretary to “His Majesty” Otto of Habsburg, asking me for my signature on a proclamation by which an Austrian military formation should be established within the framework of the American Army. I declined, saying that I wanted to become an American citizen and that, if I had to join an Army, the American had my preference. The Czechs are already excited; yesterday I received one of their publications, simply foaming with wrath at the project which seems to imply that all the inhabitants of the monarchy before 1918 are counted as Austrians. As the project has the backing of the State department, I just wonder how this affair will end. The [François] Darlan incident was not too encouraging; I have a feeling of more assassinations to come.

With all the best wishes, I am,

Very sincerely yours,

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⁶⁴ Alois Dempf, *Sacrum Imperium: Geschichte und Staatsphilosophie des Mittelalters und der politischen Renaissance* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1925).

⁶⁵ R. W. Carlyle and A. J. Carlyle, *A History of Mediaeval Political Theory in the West*, 6 vols. (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1928-1936).

21. Parsons to Voegelin, 8 January 1943⁶⁶

Harvard University
Committee on Concentration in the Area of Social Science
10 Holyoke House
Cambridge, Massachusetts

January 8, 1943

Professor Eric Voegelin
Department of Government
Louisiana State University
University, La.

Dear Voegelin:

Thank you very much for your letter. It was very gratifying to hear from you after such a long time. I am glad that you find the situation there so much more congenial than at Alabama. We are of course all facing very great alterations in our professional situation, but I hope the opportunity will remain to go ahead with useful work.

I am glad to hear that your book is progressing, perhaps particularly since I have sent in a strong recommendation for the application for your Grant-in-Aid. I can think of hardly any book I know to be in progress to the publication of which I look forward with greater anticipation than yours. I am glad that receipt of the Grant-in-Aid would probably mean that you would be back here in Cambridge for the summer. Our own plans are completely in the air on account of the uncertainties of teaching obligations, but I think the probability is high that I shall be here a good part of the summer.

I am afraid I neglected to send you earlier a reprint of my recent article on German social structure which appeared in the new *Journal of Legal and Political Sociology*.⁶⁷ I hasten to repair the omission and would be very grateful for your comments. The fall term here was hectically busy, so I have gotten no writing at all done. However, now I hope to get something in, and one virtue of the departure of students is likely to be more time for my own work.

⁶⁶ Original letter in the Eric Voegelin Collection, Hoover Institution Archives.

⁶⁷ "Democracy and Social Structure in Pre-Nazi Germany," *Journal of Legal and*

Political Sociology 1 (1942): 96-114; reprinted in *Talcott Parsons on National Socialism*, edited by Uta Gerhardt (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1993), pp. 225-242.

I join you in wondering what some of these political developments are all about. I might add to them a speech I heard the Dutch ambassador make a few nights ago, the keynote of which was the principle of legitimacy.⁶⁸ Its implications were left, probably purposefully, vague, but still one wondered how far those people are playing for the closest approach to a restoration of their previous colonial empire that they can possibly get. I would feel better if something more in line with the deeper forces of social change in the Orient were brought out.

I hope to hear from you again soon. In the meantime, best wishes to both of you and to the [Rudolf] Heberles when you see them.

Talcott Parsons

—

22. *Voegelin to Parsons, 16 January 1943*⁶⁹

January 16, 1943

Professor Talcott Parsons
Department of Sociology
10 Holyoke House
Harvard University

Cambridge, Mass.

Dear Parsons,

Many thanks for your kind letter of January 8th and for the preprint on Democracy and Social Structure in Pre-Nazi Germany. May I thank you in particular for your kindness in writing a letter for me to the Social Science Research Council; I am very much afraid I committed the faux pas of not warning you in time that such a request from the Council would be forthcoming. They require three names of men who are acquainted with the work in hand, acting on the assumption that the work will be done under somebody's supervision. I gave besides yours the names of [William Y.] Elliot and [Fritz] Morstein Marx, and I think of [Gottfried von] Haberler; as you are

⁶⁸ Alexander Loudon. See "Loudon Asks Hate of Nazi Leaders," *Harvard Crimson*, January 6, 1943.

