



The Role of *Metaxy* in the Political Philosophy of Eric Voegelin

JAROSŁAW DURAJ SJ

Macau Ricci Institute
University of Saint Joseph
Macau, China
ORCID: 0000-0002-9350-0324

The aim of this article is to explore the „in-between” nature of human beings in the light of the *metaxy* inherited from the classics. This text envisages a study of contemporary philosopher Eric Voegelin and the role which Plato’s *metaxy* plays in his philosophy. The goal is to provide an interpretation of *metaxy* in terms of that dynamic happening taking place in the „between” and thus becoming the condition of the possibility of the historical, social, political, ethical and religious orientation of the human person in reality. The experience of being in the context of *metaxy* reveals for Voegelin a spiritual movement and tension within consciousness, something that the German-American philosopher designates in terms of a noetic consciousness. We can say, therefore, that consciousness for Voegelin constitutes the proper *locus* of the *metaxy* regardless of its plurivocal expressions. In other words, the human consciousness is situated in the reality of the „in-between”, the middle ground where the divine reality manifests itself as the origin of being.

1. The Philosophy of Eric Voegelin

Eric Voegelin¹ was a German-born American political philosopher. His particular interest was the nature of human consciousness and the way it shapes the ordering of history and of political reality. He was also a fierce critic of modernity, addressing the problem of atheism, scientism and modern ideology present under the revival of diverse forms of Gnosticism.

¹ Erich Hermann Wilhelm Vögelin (3 I 1901- 19 I 1985).

Voegelin was especially critical of ideologies such as Nazism, Marxism and Scientism. One of his principal goals was to show how the sense of order is conveyed by the experience of transcendence, which can never be fully described but only partially expressed by means of symbolic language. The transcendent order reflected in consciousness remains a basis for a specific political order. In Voegelin the philosophy of politics becomes the philosophy of consciousness. His primary concern was to engage in an open philosophical investigation concerning the truth of existence. The search for this truth, he held, should be based on resistance to prevalent ideological distortions, diagnosis of their spiritual causes, and study of their historical development. Voegelin's view is an invitation to think realistically about the world that systematically marginalizes the dimension of the spirit and does not speak about man's true nature expressed in the form of a „quaternarian” structure of reality: God, man, world and society.

The dimension of human consciousness in Voegelin is considered as a platform for the interpretation of *metaxy* and as the privileged *locus* for thinking the encounter between transcendence and the human being. For Voegelin, indeed, the truth about reality appears in consciousness as the process of existential realization of the nature of being in the *metaxy*, while the encounter with the divine is described in terms of the divine-human participation. In other words, God is seen here not as an external reality, but rather as intimately close and dynamically dwelling within human being. This reveals the tensional nature of *metaxy*².

The intellectual journey of Eric Voegelin was very complex and touched upon many crucial historical and philosophical problems that have accompanied humanity throughout the ages. Voegelin believed that contemporary political problems are rooted in distortions of human consciousness and that philosophy has the task of diagnosing and healing those *malaises*. He makes this explicit in *Order and History*: “Philosophy is the love of being through love of divine Being as the source of its order. The logos of being is the object proper of philosophical inquiry; and the search for truth concerning the order of being cannot be conducted without diagnosing the modes of existence in untruth. (...) The diagnostic and therapeutic functions are inseparable in philosophy as a form of existence”³.

² For Voegelin the „in-between” is „the tension of God seeking man, and man seeking God – the mutuality of seeking and finding one another – the meeting between man and the Beyond of his heart. Since God is present even in the confusion of the heart, preceding and motivating the search itself, the divine Beyond is at the same time a divine Within”; Eric Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 398.

³ Id, *Israel and Revelation* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), xiv.

The basic methodological structure and framework of his inquiry Voegelin discovers in the „quaternarian“ structure of reality that he calls the „primordial community“ including God, man, world and society. Adopting this broad perspective, Voegelin tried to set the context for his philosophical investigation of man in the historical dimension. Voegelin tried to understand the nature of human consciousness and its manifestation in the social, political, religious and historical order of reality.

Voegelin realized the necessity for a return to classical thought as the origin of reflection on order. His mediation through Greek philosophers, especially Plato and Aristotle, became the crucial methodological turning point in his research. Particularly inspiring in Voegelin’s endeavor was Plato’s philosophy and his concept of *metaxy* as the *locus* of human-divine interaction. This gave a tremendous thrust to Voegelin’s work, became the inspiration for its further development and constitutes the interpretative key for his philosophical vision. Considering his actual socio-politico-philosophical context, Voegelin saw the origin of the cultural crisis in the spiritual crisis taking place in the souls of human beings. Ultimately, any crisis was due to the rejection of transcendence on the part of man (driven by his *libido dominandi*, being the „lust for power“)⁴ that eventually resulted in negation of God, making him redundant, or, in a more sophisticated way, leading to various forms of spiritual aberrations or deformations such as Gnosticism and the different ideologies of the modern era. This diagnosis prompted Voegelin to clarify his philosophical agenda as the recovery of transcendence, since he stated clearly that the „philosophical problems of transcendence [are] the decisive problems of philosophy“⁵.

