

THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF GERHART NIEMEYER (1907-1997)

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Resumen: LA FILOSOFÍA POLÍTICA DE GERHART NIEMEYER (1907-1997). Este escrito explora, a la vez que rinde un homenaje póstumo a la obra del profesor emérito de la Universidad de Notre Dame, los principales aspectos que Niemeyer advierte en la formación del pensamiento político moderno, así como la caracterización penetrante que su filosofía hace frente a las tesis que niegan la posibilidad ontológica de la realidad. La filosofía política de Gerhart Niemeyer está caracterizada por una crítica al pensamiento moderno (y posmoderno) manifestado en las ideologías políticas que se originan en la Ilustración. A través de una vida dedicada al estudio de los principales fenómenos políticos en la historia, Niemeyer advierte la existencia de un conjunto de símbolos unificadores que han determinado el curso político del siglo XX, de los cuales se han nutrido las ideologías totalitaristas, así como las corrientes de pensamiento positivistas, el ateísmo, el liberalismo ideológico y el existencialismo. La última parte de esta conferencia explora y analiza los principios expuestos por la filosofía política de Niemeyer tendientes a la recuperación del orden político, cuyas fuentes son actualizadas a la luz de los filósofos griegos (Aristóteles y Platón fundamentalmente) y de la filosofía cristiana (Agustín de Hipona y Tomás de Aquino), mediante una teoría de la conciencia noética y del derecho y la ley natural.

Palabras claves: ateísmo, existencialismo, ideologías políticas, liberalismo ideológico, orden político, pensamiento político moderno, pensamiento positivo, realidad.

Résumé: LA PHILOSOPHIE POLITIQUE DE GERHART NIEMEYER (1907-1997). Cet écrit explore, et en même temps rend l'hommage postume à l'oeuvre du professeur émérite de l'Université Notre Dame, les aspects principaux que Niemeyer constate dans la formation de la pensée politique moderne, ainsi que la caractérisation pénétrante que fait sa philosophie face aux thèses qui nient la possibilité ontologique de la réalité. La philosophie politique de Gerhart Niemeyer est caractérisée par une critique à la pensée moderne (et postmoderne) manifestée dans les idéologies politiques qui ont leur origine au Siècle des Lumières. Niemeyer, à travers de sa vie dédiée à l'étude des phénomènes politiques principaux dans l'histoire, remarque l'existence d'un ensemble des symboles unifiants qui ont déterminé le cours politique du XX-ème siècle, dont se sont alimentées les idéologies totalitaristes, ainsi que les courants de la pensée positiviste, l'athéisme, le libéralisme idéologique et l'existentialisme. La dernière partie de cette conférence explore et analyse les principes exposés par la philosophie politique de Niemeyer qui tendent vers la récupération de l'ordre politique dont les sources sont actualisées à la lumière des philosophes grecs (fondamentalement Aristote et Platon) et de la philosophie chrétienne (Augustin d'Hippone et Thomas d'Aquin), grâce à une théorie de la conscience non-éthique et du droit et la loi naturels.

Mots-clés: athéisme, existencialismo, ideologías políticas, liberalismo ideológico, orden político, pensée moderne, pensée politique moderne, pensée positiviste, réalité.

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INTRODUCTION TO NIEMEYER'S OPUS

It is a great honor for me to speak before you about Dr. Gerhart Niemeyer, Professor Emeritus of Government at the University of Notre Dame, who died a little more than one year ago, on June 23rd, 1997. For forty-two years—since the early days of Father Hesburgh's presidency—Professor Niemeyer was associated with this prestigious university. However, for those of us who were his students over the years—no matter how many or few—and for the entire Phoenix Institute, Gerhart Niemeyer represented a model of exceptional and outstanding qualities to which he dedicated his entire personal and professional life. Among the most important of these qualities was Professor's Niemeyer's commitment to political ideas and rigorous and substantial intellectual research.

Prior to develop some of the main political issues he defended, I believe is important to begin by making a short presentation of this great man's life, specially his work as a consecrated academician and also as a person who had an extraordinary vocation of service to others. This is a very difficult task, because when one wishes to evoke the memory of someone who is no longer between us, one can feel not only a normal *nostalgia* by the remembrance of the person (in this case a great professor, a real Master who shaped in many ways my intellectual life), but also the difficulty of determining which specific aspects must be remarked or said in this talk, specially when they are referred to many issues and matters of political life.