⁶⁹ Copy in the Eric Voegelin Collection, Hoover Institution Archives.

the only ones with whom I have talked about the "History" and who have an approximate of idea of what I am doing. I hope very much that you were not inconvenienced too much. – I have applied for the Grant-in-Aid because last year's moving around has exhausted my reserves, and because the income-tax payment of this year simply does not leave me enough money for the considerable cost of a trip to Harvard. In the meantime the local situation has shaped in such a manner that in all probability I shall have to teach summer-school so that I can come to Cambridge for not more than three weeks (last week of August to mid-September).

Your paper on the social structure of Germany has interested me very much, as you can imagine. Your analysis of the emotional instability of the structure is excellent, and I am particularly impressed by your remarks on "romanticism" and on "schismogenesis". There is not much I have to say about your thesis: I think your description of the attitudes is quite correct and I only can corroborate by my own experiences. I was particularly delighted by your remarks about German "titles": they reminded me of the horrible mistake which a friend of mine once made in a Bavarian small town when he addressed the Frau Apothekenbesitzersgattin as only Frau Apothekersgattin, overlooking the abyss which separates a man who owns a pharmacy from a man who just works in one.

There are, of course, an infinite number of details which occur to me when I read your paper, but they are not in the nature of corrections; they would rather fortify your thesis by additional observations. As some of them might interest you, you will perhaps permit to dwell on them for a moment.

On p.99 you remark about the contempt of the officers' corps and the Junkers' caste for certain bourgeois virtues and "even liberal and humane culture". Your observation is correct, but I wonder whether the Junkers' class does not present a somewhat ambivalent phenomenon. On the one hand, in the broad mass, the type to which you refer; on the other hand, the very opposite. There occur to me off-hand such Junkers as Ewald and Heinrich von Kleist, Alexander and Wilhelm von Humboldt, Achim von Arnim, Josef von Eichendorff, the count Pauk Yorek von Wartenburg, [Otto von] Bismarck, and such chiefs of staff as [Helmuth von] Moltke and [Alfred von] Schlieffen. I need not elaborate on their merits. But certainly a class which could in the hour of national despair make the resolve that Prussia, if politically out, should be the leading nation in the achievement of the mind and found the University of Berlin, does not show only contempt for liberal culture.

Your excellent presentation of attitudes and factors determining them, gives occasion to observe connections between phenomena which otherwise would be overlooked, as for instance the relation between the sex-roles on the one, the heroic ideals and male associations on the other side. I should like to add Lutheranism as connected with these problems. The interpretation of the phenomena which you describe so admirably, seems to [me] extremely difficult. Let's start with the women. I hesitate to ascribe national types to such complicated behaviors as a woman's selection of a mate. For the historical periods and the social strata in which the emotions of the woman are a decisive factor in the selection I should venture to guess, on the basis of such observations as I have been able to make, that nature has endowed woman with the gift of organizing the emotional life in such a manner – with numerous exceptions for various reasons admitted – that through all romanticism and sincerity of sentiments she lands with a male specimen of the most desirable social status – if she can get him. The status-question is not even absent in America, it is only less visible because the status-differentiation does not express itself in such handy titles as the German. We do not call a man Mr. One-hundred-Thousand, or Mr. One-Million, but, as far as I can see, we act on this classification in much the same manner as the Germans act with regard to the Herr Geheimrat or the Herr General, - and particularly women do so. I should like, therefore, to distinguish between a substratum of determinants of behavior which probably are not nationally diversified, and the national differences to which you refer.