2. Voegelin’s Hermeneutics of *Metaxy*

The concept of *metaxy* stands out among many classical terms used by Voegelin in his philosophy. It is one of Voegelin’s favourite symbols and signifies the „in-between“ realm of subject and object, man and God, time and eternity, finiteness and infinity, mortality and immortality. The notion of *metaxy*, especially in Voegelin’s later writings, became crucial for understanding of his vision and interpretation of reality. What is the use of „in-between“ in Voegelin’s philosophical enterprise? For him, as it was for Plato, we exist at neither of the respective poles in the tension of *metaxy*, but rather

⁴ Id, *Modernity without Restraint: The Political Religions; The New Science of Politics*; and *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 265-267.

⁵ Id, *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 6.

in reality between them. Voegelin thinks that it is an error to believe that we can move to a really existing endpoint in either direction. For Voegelin the poles are directions or „indices”, not objects one would be able to pull within the *metaxy*. The tendency to try to set the point of orientation in reality at one or the other of the poles can be observed in the history of human thought in many instances. Voegelin realized that only avoiding this hypostatization of *metaxy* offers a way to understand reality and, as well, the *malaises* and distortions of truth human thought has suffered in history.

Voegelin recognizes Platonic *metaxy* as the specific dimension or characteristic of man's existing in between the opposite poles of reality, that is, between the height and the depth, between the divine *Nous* and the chaotic *Apeiron*. In other words, *metaxy* is the tension between origin of being (*Apeiron*) and what lies beyond being (*epekeina*). When man maintains the dynamic tension between those poles through the balance of his consciousness, this „becomes the balance of immortality and mortality in the *bios theoretikos*, in the life of reason in this world”⁶. This balance depends on the way of one's participation in reality. Human beings participate in all the levels of reality – the community of being – to which they are granted access by their composite human nature. The term „participation” was expressed by the Greek terms *methexis* (the Platonic participation in the Idea) and *metalepsis* (the Aristotelian mutual human-divine participation in the *Nous*), both of which refer to participation in the community of being and each of which has to be considered as an essential component in Voegelin's philosophy. Voegelin perceived *metaxy* in terms of „participatory consciousness” (*methexis*). This conviction has its consequences for the whole vision of history and reality, because Voegelin often underscores that „there is no history other than the history constituted in the *Metaxy* of differentiating consciousness”⁷.

The process of acquisition of truth and comprehension of reality Voegelin approaches in epistemological terms when he says that „an investigation into the meditative origin of the philosophical knowledge of order must take its start from the situation in which we live and from which the problem of truth first becomes a problem”⁸. By realizing that one lives in untruth and disorder, one experiences tension and feels himself being moved into the search for truth and order. This first „meditative tension”, which can be called the „noetic posture”, is pertinent to the human side⁹. There is another tension, on the „revelatory side”, in which is stressed the

⁶ Id, *The Ecumenic Age*, 302.

⁷ Ibidem, 308.

⁸ Id, *The Drama of Humanity and other Miscellaneous Papers 1939-1985* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 384.

⁹ Ibidem, 389.

„motivational factor”. This tension can be called the „pneumatic position”. Thus, we have the tension between the human side and the divine side. This two-dimensional tension is what constitutes the *event* as the subject of meditation, and Voegelin calls it the „in-between”. The *metaxy* is not, for Voegelin, a kind of place or space, rather, this “reality is not the human reality, nor the godly reality, but rather what takes place „In-Between” these two realities; it is not permissible that, in turn, this „In-Between” itself be made into an independent fragment or hypostatized. We are concerned here, not merely with a psychology of the subject, nor with the activity of god alone, but always with a *responsio*, with movements and countermovements”¹⁰.

Considering *metaxy* more in technical terms Voegelin will conclude that the „in-between” functions or operates as the connector between the *Nous* (divine mind) and the material realm, or, the other way round, as the link between materiality and the mind expressed in terms of the „consciousness of being”. Besides, in the context of Voegelin’s studies, *metaxy* can often express the contrast between consciousness as perception and the dynamic flow of consciousness in its experiential character. *Metaxy*, reflecting the opposing poles of existence such as finite and eternal or immanent and transcendent, points to a vision that sees the whole existence as the cosmic reality. The *metaxy* is therefore man’s connection to the material world and, through this, to the ground of being¹¹.

From the chronological perspective the term *metaxy* most probably appears for the first time in the text *Ewiges Sein in der Zeit*¹² published already in 1964, before Voegelin’s groundbreaking *Anamnesis* was finished in 1966 and in which he used the notion of *metaxy* in a more systematic and consistent way. We have some instances of his developing consciousness with regard to *metaxy* and its role in his philosophy. In a rich and interesting correspondence Voegelin on a few occasions writes also about *metaxy*¹³. In his letter to Manfred Henningsen dated 26th December 1964 he mentions the definition in *A Greek-English Lexicon* of Liddell–Scott–Jones (LSJ) and how his understanding of the term *metaxy* changed. He writes: “The intermediate realm of experience, *metaxy*, has gained significantly in clarity since I looked the word up in Liddell-Scott. It is a composite of *meta* and *xynon*. *Meta* means that the word has not only the meaning of a temporal and spatial interstice, but it also denotes something »between« two things that is

¹⁰ Ibidem, 390.

¹¹ Id, *Published Essays 1966-1985* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), 289-290; id., *The Ecumenic Age*, 408.