Gerhart Niemeyer was a successful scholar and teacher, in political philosophy, because he understood that the most valuable thing in life was *friendship*. How political life is referred to friendship evokes Aristotle's words in *Nicomachean Ethics* when he mentions friendship as something that keeps the *polies* united¹. The importance of the value (and virtue) of friendship in Niemeyer's life is remarkable. Yet, despite being a scholar, he understood that words were not always necessary to communicate that friendship. On one occasion—the ordination of a good friend—Niemeyer was indeed inspired by expressions of such nature that could only be referred to someone who considers friendship as the most valuable thing in life: «We do not see each other often but I never feel that the interstices have meant a loss. Thus I was not too sad not to be able to talk to you that night. It was not an occasion for conversing. I saw you, I felt your hand, and got the glance from your eye. No more was needed».

He also understood that friendship transcended did not require mere presence alone. After reviewing the obituary in *National Review* of his friend, David Niven, he said: «I feel as if there were no distance, or time of absence at all between us. There is an immediacy of presence which, again, is possible only through the realm of spiritual mediation». And after receiving and reading a book from another good friend, William F. Buckley Jr., he wrote: «The music is about friendship rather than friends as such. 'This love one can imagine between angels'—Remember

1 Cfr. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155a 20.

[sic] those words of C.S. Lewis's *The Four Loves*? Curiously enough, there are few books in literature that can be called 'a celebration' of friendship. This is one of them. Throughout it one has the stimulation of well-being, not because of the wine and the cooking, but because of congenial companionship. At some point it rises to great heights, as when Danny, in the solitude of his night watch, worries about the captain's besetting concerns and composes and says a prayer for him. But mostly it moves on in the undulations of sheer harmony, like the Pastoral Symphony, without high summits or deep canyons».

I can remember the unforgettable meetings with other students from the Phoenix Institute at his house near the University of Notre Dame. His purpose in inviting us was to spend a great deal of time with students and to give informal talks about his life in Germany and Spain, his experiences in the United States, and his vocation as a university professor. For Professor Niemeyer, the university was more than a place of work. It was a place for ideas and he always possessed the time and the inclination to give meaningful advice to anyone who sought the benefit of his wise counsel. He was a man of great importance and yet, as a scholar, he was at the same time a real friend to those around him, a person who was always able to share the good and simple things of life—those same things that Aristotle referred to as necessary for the good life in community². Not only as our professor but also as a member of the Phoenix Institute's Board of Advisors, Gerhart Niemeyer gave his best to the achievement of our goals and to the intellectual growth of the academy. As may be evident at this point, my tribute to Dr. Niemeyer is not only due to my gratitude to him. My tribute to this man is also the right thing to do.

2 ARISTOTLE, *Rhetoric*, I, 1360b 20; *Nic. Eth.*, I, 1097b 7-10; 1099a 31.

To this sense of right I add another reason for this lecture tonight: a profound sense of respect and admiration for someone who became for me a true model of intellectual life, someone of whom it may be said that he lived as his own person and, in all his actions, he displayed the reality of an ordered spiritual soul. He always considered an ordered soul to be an essential part of the civil and political order. Perhaps this may be the fundamental idea of all Dr. Niemeyer's philosophical discourse: *the understanding of the political order presupposes a realization or the actualization of order in the human soul*. In Professor Niemeyer's latest book, entitled *Within and Above Ourselves*, Marion Montgomery developed this idea in the introduction and considered that for Niemeyer the most important and fundamental thing was recovering «'metaphysical reality, moral and spiritual order', first within the self so that as persons we may flourish in community beyond the self, above the self as now so largely alienated beneath itself by ideology»³.

This idea could appear as nonsense to many contemporary political scientists, inasmuch as they think that an argument-related to political reality—must never contain an argument concerning spirituality. We all know, especially after the advance of positivism or *positivist social science* with its enormous ideological force masterfully developed under Max Weber's orientation, that an approach to any social concerns must be devoid of normative or particular value, including, naturally, any spiritual value. At best, spiritual values could only be accounted for as describing social affairs. In other words, values should never be part of a subjective relevance, for values are beyond science. A «value-free science» is, for this school, the best way to attain reality as it constitutes the

3 NIEMEYER, GERHART, *Within and Above Ourselves: Essays in Political Analysis*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Wilmington, 1996, Introduction by Marion Montgomery, p. xx.

realm of human behavior, as something merely descriptive rather than normative. From a positivist point of view, a spiritual value is out of the question and not of any concern for anyone who claims himself a scientist.

For Niemeyer, on the contrary, all of his life was engaged in the search for ultimate truth that constitutes the foundation, i.e. the *principium* of all things, including things political and the practical realization of truth in human affairs. His life was spent teaching and research—as an academic—as well as advising the U.S. government on international politics. He was also a husband, a father of five children, a grandfather and great-grandfather, a priest, and involved in hospice care and social service. We cannot say that his life existed with a separation between what he professed as an academic and how he lived the vocation of his life in the everyday world. Gerhart Niemeyer's ninety years of life were fully dedicated towards the highest level of philosophical contemplation and to the achievement of what he considered as the minor and major things in daily affairs. In so many ways he lived a life of unity between thought and action: he was, indeed, a good man in society.