Within this general frame of behavior now, there are doubtless to be observed the German peculiarities to which you refer. They are intimately linked, I believe, to the German political problems. Germany, and that is the over-all fact, is not a nation; in the self-interpretation though their language Germans designate themselves quite correctly as a Volk. The consequence is that it is the foremost occupation of Germans of temperamental and spiritual distinction to engage in the creation of political community substance ever since the creation of a German nation in rivalry with Western has become acute, that is since approximately the middle of the 18th century. From the Göttinger Bund to the circle of Stefan George the formation of Buende of various types, and of looser movements to the same effect, has absorbed the best forces of Germany. The creation of a political community substance, now, is a male occupation. (Here I agree on principle with the tenets of Hans Blüher in his Documentary History of the Wandervogel and his two volumes on Die Rolle der Erotik in

der männlichen Gesellschaft).⁷⁰ Where the national community is established beyond question, as in England, France or America, male forces are released into relations with women, which in Germany are drawn into the männliche Gesellschaft (in the sense of Blüher) in a cramped and sometimes pathological manner. The point is confirmed by the fact that in the period after 1870, when the German nation seemed to be established through Bismarck, we find in Germany a wave of precisely the “romanticism” in love relations which today may seem to be peculiarly American; it is the Goldschnitt period, producing some of the most revolting tosh in best-sellers for the nationalistic lower middle-class (outstanding “classics” Julius Wolff at the beginning, [Hedwig] Courthe-Mahler at the end of the period). This romantic wave came to an end on principle with the Wandervogel movement of 1900 when the question of creating a community substance was reopened on a mass-scale. Whenever and wherever we have in Germany the waves of the Buende the role of women is decisively influenced by the fact that women cannot participate in the absorbing male occupation and are confined, therefore, to a private sphere. This problem is all pervasive and goes far beyond the Buende in the strict sense, and I agree, therefore, with you that certain German phenomena of intellectual and spiritual intenseness in art, music, science, philosophy have to be classified along with it.

Being an inveterate rationalist and systematizer, I am inclined to link the problem of Lutheranism with the just mentioned complex of problems. Again your description is quite correct and Lutheranism is the factor which has to be used in the interpretation of certain German phenomena. Nevertheless I should like to drive the question further and ask: why has Lutheranism been possible in Germany – taking again the German national problem as a guide for the interpretation of Lutheranism and not the other way round. This is a complicated and dark affair and I am not clear about it. Anyway, Luther’s a-political attitude leading to the submission to the temporal power of the princes to the degree that Luther himself discouraged attempts at a congregational organization of the Protestant Church made by the Landgraf of Hessen is simply a continuation of the medieval ideas about relations between the spiritual and temporal powers – the national community which exacted the Anglican and Gallican solutions or the Spanish governmental control of the Catholic Church did not exist in Germany. Lutheranism I should consider, therefore, as the

⁷⁰ Blüher, *Wandervogel: Geschichte einer Jugendbewegung*, 2 vols. (Berlin-Tempelhof, 1912); *Die Rolle der Erotik in der männlichen Gesellschaft*, 2 vols. (Jena, 1917-1919).

characteristically German form of religious organization which has yet to be explained by the German national history. It follows, furthermore, that Lutheranism is on the wane as this specifically German form with the rise of the Buende; the last German, Lutheran-Christian philosopher of any importance was, as far as I can see, Hegel; and even he found his Lutheran Christianity by a tour de force, after he had seen the German problem in his youth much as it was seen by the Junghegelianer in the 40s, of the brilliant *Jugendgeschichte Hegel's* by Wilhelm Dilthey⁷¹, and the study by Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*.⁷² The feudalism of the Prussian governmental construction and its allegiance with the Lutheran Church did of course survive until 1918, but I should venture to say that the Prussian ruling class and the Prussian army were the only places where Lutheranism as a political force of decisive importance could be found in Germany. The intellectual and spiritual movement of the people had little to do with it any more since the Junge Deutschland.

Well, this letter is long enough. I should be very happy to hear from you more about your German study; I admire greatly your ability to penetrate as profoundly as you do such a network of complications as is presented by German politics.