¹² Id., „Eternal Being in Time”, w: id., *Anamnesis*, 312-337.

¹³ Id, *Selected Correspondence, 1950-1984* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 485-486, 688, 751, 782, 845, 859, 860-861.

common to them, an adverb of substantiality that in fact can denote the consubstantiality of two things. Xynon has the meaning of commonality – the conjunction of the two, that is, an intensification of the consubstantial. – On methexis, the participation of things in ideas, I found an explanation in Phaidon which is taken from a ritual formula: The thing participates in the idea in so far as there is a parousia (presence) and a koinonia. The idea is present and reveals itself like a god. This throws a whole new light (for me, anyway, since I hadn't known it before) on the Platonic insistence that ideas have a »separate« existence”¹⁴.

Voegelin finds the origination of *metaxy* in a broader classical and in the mythological vision of reality as antecedent to Plato's philosophy. Voegelin was greatly inspired by the Classics and remained interested in Greek philosophers who developed the set of notions used for the description of experience and reality¹⁵. The *metaxy* as the fundamental principle and symbol first appears in Plato. From him Voegelin drew inspiration in the period of disorientation and confusion when he did not know how to interpret the ideological phenomena he witnessed in his time. As far as Plato's philosophy is concerned, Voegelin makes many references to several dialogues in order to demonstrate the place of *metaxy* in Plato's vision. The main dialogues Voegelin discusses are *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, *Philebus*, *Timaeus* and *The Republic*. The fundamental text of reference is *Symposium*. Plato makes the point about the „in-between” in the context of the dialogue between Socrates and Diotima. This dialogue, as the „Socratic dialogue of the soul”, has continuation in the dialogue between the participants of symposium. This constitutes an „event” of participation since “the erotic tension in a man's soul struggles to achieve the articulate luminosity of its own reality. Hence, the dialogue of the soul is not locked up as an event in one person who, after it has happened, informs the rest of mankind of its re-

¹⁴ Ibidem, 485.

¹⁵ „The pre-Socratic and classic philosophers have developed a host of new symbols that will express the experience of an area of reality intermediate between God and man. There are, first of all, the Platonic symbols of the In-Between (*metaxy*) and of the spiritual man (*daimonios aner*) who exists in the tension of the In-Between. Curiously enough, there was developed a wealth of symbols expressing the nuances of existential tension, such as »love« (*philia*, *eros*), »faith« (*pistis*), »hope« (*elpis*), while the symbol »tension« (*tasis*) itself appears only in Stoic philosophy as expressing the structure of reality in general. The nature of the In-Between as a mutual participation of human and divine is symbolized by the Platonic *methexis* and the Aristotelian *metalepsis*, the active life ...”; id., *Published Essays 1966-1985*, 89.

sults as a new doctrine. Although the dialogue occurs in one man's soul, it is not »one man's idea about reality« but an event in the *Metaxy* where man has »converse« with the divine ground of the process that is common to all men. Because of the divine presence in the dialogue of the *daimonios aner*, the event has a social and historical dimension. The Socratic soul draws into its dialogue the companions and, beyond the immediate companions, all those who are eager to have these dialogues reported to them. The *Symposion* presents itself as the report of a report over intervals of years; and the reporting continues to this day»¹⁶.

The *Symposium* is therefore the paradigmatic text Voegelin finds in Plato where he can identify the notion of *metaxy*. This symbol provides him with a proper way of philosophizing as the „love of wisdom” as distinguished from sophists' philodoxy standing for „love of opinion”. It becomes also the foundational expression in his personal formulation of philosophy as metaxic participation in being in historical perspective. The presentation of erotic tension in Plato's dialogues answers Voegelin's urgency to find the solution for the philosophical derailments in society, derailments first originating in the human *psyche*. In his reading of Plato, it is exactly the *metaxy* that reveals the nature of order or disorder in human life.

The existential tension defines the fundamental dynamism of the participatory *metaxy* epitomized by the spirit of *daimonion*, the Eros of Plato's *Symposium* (202e-203c)¹⁷. From Diotima's explanation about the origin of Eros we learn that his mother is Penia (penury, poverty, need) and his father is Poros (plenty, fullness, wealth) who is the son of Metis (wisdom, counsel)¹⁸. Eros epitomizes the „love of wisdom” and the universal tension present in the reality¹⁹. Voegelin says that the *locus classicus*, as a type of the mythological formulation in terms of the „first tension”, we find in the speech of Socrates in Plato's *Symposium*. The poles of what is temporal and

¹⁶ Id, *The Ecumenic Age*, 246.

¹⁷ Plato, *Platonis Opera* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903).

¹⁸ Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, 325.