Philosophically, this man sought knowledge but not in the rather limited manner in which some modern scholars seek this knowledge, through science and the scientific method only. For Professor Niemeyer there was no separation between the intellectual life and its *noetic* content, between his view of knowledge and the practical realization within the daily world. The acquiring of knowledge through science (*episteme*) was a frequent topic of study for Dr. Niemeyer as he wrestled with the philosophical problem of attaining the truth of all things. As Niemeyer later pointed out, if a positivist scientist does not recognize the possibility of the mind to discern human behavior from the truth of things (according to the nature of things), then

what is left of his analysis is a mere description of facts that could be one way or another, regardless of a desirable reality or of a common good. Throughout his work—and that of Eric Voegelin or other twenty century political thinkers from this school of thought—one can easily discover the probing analysis and criticisms of the positivistic method, especially a questioning of why such positivist thinkers deny a metaphysical approach to reality and why they have ignored metaphysical questions, the real and very important questions.

NIEMEYER'S FOUNDATION OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

To recount Professor Niemeyer's political thought in one lecture is a very difficult task. This is not so because his ideas were complicated or difficult to understand. They were not. But these ideas of his were rich in content, wide-ranging, thought-provoking, and profound. The basic premise behind each one, and all of his work is clearly evident. For Gerhart Niemeyer political philosophy presupposed a specific understanding of human nature. In fact, all of his work is immerse in a deep anthropology, in the comprehension of a clear idea of the human person, in his individuality as well as in his relation to others and to God. Two important ideas related to this approach of his were:

- 1) that a human person is, above all else, a created being that is defined by participation; and
- 2) since the quality of a human person as being is derived from his participation, the human person has been created for a specific end, that is, *man is teleological by nature and definition.*

As is common in all classical philosophy, both of the above-stated ideas imply that all

knowledge related to political issues (especially political philosophy) naturally incorporates in its analysis the reality (*realissimum*) that supports it; the human person, as a substantive reality and a being which derives the quality of being by its participation, comes into being always headed towards its final causality. Thus special quality of the human being is best represented by the Greek word *metaxy*, which is an expression referred to the human tension between the immanent and the transcendent, or, as Plato's definition, «the in-between divine fullness and human needs». Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote of this tension by using the symbolic expression of the *status viatoris*, in which *viator* is «the one who is in the path» towards happiness and the fulfillment of his moral nature.

We are accustomed to modern and contemporaneous scientific theories. We would be very surprised to find in, for example a modern theory of public morality or perhaps in a study of constitutional theory about representation and government, any connection with metaphysics. We might be especially surprised if someone were to use Aristotle's approach from the *Ethics* or the *Politics* and study human actions utilizing the «Ontology of Ethics». Niemeyer's political philosophy and his approach to the study of politics restored that connection between politics and the highest contemplation about philosophy, metaphysics. Niemeyer drew upon the understanding provided by Saint Thomas Aquinas, his science of *prima causae*, of *principia maxime universalia*, and of substances *quae sunt maxime a materia separatae*. Among those causes, principles, and substances Aquinas mentions the *ens* and *Deus*. By means of the apprehension of reality through reason, classical political philosophers were capable of seeing that among the variable and contingent of things, there is something that never changes, and that things are (in the sense that they have an essence) including the principles that rules human actions. To these last was

meant to be the *philosophia perita anthropina* ('philosophy of human affairs'), as Aristotle names the work that comprises both the *Ethics* as well as the *Politics*.

One of the most important symbols which professor Niemeyer used in his teaching –and represents an exact characterization of the way Niemeyer understood political philosophy through metaphysics and the importance that symbol had in a theory of politics–, is that used by Plato in the *Symposium*⁴, that I have stated before: the *metaxy*, that can be translated as the in-between, i.e. the understanding that we, as humans, participate of both the realms of transcendent and immanent realities, or as Professor Eric Voegelin's explains it, «the area of mutual participation of divine and human reality». For both Niemeyer and Voegelin, as scientists or as philosophers, the spiritual order was not just part of an empty discourse or as a mere fact to be considered only in terms of a broader investigation about the history of social, religious or political ideas. On the contrary, their knowledge was in a very profound way a recognition of the existence of a higher reality that sustains the world in its existence.

This last proposition—that their knowledge was in a very profound way a recognition of the existence of a higher reality that sustains the world in its existence—should be considered as a chief tenet of Gerhart Niemeyer's life as a political philosopher. Academically, his *opus* represents a close and deep understanding of classical *episteme politike*—drawing from Greek sources and from Augustine and Thomas Aquinas—applied to modern and contemporaneous representations of reality. This was done in order to «recover» the elements of political science as well as to «confront» the ideological orientation that had resulted from the modern understanding of order.