With sincerest regards,

Yours,

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23. *Voegelin to Parsons, 2 December 1943*⁷³

Louisiana State University
College of Arts and Sciences
University Station
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Department of Government

December 2, 1943

⁷¹ Dilthey, *Die Jugendgeschichte Hegels* (Berlin: Verlag der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1905).

⁷² *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche: Der revolutionäre Bruch im Denken des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Zurich: Europa Verlag, 1941). Translated by David E. Grene as *From Hegel*

to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964).

⁷³ Original letter and enclosure in the Papers of Talcott Parsons, Harvard University Archives.

Professor Talcott Parsons
Little Hall
Harvard University

Cambridge, Mass.

Dear Parsons,

The American Political Science Association has a panel for research in political theory. This panel has recently appointed a committee which is charged with the preparation of text-editions of European sources in political theory. Chairman of the committee is Professor [J. R.] Pennock of Swarthmore; members are Paul A. Palmer (Kenyon College), Wilfred Parsons (Catholic University), and myself.

The purpose of the committee is not yet entirely clear to me but the general idea seems to be that for courses in political theory, teachers as well as students are in need of judiciously selected texts in English translation for a better understanding of European politics and ideologies.

The four members of the committee have taken it on themselves to make preliminary suggestions which will be digested by the chairman and submitted to a discussion at the first meeting of the Association in Washington, in January. Before I submit my suggestions I should like to have the opinions of some friends and colleagues concerning the idea in general as well as concerning texts to be selected. I am enclosing a page of tentative suggestions which will give you an idea of the project and you would oblige me greatly if you could let me know what you think not just of my suggestions, but of the whole project and if you could let me know what your suggestions for such a project would be.

Our endeavor to get a group of Army students for Special Area Training will probably not mature. I was in Washington recently and learned from the War department that the Army is not allocating any new groups at the moment.

With best regards to Mrs. Parsons, I am
Yours very sincerely,
Eric Voegelin

EV: YW

Enc.

Suggestions for Texts in Political Theory

- I. France: Selections concerning: (1) Catholic-conservative political thought; (2) Socialists, Syndicalists, [Louis Auguste] Blanqui,

e6o

[Charles] Peguy, [Georges] Sorel; (3) the theory of the objective social mind from [Jean-Jacques] Rousseau to Durkheim and [Leon] Daguít; (4) secularist Solidarisme; (5) the reform of the republic from [Ernest] Renan to [André] Tardieu.

- II. Germany: (1) Selections from Fichte – extremely important because Fichte’s European importance as the ancestor of both Communism and National Socialism is little appreciated in this country; the late Johannine phase (Staatslehre of 1813) is practically unknown; (2) Equally important a selection from Nietzsche; (3) a selection from German “Movements”: Youth Movement, the circle of Stefan George, the post-War conservatives.
- III. Italy: (1) All-important a decent selection from [Giuseppe] Mazzini; M. is deliberately misrepresented by Italian liberals in order to make him one of their glories; as a matter of fact he was not only a liberal, but also a conspirator; his Gloviné d’Italia programs are indistinguishable from Mussolini’s efforts; furthermore, Mazzini’s attitude was deeply rooted in Italian tradition, and a selection from his studies on Dante is indispensable for a complete understanding of this rich phase of Italian thought; (2) Italian socialist and syndicalist; (3) Nationalists, particularly [Enrico] Corradini.
- IV. Russia: An extremely complicated affair; obvious requirement: a selection from [Fyodor] Dostoievski’s Political Writings, which, as far as I know, have never been translated into English. [Leo] Tolstoi, [Peter] Kropotkin, Lenin, and Stalin are well taken care of, but 19th century Russian political thought in its breadth is almost unknown.
- V. Spain: I do not know much about Spain, but obvious requirements would be selections from (1) Donoso Cortes; (2) from the Spanish regeneration movement.