¹⁹ „Thus, in Diotima's account, the paradigmatic event of eros – the event which serves as a model for the birth of the cosmic Eros – is »the love of wisdom« that moves, in the philosopher's consciousness, »in-between« the »poverty« of ignorance and the »resource« of wisdom. In the narrator's time, the philosopher's eros comes first and is extrapolated onto a cosmic scale as a means of interpreting – that is, re-interpreting – the tension in reality”; Mark Sinnott, „Eric Voegelin and the Essence of the Problem: The Question of Divine-Human Attunement in Plato's »Symposium«”, w: *Politics, Order and History: Essays on the Work of Eric Voegelin*, red. Glenn Hughes i in. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 430.

eternal are represented by man and gods. Communication in a direct way between these two realms is impossible because they do not mingle. There is need of mediator, who is called a „very powerful spirit”, a *daimonion* belonging to the spiritual realm, because this realm of the spiritual (*pan to daimonion*) lies between (*metaxy*) God and man. This mediator mingles these two poles into one „great whole”²⁰. It is in this „whole” that the tension of *metaxy* takes place and that man becomes aware of his humanity with *psyche* as the site of tensions and with his ability for transcendence. He realizes it, however, as the result of being drawn by God, not as something that he would be simply endowed with²¹.

Drawing on Plato’s *metaxy* Voegelin sustained that man is rooted in *metaxy* and gradually becomes aware of its poles. Even though he lives in „partnership” with being, yet he is never certain of this relationship, as the tension itself is uncertain, ephemeral, dynamic, constant and ambiguous. It is characterized by a weak balance between ignorance and limited knowledge. This balance results in an act of trust or faith but without assurance of solid knowledge and experience of transcendence. This life in *metaxy* as the life in tension becomes, sometimes and for some, unbearable to the point of their falling into the temptation of Gnosis.

The tension of *metaxy* constitutes a philosophical aporia. For Voegelin philosophical speculation has difficulty, due to the nature of its language, in treating the nonobjective field of tensions. There exists, however, a different possibility: to express these tensions via the symbolic language of myths. The best example of this method is in Plato. His philosophizing based on myths involves two already mentioned „primary constituents of history”. First is the tension in the soul between the temporal and eternal, and second is the tension in the soul between two states of order present in it (soul), namely, one before and the other after given ontic event²². The central issue of this symbolism is the conviction that man, even though being mortal, yet experiences the divine drawing him to Himself. Therefore man is not just mortal (*thnetos*), but he „experiences in himself the tension toward divine being and thus stands between the human and the divine. Whoever has this experience rises above the status of a mortal and becomes a »spiritual

²⁰ Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, 324-325.

²¹ „The generative power of the tension in reality is particularly clear in the fact that the impetus of the philosopher’s inquiry does not arise from within himself, but from his being drawn by the divine reality of which he is in search”; Sinnott, „Eric Voegelin and the Essence of the Problem”, 431.

²² Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, 324.

man«, *daimonios aner*”²³. This mediator, or the „great spirit”, is mythological Eros and symbolizes this tension between the poles of *metaxy*.

For Voegelin, as for Plato, the nature of the human being is explained by the tension of *metaxy*, first in the individual dimension and later in the social, political, historical and religious dimensions. What is this human participation in the „in-between”? Its character is one of tension (*tasis*). Voegelin describes this structure of reality as a realm constituted by the polar tension of time and eternity in which the mutual participation (*met-alepsis*) of humanity in divinity and divinity in humanity transpires. Accordingly, for Voegelin, divine transcendence is signified by the eternal pole of the tensional structure of the *metaxy*, and participation in (human) consciousness is construed as existence both embodied in time and positioned between the indexical poles of time and eternity. Hence, Voegelin in essence delineates the structure of *metaxy* as the way consciousness exists in tension toward the divine ground of being (*Nous*). Voegelin’s focus on *metaxy* as tension is but one aspect of the way in which this symbol is employed in his philosophy. Nevertheless, it is a very important aspect and a starting point in understanding any discussion Voegelin undertakes at the level of history, politics and religion. This *tasis* is the spiritual tension created by existence within the *metaxy*, the „in-between” poles of reality. The challenge for man is to live a balanced life maintained by a balance of consciousness, that is, to live his life in affinity with the order of reality. Considering the existential tensions present in all aspects of human existence, such a balanced consciousness is very difficult to maintain since human nature is like Plato’s Poros and feels the lack of knowledge and the unquenchable desire for fulfilment. He wants more than the „pure” state which the *metaxy* of tensional existence can provide. It is unsatisfactory because incomplete and fleeting, avoiding any possibility of being grasped by or becoming an attachment of human *libido dominandi*. This natural condition of creation forces man to recognize his limitations. Whenever anyone tries to revolt against the order of being, he is being tempted to overcome this limitation by reordering reality according to his „will to power”, instead of shaping his own life according to the order that manifests itself when the experience of *metaxy* is authentically lived. What does this revolt mean and when does it happen? The fundamental cause of the confusion resulting in disorder is when somebody neglects one of the poles of *metaxy*, especially concerning immanence and transcendence, and tries to substitute for it, or to reconstruct it in accordance with, his own speculative-imaginative distorted imitation. This does not alter, harm or transform the order of being. Nevertheless, the mere fact that man wants to follow his *libido dominandi*,

²³ Ibidem, 325.

as Voegelin clearly shows, will definitely turn against man himself. By his ignorance and pride man pays a high price in the form of confused individual life and disastrous political movements.