4 PLATO, *Symposium*, 202.

Professor Niemeyer was aware of the main issues and ideas which had developed in the modern age. In fact, Niemeyer's contribution to the political and philosophical understanding of the world around us was tremendous. As an expert he was aware of the significance of modernist ideas and thinking; he realized that the ideological discourse which had emerged over the previous centuries and up through the twentieth century was fraught with fallacies which had led to domination, slavery of various sorts, and two world wars. One of the chief fallacies was the notion of the «autonomous man» which rejected an objective natural law (or a natural normativity) and the transcendent. Most notably, with respect to the idea of the History of Salvation, Dr. Niemeyer spoke of the «fallacious immanentization of the eschaton», referring to the rejection by eighteenth –and nineteenth–century historians of any sense of the good, or more radically, to the direct denial of the Good in terms of power and domination.

THE UNDERSTANDING OF OUR TIME: THE «FALLACIOUS IMMANETIZATION OF THE ESCHATON»

«We are –Professor Niemeyer used to say– children of the Enlightenment». With this expression he emphasized that we live in a world shaped by the ideology of modernity and an attempt to recapture a sense of reality. Aware as he was of the intellectual stage of our time, that in some sense is combined with forms of existentialism and nihilism (both directly derived from the earlier stage of the ideological movement of the enlightenment and also from nineteenth century *Atheism*), he encouraged his students to search for «the royal majesty of truth», which he regarded as being beyond the pride and power of the secular intellectuals «autonomous man».

This understanding, anthropological in its nature, helps to explain two important chapters in the life work of Gerhart Niemeyer, both of which I was able to experience as specific courses while a student of the Phoenix Institute in 1991 and 1992. In the first, «The Understanding of Our Time», Dr. Niemeyer provided his students with a detailed analysis of the entire scope of the social, religious, philosophical, and political phenomena of our modern era through the study of the most pressing problems vexing modern societies. The second course, «The Regained Elements of Order» was intended for the restoration of political thinking through the recovery of the idea of the good and of the beyond, specially through the works of his good friend Eric Voegelin.

Without a doubt, Gerhart Niemeyer thought the twentieth century fraught with problems and he characterized it as «The Terrible Century». His words were sharp in this point:

to those of us who are enjoying a life in relative wealth, the educational and artistic offerings of a flourishing culture, and, yes, *in peace*, this century may appear to provide full reason for self-congratulation. To the future historian, however, it may rank as one of the worst centuries of human history. That is, it may so appear to an historian who can discern between good and evil spirits, who is sensitive to the needs of the soul and skillful in reading between the lines of official texts⁵.

Niemeyer's understanding of this century as «terrible» was based upon three considerations:

- 1) First of all, this century was to be considered as terrible because of the political phenomena of totalitarianism which had been expressed through three main political movements –Communism, National Socialism,

5 *Within and Above Ourselves, op. cit.*, p. 48.

and Fascism— each of which produced the condition of general slavery. All of these movements had the common ground of being governed by *ideocracy*.

- 2) Secondly, the century witnessed the rapid expansion of atheism, a direct result of secular nineteenth-century ideologies. Although atheism was evident in Voltaire, Feuerbach's critique on religion in his *The Essence of Christianity*, Nietzsche's *The Murder of God*, or Comte's foundation of a *positive religion*, atheism was popularized on an institutional level, by government and formal political structures so that the lust for power (*libido dominandi*) replaced God. In other words, nineteenth century atheism (as a previous stage) was mere ideological; our century made it popular by replacing God with Power.
- 3) Thirdly, it was during the twentieth century that knowledge (*episteme*) was replaced by mere opinion (*doxa*) in the terms previously described in regard to positivist social science, with the rejection of questions focused on fundamentals. It was through positivist social science that the fundamental principles of political science were destroyed. According to Eric Voegelin, there were two essential assumptions that undergirded this destruction: «In the first place, the splendid unfolding of the natural sciences was co-responsible with other factors for the assumption that the methods used in the mathematizing sciences of the external world were possessed of some inherent virtue and that all other sciences would achieve comparable success if they followed the example and accept these methods as their model [...]. The second assumption subordinates theoretical relevance to method and thereby perverts the meaning of science»⁶.

Professor Niemeyer's observation to this kind of theoretical analysis and investigation was indeed of the the same force: he understood those positive systems as constructions of «Imaginary Concepts and Imaginary Reality»⁷ that had a terrible and destructive effect regarding political science as the theory of well ordered societies. Because of the methods employed within modern social sciences, normative realities were discounted or removed entirely. As science became descriptive only, both being and nature were denied any relevance. The consequence of this is obvious: since nature or being are lost from an ontological perspective, i.e. if one cannot approach reality with the certainty of knowing reality in its essence and above its phenomenon (in the kantian sense, the accidents, or the contingent aspects of being in the aristotelian sense), no value or good could be attained for any purpose at all. Science, in the modern sense, had led us to a moral nihilism⁸.