The above suggestions are made as a minimum program; they should not preclude the presentation of other materials if a larger project should become possible. It would be very desirable to have for instance, a collection of texts bearing on the idea of the Third Realm from Joachim of Flora and Amaury of Chartes to the present: or, a collection of sources for the idea of the hierarchy and delegation of powers (pseudo-Dionysian literature, Plotinus, Maimonides, etc.); or, a collection of texts on Latin Averroism and its consequences in Western political thought; etc. Finally, the edition, under the sponsorship of the APSA, should be considered of classics, which regrettably have never been edited and translated, such as the complete York Tracts. All of the above suggestions should be understood as requiring competent introductions.

—

24. Parsons to Voegelin, 17 December 1943⁷⁴

10 Holyoke House

December 17, 1943

Professor Eric Voegelin
Department of Government
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Dear Voegelin:

I find it rather difficult to think of anything very helpful to say in answer to your letter about texts of European political theory. Your knowledge of this field is very much greater than mine, and I have done very little reading of this sort at all recently.

I do, however, think that there is a place for really good translations and editions of some of the key writers. I also think if it is sufficiently carefully done, volumes of selections from writers whose work is scattered could be very useful. Quite clearly, Max Weber is one of these and I should think a volume containing the best from the "Politsche Schriften" and also from "Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft" would be excellent.

Also, I think the suggestion in your appended sheet of volumes consisting of representative selections from a group of writers is a good idea. As you know, however, I am something of a stickler for the view that poor translation is usually worse than none and that the thing ought to be very carefully done, if at all. Beyond that, I am really very much afraid I cannot contribute much in the way of specific suggestions.

The way such things usually develop, however, there would be no possibility of getting more than a very few started at the beginning. I should think that some of the less well known writers important in the background of current political movements might be a very good

⁷⁴ Copy in the Papers of Talcott Parsons, Harvard University Archives. This is the last surviving letter from Parsons to Voegelin; however, the Eric Voegelin Collection also contains a manuscript copy of Parsons' paper "Racial and Religious Differences as Factors in Group Tensions," dated 1944, and pub-

lished in *Approaches to National Unity*, edited by Lyman Bryson, Louis Finckelstein, and Robert McIver; reprinted in *Talcott Parsons on National Socialism*, edited by Uta Gerhardt (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1993), pp. 275-290.

starting point. The German suggestions seem to me good as does that of selections from Mazzini and Dostoievski.

I am sorry to hear that you are unlikely to have an area and language group. We seem to be getting along quite well in ours with, in my case, increasing attention to the Far Eastern Area.

Cordially yours,

Talcott Parsons

TP: j

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*25. Voegelin to Parsons, 9 June 1944*⁷⁵

Louisiana State University
College of Arts and Sciences
University Station
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Department of Government

June 9, 1944

Dear Parsons:

This is to tell you that by the end of June I shall come to Cambridge again, and that I am looking forward very much to the opportunity of seeing you again.

Moreover I have to make a confession: I have used your name as a reference with the Macmillan Co. as well as with the Oxford University Press. I hope sincerely neither of them will bother you; but still, I should have asked your permission first. Please, forgive the liberty which I have taken.

The occasion for this reference arose through the fact that the interminable "History of Political Ideas" has arrived at a provisional resting point. The MS. has been typed cleanly now, and it turned out that the whole thing has three volumes of 400, 500 and 500 pages (Ancient World, Middle Ages, Modern World). The first two volumes

⁷⁵ Original letter in the Papers of Talcott Parsons, Harvard University Archives; copy in the Eric Voegelin Collection, Hoover Institution Archives.

are practically completed; and I should like to have them published. The third volume may take another year. So I started sending letters and materials to various publishers (all consider seriously, none has given an answer yet): and that is how I came to use your name. This summer in Cambridge, I intend to check bibliographies and quotations, preparing the two volumes for print by September 1st.

With the hope to see you soon, and with the best regards to Mrs Parsons, I am,

Yours very sincerely,

Eric Voegelin

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