3. The Role of *Metaxy* in Voegelin's Philosophy

Voegelin's application of *metaxy* into his political philosophy can be seen as reflecting the specific place of man's existing „in-between” the opposite poles of reality in historical dimension. There are some ambiguities regarding his use of *metaxy* as „in-between”. In his writings Voegelin sometimes tends to use *metaxy* with small letter, sometimes with capital letter. The same regards the notion „in-between” as distinguished from „In-Between” or, used less frequently, „the Between”. Voegelin is not very systematic and coherent in it. We could not find any justification for these alterations and he does not explain their use. In our view the second instance of *metaxy* as „In-Between” was used more in an ontological and metaphysical context related to the phenomenon and the structure of being as well as to participatory reality in which man enters into relation with the divine. This is the basic structure and nature of the human being that orients him in the tensional reality between the poles of *metaxy*. Our intuition is that *metaxy* as „in-between” is simply a general term to render the „in-between” phenomenon in its plurality of manifestations in reality. It is more in line with the adverbial form used in Plato's context. The *Metaxy* with capital letters is used when we enter into an extraordinary dimension where human or worldly dimensions do not have a place. It is used where one deals with the structure of reality *par excellence*, that is, when the „In-Between” stands not just for some features of the human condition, not for the spatio-temporal dimension, but for the ontic structure that conditions the nature of participation in the reality in an existential and spiritual sense. This structure not only has the qualification of immanence in the human being who, in his intimacy and interiority, discovers the divine dimension in which he participates and from which he draws the force for the order in life. This structure is at the same time beyond the human being, as it opens his being into Transcendence, overcoming in this way his tendency for closure. The *metaxy* is the crisscrossing of the horizontal and vertical dimensions in man, both of which are necessary so that the consciousness of tension in *metaxy* can be grasped and lived by man. The moment when the two lines meet each other is decisive for the experience of luminosity that the person reaches in her consciousness and in her soul, leading her to the experience of *periagoge*.

Voegelin's philosophy is situated in the perspective of the balance between immanence and transcendence. Whenever this balance is lost, a dis-

tortion of reality takes place and man lives in untruth, following *amor sui* rather than *amor Dei*. An interpretation of existence in the light of *metaxy* he describes as follows: "Existence has the structure of the In-Between, of the Platonic *metaxy*, and if anything is constant in the history of mankind it is the language of tension between life and death, immortality and mortality, perfection and imperfection, time and timelessness; between order and disorder, truth and untruth, sense and senselessness of existence; between *amor Dei* and *amor sui*, *l'âme ouverte* and *l'âme close*; between the virtues of openness toward the ground of being such as faith, love, and hope, and the vices of infolding closure such as hybris and revolt; between the moods of joy and despair; and between alienation in its double meaning of alienation from the world and alienation from God. If we split these pairs of symbols, and hypostatize the poles of the tension as independent entities, we destroy the reality of existence as it has been experienced by the creators of the tensional symbolisms; we lose consciousness and intellect; we deform our humanity and reduce ourselves to a state of quiet despair or activist conformity to the »age«, of drug addiction or television watching, of hedonistic stupor or murderous possession of truth, of suffering from the absurdity of existence or indulgence in any divertissement (in Pascal's sense) that promises to substitute as a »value« for reality lost. In the languages of Heraclitus and Plato: Dream life usurps the place of wake life"²⁴.

Although Voegelin's exegesis of Plato's *metaxy*, as well as its later hermeneutic application to his political philosophy, does not remain without some ambiguities and problems, we find his use of *metaxy* perfectly justifiable and coherent with his philosophical vision, especially in his late philosophy, when he had already corrected several problems he himself found in his former approach. In fact it was *metaxy* that he found to be a correcting factor that played a decisive and a crucial role in his vision.

One of the problems in interpreting *metaxy* is the danger of hypostatization. Voegelin was aware of this when he saw a tendency in philosophy and theology to eliminate the tension of *metaxy* through dogmatization and identification of the poles with a specific aspect of reality that can be easily grasped by speculative language. The attempt to reduce the tension of existence through hypostatization of the metaxic poles has been the common feature of apocalyptic movements of gnostic origin and of various ideologies and dogmatisms either religious or political. The vision of man is distorted and fragmentary due to this reduction, and it is too simply represented by a univocal definition describing the one-dimensionality of man. For Voegelin *metaxy* above all is not to be comprehended in terms of a spatio-temporal object. The „in-between“ is to be explained in existential

²⁴ Voegelin, *Published Essays 1966-1985*, 119-120.

and relational terms²⁵. For him *metaxy* marks the philosopher's existence and in fact the existence of every human being while in search for its proper humanity. Everyone participates in the drama expressed by Platonic *metaxy* as the „in-between” of mortality and immortality²⁶.

Michael Franz, in the „Editor's Introduction” to *The Ecumenic Age*, calls *metaxy* „an absolutely crucial concept” and adds that „Voegelin gradually expands »metaxy« from a symbol denoting the status and situation of the human person within being to one that also characterizes reality, the cosmos, and history”²⁷. In fact, in this volume we find various applications of this notion. Voegelin uses *metaxy* in order to render the human person and its status²⁸; later this notion stands for reality as such²⁹; then *metaxy* symbolized the cosmos itself³⁰. Finally, for him history also has the character of *metaxy*³¹.