The explanation of modernity and its final stage in terms of existentialism could be given through the expression of *Ideology*; this is a very interesting word when it is applied to political movements for one particular reason: because it describes the ground upon which these movements stands for, such as Communism, Nazism or Fascism, and all kinds of totalitarianism, as opposed to those upon which we are able to find in the classical experience, especially the Aristotle's *Politeia* (philosophical view). The difference between Ideology (modern political movements) and Philosophy (classical experience), is also a difference between methods regarding an epistemology or a theory of knowledge.

Professor Niemeyer addressed these distinctions within the political order. He explained that

6 VOEGELIN, ERIC, *The New Science of Politics*, (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1952), Midway Reprint, 1983, p. 4.

7 NIEMEYER, GERHART, *Aftersight and Foresight, Selected Essays*, Intercollegiate Studies Institute, University Press of America, 1988, p. 18.

8 *Within and Above Ourselves*, op. cit., p. 64.

to philosophize means to raise questions about the meaning of individual or social existence in the larger reality of what is common to all mankind. Political societies are not monadic, and philosophy proceeds to raise questions about their meaning in terms of a higher, encompassing reality (the Divine Nous). Early on, in Greek classical philosophy, this meaning was recognized as the «order of the soul». Voegelin here defines «theory» as «an attempt at formulating the meaning of existence by explicating the content of a definite class of experiences». These are experiences of being, such as the love of wisdom, the experience of the just as «right superordination and subordination,» the experience of friendship, of death, and of the depth and the height of the soul. Basically, these experiences serve as evidence of what is given, in terms of the cosmos as well as the soul⁹.

On the other hand, for Niemeyer,

Ideology is the name for that kind of disorder which consists in substituting for philosophical questions about what is given a set of assertions about what is not given. What is not given includes the historical future, particularly when one «inquires» about it in order to control the «destiny of mankind.» What is given but not accessible to the type of knowing suitable for *things* in this world is the divine reality, above and beyond that of the cosmos and of human history¹⁰.

With this explanation, Professor Niemeyer identified the most important characteristic of totalitarianism and all ideological movements which attempt to control society by means of power:

When speculation of the mind begins to criticize being as such, when it aims not at understanding the 'constitution of being' but at its control by the human will, the result is not philosophy but ideology. The Fascist, the National Socialist, and the Communist ideologies were such bastard children of the human mind in the West. Philosophers may have contributed to it. Hegel, for instance, made «states of consciousness» the prime states of history, both past and future, so that his abstractions replace real actors, either men or God [...] Freud's reduction of human consciousness to determinism by the subconscious created another premise on which human control over future history could be seemingly secured¹¹.

Dr. Niemeyer also understood that making sense of the modern era required an understanding of modernity and scientific movements as intellectual forces. These bore a resemblance to «Modern Gnosticism». The idea of the term Gnostic (that comes from the Greek *gnosis*, knowledge) is to describe the theological element in modern philosophy of history. It is also a way of describing the spiritual sense of modernity in terms of what Albert Camus referred as the *Absurd*. As Professor Niemeyer pointed out, gnosticism was

a type of religion that places some elect men, by virtue of special knowledge (gnosis), into a savior's role against a world experienced as totally alien and corrupted. This, Voegelin demonstrated, is the structure not only of the various gnostic religions of the first three centuries of our era, but also of the numerous revolutionary ideologies, which have arisen in Western civilization since the end of the eighteenth century and have resulted in a «redivinization» of politics, i.e. a fusion of politics and salvation which the Christian order fundamentally separated from one another. The modern gnostic identifies transcendence, political action, and its hoped-for result, a transformed social order, and this identification of transcendence and political immanence means that some men or groups see themselves in a quasi-divine position as redeemers of mankind¹².

9 *Idem.*, p. 51; cf. Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, op. cit., p. 63.

10 *Within and Above Ourselves*, op. cit., p. 51.

11 *Idem.*, pp. 51-52.

12 *Idem.*, p. 111.

This type of gnosticism, applied to modern political thought, is best represented by Eric Voegelin's *The New Science of Politics* (1952), *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism* (1959; 1968, English edition), and Hans Jonas' *The Gnostic Religion* (1958). In *The New Science of Politics*, Voegelin described how the «essence of modernity [should be recognized as] the growth of gnosticism». Gnosticism represented the belief in the dialectic between man and the world, man and God, and that the salvation of human kind was an ontological impossibility. Since we, as humans, are organized in political communities among which the most important is the State, there should be a place inside the State for the realization of salvation of the human race. So it is necessary, from this perspective, to use politics in the same manner as we make use of religion (or, as Camus suggested, to make *politics become religion*) and to fuse together politics and eschatology or the History of Salvation. Niemeyer viewed these ideas critically, observing in *Aftersight and Foresight* that,

The ideologists perceived, as did others, the dimensions of the Beyond, the Transcendence. They did not discard this dimension, but they perverted it by drawing the transcendence into the historical immanence, thereby endowing something human with the character of divinity. Similarly, they were aware of the eschatological element at the center of the Christian view of order, but they played false with the eschaton by misplacing it in history¹³.