The symbol of *metaxy* helped Voegelin to approach the mystery of reality because it respects the fact that human life is larger than any human category would be able to express. Hence, *metaxy* will entail the Socratic and Platonic awareness of personal ignorance and failures. There is something deeper to this than just an epistemological consideration of our ways of seeing as, in fact, the ways of not seeing or ignoring. The knowledge of something is left naked before the ignorance of what is not yet known. In the context of religion, Voegelin stressed this aspect very much when recognizing the metaxological experience of imperfection in relation to religious transformation. This balancing of perfection and imperfection, of plenitude or resourcefulness and poverty, is the ontological condition of *metaxy*. However, the notion of „in-between” is treated by Voegelin as an index, because, it indicates the ontological plenitude and ontological surplus of being and its meaning.

We find Voegelin's concern about the condition of the Western culture to be justly approached from the perspective of the *metaxy*. He does not

²⁵ David B. Van Heemst, *Herman Dooyeweerd and Eric Voegelin: A Comparative Study* (Lewiston- Queenston- Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), 144.

²⁶ Jürgen Gebhardt, „Epilogue”, w: Eric Voegelin, *In Search of Order, w: The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, red. Ellis Sandoz, t. 18 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 132.

²⁷ Michael Franz, „Editor's Introduction”, w: Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, 24.

²⁸ Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, 50.378.

²⁹ Ibidem, 247.387.

³⁰ Ibidem, 247.264.

³¹ Ibidem, 192.247.

treat this notion as a solution to all the problems, but rather as an important contribution to the diagnosis of the political reality and a possible aid in overcoming the modern crisis. Together with Voegelin we are convinced that the metaxological perspective promises a way of paying mindful attention to the tensional constancy in our human experiences. Losing or negating the tension in experience, as has taken place in the modern world, may result in substituting the original engendered symbols of human experience with other ideologically or dogmatically oriented notions, notions which represent not reality, or at least its respective aspect, but rather its ideological deformation and distortion. Life experience cannot be encapsulated within categories that serve our „enlightened” domination over being. One might say that this attempted domination is the manifestation of an intellectual *hybris*.

One of Voegelin’s contributions regards the role of reason, which means that he wanted to overcome the crisis of skepticism by renewing awareness about the role of reason in philosophy, political sciences and religions. In what regards the relationship between philosophy and religion he is one of the strongest advocates of the inseparability of the *fides* and *ratio*. This task he finds in the metaxological revival of the noetic force of the human consciousness. He decided to look for the order of reality within the disorder of the political reality of his time, and such order had to be mediated, in his view, by a new role of *ratio* founded on the classical principles of philosophy and on the classical *fides* of Christian revelation. Voegelin understood this correlation when he identified in Plato’s Allegory of the Cave the symbols of transition experienced by noetic consciousness through the cosmological mythology up to the transcendent reality with which man is in relation by participating in *metaxy*³². Voegelin’s theory of noetic consciousness based on the philosophy of *metaxy* served as a penetrating and broadly applicable critical tool in considering various phenomena of modernity.

What regards the centrality of Voegelin’s philosophy of consciousness is the event of differentiation that he interprets metaxologically as one that is taking place in the participatory consciousness. This differentiation of consciousness allows insight into the nature of reality as distinguished between the metaxic pole epitomized by man or the finite world and the pole of the Beyond proper to the divine reality. The human being is characterized by its ability for transcendence and thus goes beyond its finiteness toward the transcendent Beyond. But this distinction does not prove the dualism of Cartesian theory; rather it illuminates the structure of consciousness which has to be viewed integrally as encompassing the immanence and

³² Adam Wielomski, „Filozofia Polityczna Erica Voegelina”, *Arcana* 29, nr 5 (1999): 134-155.

transcendence which are not opposing each other, but rather interpenetrating in the mode of participatory *metaxy* which constitutes the human being as the subject of the divine-human *methexis*³³. Metaxological perspective in Voegelin's view helps us to overcome, at least to some extent, the problem of dualism. Voegelin says in this regard that "There is no »external« or »immanent« world unless it is recognized as such by its relation to something that is »internal« or »transcendent«. Such terms as *immanent* and *transcendent*, *external* and *internal*, *this world* and *the other world*, and so forth, do not denote objects or their properties but are the language indices arising from the Metaxy in the event of its becoming luminous for the comprehensive reality, its structure and dynamics. The terms are exegetic, not descriptive. They indicate the movements of the soul when, in the Metaxy of consciousness, it explores the experience of divine reality and tries to find the language that will articulate its exegetic movements. Hence, the language and its truth engendered by the event do not refer to an outside object, but are the language and truth of reality as it becomes luminous in man's consciousness"³⁴.

This fundamental feature of Voegelin's philosophy has its consequences in his penetrating analysis of modernity and its ideological manifestations. They constitute for Voegelin a distortion of reality because they do not accept the metaxological condition of human nature. Many critics focus on this more familiar aspect of Voegelin's political philosophy, reducing his philosophical agenda to exorcising the „demons of modernity". Some analyses are quite obtuse as they seem to ignore pertinaciously Voegelin's principles of metaxology, without which it is difficult to grasp all the possible ramifications of his vision for philosophy, history, politics and even religion. Voegelin tries to overcome an ideological dichotomy when he rejects the project of the Enlightenment, with its distinction between Athens and Jerusalem, reason and faith, philosophy and religion and facts and values. This dichotomy is erroneous, as it does not exist in reality, but rather only in the speculative mind of the sophist. For him the recognition of the „pull and quest" relationship that reflects the divine calling and the human searching, constitutes the foundation of all *theoria* about reality. The rejection or ignorance of the existential tension of the „in-between", according to which the immanent and transcendent poles of the tension meet in *metaxy* as the foundation of human participation, will make it impossible to get ex-

³³ Glenn Hughes, Frederick Lawrence, „The Challenge of Eric Voegelin", *The Political Science Reviewer*, nr 24 (1995): 412.

³⁴ Eric Voegelin, *What is History? And Other Late Unpublished Writings*, w: *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, red. Thomas A. Hollweck, Paul Caringella, t. 28 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990), 185.

periential knowledge about the divine reality in which human longings find their ultimate fulfillment. This danger exists if rejection or oblivion takes place as a form of transcendentalizing or an immanentizing, both being the consequence of hypostatization in which *metaxy* becomes associated with one of the poles.

What regards the religious perspective we can conclude that for Voegelin it was unthinkable to dissociate the nature of the „in-between” from the mystery of God’s intervention and presence in human life. Human communication with the divine and the fullness of participation in the pleromatic *metaxy* as manifested par excellence in the life of Christ cannot be comprehended without the divine „measure” and generosity according to which God allows the human being to take part in his divine life. Without that divine and loving initiative man cannot experience the ordering force in his soul leading him to the transformative participation in the divine ground of being. The mystery of *periagoge* or *metanoia*, as transformation from *amor sui* toward *amor Dei*, is not the result of human effort but the response to the anticipating divine *agape*. Thus, participation in the *metaxy* in Voegelinian terms means the promise of dwelling in the middle, where God’s *agape* generously can be manifested in the life of creation. For Voegelin *metaxy* has a revelatory character because the luminosity and realization of the „in-between” participation in the divine order of reality depends on the degree of gift by which man becomes mindful of his own origin and his resourcefulness that manifests itself through the *metaxy*.

Michael P. Morrissey will conclude that Voegelin plays a huge role in restoring the notion of *metaxy* for philosophy. He thinks that most interpreters of Plato regarding this notion „fail to recognize its revelatory import due to its lack of prominence in the whole of Plato’s dialogues”, hence, the „experiential insight represented by the symbol has suffered the death of a thousand oversights”. Nevertheless „Voegelin has saved the chief symbol of this saving tale, and its revelatory truth, from its own death in the philosophical tradition”³⁵.

Voegelin’s philosophical ethos inserts itself into the classical picture of a wisdom thinker as a lover of wisdom with its manifold manifestation. For Voegelin philosophy has its beginning in wonder, admiration, perplexity and astonishment, because it discovers reality not as something granted but as a gift. If life and being is a result of creation, it is given that man, not being the owner of reality, has to recognize his own overdetermination and the non-autonomy of his participation in it. This is important, because, if man’s participation in the *metaxy* is to be authentic, he can recognize his

³⁵ Michael P. Morrissey, „Voegelin, Religious Experience and Immortality”, *Loneragan Workshop*, nr 12 (1996): 206-207.

own limitations and imperfections and the simple fact that he is not the author of life. This is the way to transcending his problematic anthropocentrism and to becoming attuned to the divine ground of being as the source of its own plenitude. This means to experience *metaxy* as the surplus of meaning, life and agape.

4. Conclusion

In this article we discussed the notion of *metaxy* and its function in the philosophy of Eric Voegelin. In the light of Plato's *metaxy* Voegelin elaborates a very fine political philosophy serving the understanding of the nature of reality. On the one hand, Voegelin does this through diagnosis of various deformations within the historical, political and cultural contexts and, more fundamentally, in human consciousness. On the other hand, he wants to explore the nature and sources of order and ethos within the human being, which nature and sources allow him to be in touch with his ground of being.

Despite his keen eye for the ethical inadequacy whenever one takes the side of one of the extreme positions, Voegelin's understanding of the human condition through his vision of anthropology need to be enriched and further developed. This regards especially bringing the complexity of his philosophy of consciousness and historical analysis to the field of axiological questions with possible solutions for the existential problems of the contemporary man. One of the merits of Voegelin's philosophy is to have re-thought the role of philosophy by going back to the Platonic vision of reality. He adapted it to his central concern regarding the human search for order and the truth of reality. This inspired his renewal in the approach to history, consciousness, anthropology, politics and religion. His integral vision of man in relation to God, world and the social order was helped by his central application of *metaxy* as the human-divine participation in the reality. Voegelin was the first thinker who systematically applied *metaxy* to his philosophy, and it is essentially thanks to him that this long forgotten notion has been restored to philosophy, politics and religion. Voegelin's philosophy is not the result of speculation or conjecture. It is the result of meditative insight into the nature of reality.

A great contribution of Voegelin is to provide a reflection on the interdependence among the various dimensions of reality. The ignoring of the tension that exists in reality and the hypostatization of the metaxic poles easily led to the deformation of human consciousness and, as a consequence, to the distortion of reality which finds its tragic consequences in the dogmatomachies and ideological movements of modernity. Voegelin's philosophy is a witness to this through the particular attention he has paid to modernity

and to the ramifications its worldview still has for our contemporary world, but his philosophy is also a prophetic preoccupation for the future condition of our civilization.