Of course, within this idea is that domination of ideologies which separates mankind from the source of order by a sort of dogmatic postulation about the death of God. Therefore, modern gnosticism does not advance a belief in a transcendental God who is opposed to human affairs. Rather, what is put forward is the tenet that man, by himself and through the guidance of the selected, could become God. Professor Niemeyer, in explaining this development in

terms of Hegel's *zeitgeist*, explained modernity's religion by drawing upon Voegelin: politics was nothing but the «fallacious immanentization of the eschaton»¹⁴. What ideologists did was to pervert the transcendent dimension of man by «drawing the transcendence into the historical immanence» in the form of a political religion,

Now, religion is always worship of something or some being higher than man. Insofar as politics is human order without any direct, divine participation, to confuse or merge it with religion is what Voegelin calls 'fallacious', or, in everyday language, impermissible¹⁵.

According to Professor Niemeyer, an understanding of our time was possible only when we realized that the unfolding of modern history and political ideas was premised upon the following beliefs: (i) that man is ontologically corrupted (modern gnosticism); (ii) that only through a political movement could man attain salvation (immanentization of the eschaton and the millenarianism movements); (iii) that the epistemology which supports all modern political philosophy was incapable of expressing an objective truth or an objective good (from relativism through existentialism); (iv) that the methodology used by modern political sciences denied substantive values and normative standards (Max Weber's positivism), and, finally, (v) that atheism converted men and women into gods and goddesses (Nietzsche's superman theory, Comte's *Positive Religion* and Feuerbach's and Marx's ideas of alienation and freedom through socialism).

THE REGAINED ELEMENTS OF ORDER: THE NOETIC CONSCIOUSNESS

After Professor Niemeyer finished his first course at the Phoenix Institute in the summer

13 *Op. cit.*, p. 213.

14 VOEGELIN, ERIC, *The New Science of Politics*, *op. cit.*, p. 29; NIEMEYER, GERHART, *Aftersight and Foresight*, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

15 *Within and Above Ourselves*, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

of 1991, several of us decided to return the following summer for his course on recovering the meaning of political theory or the restoration of political science through philosophy. We were all soon overwhelmed by the profundity of Professor Niemeyer's ideas about political science and philosophy. Moreover, his ideas shaped my own thinking and, since that first summer, have become clearly evident in my own lectures and talks on political philosophy.

Dr. Niemeyer's ideas remain very powerful and relevant for us, though his ideas may provoke the ire of modernist scholars. Today's the common of interest is, in most cases, to develop and to maintain the belief that modern political science is the ultimate stage of human understanding of political phenomena. In the Colombian academia, for instance, we still find that the most prestigious scholars are still very close to Max Weber's methodology of social science, or some of them still believe in the Marxian's liberation through the abolition of State, or, believe or not, many of them are still trying to base democracy on Rousseau's concept of the *General Will* (*volunté générale*) as the ultimate foundation of political decisions, regardless of the moral content of them. And when someone tries to raise a question about the moral foundation of a political or a judicial decision made by government or by a court of law, or when one wishes to confront an argument with the idea of getting an answer based upon principles, there comes the skeptical answer of a moral nihilistic who by no means is willing to give up the idea that human intellect is incapable of knowing an objective truth, insofar as «all values are equal» or insofar as he considers science as free of values¹⁶.

In most cases, the understanding of the political or juridical order encouraged in our

universities is based upon Kant or Hegel and develops into a syncretic ideology that involves existentialism, relativism, liberalism, positivism, and individualism. In our law schools, the curriculum includes a course usually entitled Introduction to Law, which promotes a reductionist understanding that all law is positive (an act of power at its foundation), an idea founded upon Kelsen's *Pure Theory of Law*, or that all juridical content in human societies is reduced to a social practice accepted by a mysterious consensus, as for example in Hart's *Rule of Recognition*, or that the interpretation of law is based only on the will of the judge and not upon any objective morality within the law itself. This idea of the law is narrow because it dissolves right into law, or portrays law as a product of the will of lawmakers. Most of these advocates are moral skeptics who assert that we cannot find an objective value, that we cannot determine an objective good, nor that we could uncover the *reality* of the good. Underlying all of these beliefs are the premises that what is morally good or morally wrong is based upon societal consensus and that the most important contributors to this consensus are congressmen and judges, those charged with making and interpreting the laws.

One of the special ideas offered by Gerhart Niemeyer was that of the «Autonomous Man». This person, composed with the attitude of the *mega-self*, perceived of politics not as a field of acting but as an opportunity for «making». Here, Niemeyer used the Aristotelian sense of the word which distinguishes acting from making. «Acting» is choosing conduct (action) according to what is best for human nature. «Making» is doing things that are devoid of substantive truth and are characterized by contingency. This autonomous man as a maker is the one who thinks he posses the power and will to create *ex nihilo* political order.

«The Autonomous Man» also developed a «micro-self», according to Dr. Niemeyer. The

16 Cf. WALKER, GRAHAM, *Moral Foundations of Constitutional Thought*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1990, p. 13.

micro-self characterized those individuals who were too weak to accomplish a new state of order and dropped out of society. Here, Niemeyer referred to the common man as incapable of acting in the world with any meaning in his life, devoid of any sense of greatness:

It characterizes the person who, feeling too weak or unenergetic to accomplish a «Mission Impossible», drops out from the common world of society into his own private world. On a mini-scale, this world consists either of himself alone, or at best of «me and my girl». The scale is so small as to give him a sense of mastery over all, as witnessed by the term used to describe this situation: 'life-style.' Life-style means, of course, an unbounded freedom to give human existence any shape, direction, or form, including formlessness, which imagination may dream up. One used to hear: 'My right to an opinion is as good as yours.' Later, this mutated to: 'My truth is as good as yours.' The present slogan runs, 'My life-style is as good as yours.' All governing criteria, all norms, and ultimately all distinctions are swamped in the invertebrate subjectivity¹⁷.

Both the mega and the micro-self seek freedom as power¹⁸; the autonomous man, Niemeyer went on, is a *man without a father, a man without a Creator, and a man without a judge*.¹⁹ It has become clear that restoring a substantive and normative understanding of political science— a major objective of Dr. Niemeyer through his many works— has yet to be completed. In a recent *Review of Politics*' the editor published about the life work of Gerhart Niemeyer; there he observed that «Niemeyer engages not only in a critique of ideology but also in the announcement of a path towards recovery, the restoration of humanity, and the world to its full meaning»²⁰.

Professor Niemeyer understood well the scope and the implications of this task; as with Voegelin, this restoration first required a «*theory of consciousness*» which might lead the political philosopher to the recovery of reality. As Dr. Niemeyer explained it,

consciousness is not something enclosed between the walls of one's skull, it is «consciousness of something», the eminent reality of being, which «all men by nature desire to know»²¹.

As Professor Niemeyer was aware, a theory of consciousness had been sufficiently acquired through the classical experience of the *nous*, that is to say, «the mind which could reflect on ignorance as a movement and mystery as an 'object.' The classical philosopher «found himself being 'moved by some unknown force to ask the questions, he feels himself into the search'»²². The *nous* was experienced not as if it were an instrument, but rather as «divine or the most divine element within us»²³. Wondering, search, seeking, questioning «became core concepts of a cluster of symbols, 'bringing forcefully home the philosopher's understanding of the process in the soul as a distinct area of reality with an order of its own'»²⁴.

By means of a theory of consciousness that recognizes the possibility of a noetic approach to things of reality, the path towards the restoration of the political order is open, inasmuch as consciousness relies on a «life of reason», not in the sense of modern rationalism that cannot attain the *noumenon*, in the Kantian sense (the

17 *Aftersight and Foresight*, op. cit. p. 10-11.

18 *Idem*.

19 *Idem*, p. 13.

20 *The Review of Politics*, The University of Notre Dame Press, Vol. 59, Number 2 (Spring 1997), p. 4.

21 *Aftersight and Foresight*, op. cit., p. 207. See also Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 980.

22 Cf. VOEGELIN, ERIC, *Anamnesis* (translated and edited by Gerhart Niemeyer), University of Missouri Press, Columbia-Missouri, 1990, p. 93.

23 ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177a.

24 NIEMEYER, GERHART, *Aftersight and Foresight*, op. cit., p. 207; Voegelin, Eric, *Anamnesis*, op. cit., p. 97.

essence of things) but only the *phaenomenon* (the accidents of being), but in the sense of an openness of consciousness towards an eminent reality, that could only be attained by virtue of an experience of the fullness and totality of that reality. Under this concept lies the idea of reason as something that is being measured by reality *instead* of measuring reality. Josef Pieper explains this attitude as letting the soul be measured by things, which is the noetic *rest* of observation. *Nous* means, in its more radical sense, *knowledge of reality and truth*²⁵.