Bibliography:

- Franz Michael. „Editor’s Introduction”. W Eric Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*. W *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, redakcja Michael Franz. T. 17, 1-28. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000.
- Gebhardt Jürgen. „Epilogue”. W Eric Voegelin, *In Search of Order*. W *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, redakcja Ellis Sandoz. T. 18, 125-135. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2000.
- Hughes Glenn, Lawrence Frederick. „The Challenge of Eric Voegelin”. *The Political Science Reviewer*, nr 24 (1995): 399-452.
- Morrissey Michael P. „Voegelin, Religious Experience and Immortality”. *Lonergan Workshop*, nr 12 (1996): 199-226.
- Plato. *Platonis Opera* (Greek Original), redakcja John Burnet. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903.
- Sinnott Mark. „Eric Voegelin and the Essence of the Problem: The Question of Divine-Human Attunement in Plato’s »Symposium«”. W *Politics, Order and History: Essays on the Work of Eric Voegelin*, redakcja Glenn Hughes, Stephen A. McKnight, Geoffrey L. Price. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001.
- Van Heemst David B. *Herman Dooyeweerd and Eric Voegelin: A Comparative Study*. Studies in the History of Philosophy. T. 79. Lewiston-Queenston-Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005.
- Voegelin Eric. *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics*. W *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, redakcja David Walsh. Tłumaczenie M.J. Hanak. T. 6. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2002.
- Voegelin Eric. *The Drama of Humanity and other Miscellaneous Papers 1939-1985*. W *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, redakcja William Petropoulos, Gilbert Weiss. T. 33. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2004.
- Voegelin Eric. *The Ecumenic Age*. W *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, redakcja Michael Franz. T.17. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2000.

- Voegelin Eric. *In Search of Order. W The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, redakcja Ellis Sandoz. T. 18. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2000.
- Voegelin Eric. *Israel and Revelation. W The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, redakcja Maurice Hogan. T. 14. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2001.
- Voegelin Eric. *Modernity without Restraint: The Political Religions; The New Science of Politics; and Science, Politics, and Gnosticism. W The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, redakcja Manfred Henningsen. T. 5. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2000.
- Voegelin Eric. *Published Essays 1966-1985. W The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, redakcja Ellis Sandoz. T. 12. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1990.
- Voegelin Eric. *Selected Correspondence, 1950-1984. W The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, redakcja Thomas A. Hollweck. Tłumaczenie S. Adler, Thomas A. Hollweck, William Petropulos. T. 30. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2007.
- Voegelin Eric. *What is History? And Other Late Unpublished Writings. W The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, redakcja Thomas A. Hollweck, Paul Caringella. T. 28. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1990.
- Wielomski Adam. „Filozofia Polityczna Erica Voegelina”. *Arcana* 29, nr 5 (1999): 134-155.

Rola pojęcia *metaxy* w filozofii politycznej Erica Voegelina

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł poświęcony jest twórczości Erica Voegelina (1901-1984) oraz roli, jaką w jego filozofii politycznej zajmuje pojęcie *metaxy*. *Metaxy* (zdefiniowane przez Platona) jako matryca „po-między” ludzkiej kondycji jest dla Voegelina silnym pojęciem symbolizującym stan pośredni, w którym człowiek doświadcza różnych i przeciwstawnych napięć, takich jak bycie między immanencją a transcendencją czy moralnością a niemoralnością. Artykuł ukazuje, jak *metaxy* konstytuuje obszar bosko-ludzkiej wzajemnej partycypacji, oraz jak jej *locus* znajduje się w ludzkiej świadomości (*nous*), tam gdzie boska rzeczywistość jawi się jako źródło bycia. Autor twierdzi, że dla Voegelina *metaxy* określa możliwość historycznej, społecznej, politycznej, etycznej i religijnej orientacji w życiu. Utrzymuje, że propozycja Voegelina zasługuje na uznanie

jako odpowiednia opcja do podjęcia intelektualnych wyzwań zrodzonych przez modernistyczne i postmodernistyczne filozofie.

Słowa kluczowe: po-między, metaxy, napięcie, udział, świadomość

The Role of *Metaxy* in the Political Philosophy of Eric Voegelin

SUMMARY

This article envisages a study of Eric Voegelin (1901-1985) and of the role played by *metaxy* in his political philosophy. *Metaxy*, defined by Plato, as the “in-between” matrix of the human condition is for Voegelin a powerful notion that symbolizes the intermediate state in which man experiences diverse and opposing tensions such as the ones between immanence and transcendence or mortality and immortality). The article shows how *metaxy* constitutes the realm of the divine-human mutual participation, and how its locus resides in human consciousness (*nous*), where the divine reality manifests itself as the origin of being. Within the field of intermediation between opposing forces, man has to keep the balance of consciousness in order to differentiate the noetic and pneumatic dimensions and so attune his life to the divine ground of being. The Author’s claim is that for Voegelin *metaxy* shapes the possibility of the historical, social, political, ethical and religious orientation in life. Indeed, Voegelin’s approach deserves recognition as an option adequate for addressing the intellectual challenges engendered by modern and postmodern philosophies.

Keywords: In-Between, Metaxy, Tension, Participation, Consciousness