In an outstanding essay entitled «What Price Natural Law?». Professor Niemeyer stated that «the awareness of the order of goodness must be regained, but we have to pay a price for that»²⁶. Quite certainly, the entire concept of *restoring political science* through employing the theory of noetic consciousness could be made utilizing practical reason. However, the recovery of the elements of order through reason also possesses a practical meaning that surpasses mere speculative purpose. Through noetic consciousness a political philosopher may grasp the principles of the social political order. It must be iterated here that the proper ordering of men in society is proportional to the right ordering of each man's soul. This mutual relation between men and society, achieved through the noetic experience, fulfills the objective of classical philosophical experience. For example, the concept of the good society in Aristotle's writings includes the idea that there is a basis for human action in accordance with the realm of being; by means of the noetic understanding of «the good» the philosopher could conclude that through such knowledge men could ordain the actions of their lives and in relation to others.

25 Cfr. PIEPER, JOSEF, *El ocio y la vida intelectual*, (Spanish Edition), Madrid, Rialp, 1983, p. 97.

26 In *Aftersight and Foresight*, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

Perhaps the most important practical element of the restoration of political life is the one referred to as the natural right and natural law. These two essential concepts, though different, are interrelated by analogy. That is to say, law and right are not the same but they relate to each other inasmuch as they both are comprehended by the same reality: the juridical reality. In Greek philosophy of law we find both the expressions of *dikaion* and *nomos*, right (what is just) and law (men decisions according to an idea of what is righteous). When exploring the concept of right with his students, Professor Niemeyer first raised the question of what should be considered as right *by nature*, and the necessary approach to an answer based on a *theory of noetic consciousness*:

There is an order of goodness in the universe, and human knowledge can attain to it... Natural law and 'the order of goodness in the universe' are not to be taken as synonyms. 'Natural law,' or in Aristotle's words, *physei dikaion*, is a symbolic form of human consciousness which came with classical Greek philosophy²⁷.

What is important to remember here is that through the *nous* we can discover a reality that shapes human behavior. Applying this reasoning to human nature one is left with an additional inquiry: if there is something right by nature, could we find part of what is right in the nature of human beings? An answer to this question might be found in that tension of *the metaxy*:

Plato and Aristotle discovered the «inner justice» of human order in the course of discovering not only the soul, but also its depth and its dimension of participation in the divine beyond. This is what Plato means when he calls the *nous* «the god who is the master of rational men». *Ratio*, then, is the mind of the «open soul», the mind that is «drawn» by the divine so that it «desires» knowledge and «loves wisdom»²⁸.

27 *Idem.*, p. 252.

28 *Idem.*, p. 257.

Only through the recognition of «the Beyond» or the noetic experience of a Divine reality that sustains things in creation (the opposite idea of the Gnostic Mind), men could accept that by means of Creation there is a Creator and by the act of creation, things are not necessarily alienated from men. Things could have a substantive norm or they could be normative by their own nature. This being so, human nature is normative in the sense that it possesses a juridical aspect of its own by means of God's creation and contrary to the limited vision or less-than-substantive-and-normative conceptualizations of modern natural rights; in fact, the foundation of natural right in modernity, for Niemeyer, «meant something like a secure possession of men, an autonomous order unaffected by the existence or non-existence of God»²⁹.

As difficult as it might be, let me try to summarize Gerhart Niemeyer's elements of political philosophy in five points:

- 1) The discovery of consciousness through noetic experience is the discovery between «ignorance» and «wisdom.» The human intellect is understood as capable of being moved by the object of thought «even in the midst of ignorance» and as the most «divine element in us» (Aristotle) attaining to truth in contemplation; we can know reality as it is.
- 2) Through contemplation we find ourselves in the «in-between.» This «in-between» is the «differentiation between the things in this world that move by themselves in an auto-

nomous order, and the divine power that gives them form. In other words, between 'transcendence' and 'immanence',³⁰. This is contrary to the Hegelian immanentization of the eschaton.

- 3) «The realization that man, a thing distinguished by language and the capacity for reasoned choice, has an order not merely as a natural organism but, with regard to actions, through participation in the transcendent reality of being»³¹. This idea is contrary to all atheistic conceptions of life and man.
- 4) Within us natural right emerges as something participated in by the act of Creation.
- 5) The restoration of the political and constitutional order (*politeia*) is achieved through the acceptance of natural right in the form of true justice and ordered society.

I think with these group of premises many of Professor Niemeyer's political ideas were raised in this talk. The understanding of our terrible time and the elements by which political order could be attained were described, perhaps not sufficiently, but at least I think it served the purpose I had in mind. With this explanation all I wanted was, as I stated at the beginning, to render a tribute to one of the best man I have ever met. Gerhart Niemeyer, of whom could always be said, there was *the good man*, the *spoudous* in the aristotelian sense (the mature man), the *phronimos*, *the man of virtues*, from which many of us are and will be in deep debt of gratitude always. ■

29 *Idem.*, p. 255.

30 *Idem.*, p. 255.

31 *Idem.*, p. 255.