



Order and History (Volume 3): Plato and Aristotle (Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, Volume 16)

Eric Voegelin

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This third volume of *Order and History* completes Voegelin's study of Greek culture from its earliest pre-Hellenic origins to its full maturity with the dominance of Athens. As the title suggests, *Plato and Aristotle* is principally devoted to the work of the two great thinkers who represent the high point of philosophic inquiry among the Greeks.

Through an absorbing analysis of the Platonic and Aristotelian vision of soul, polis, and cosmos, Voegelin demonstrates how the symbolic framework of the older myth was superseded by the more precisely differentiated symbols of philosophy. Although this outmoding and rejection of past symbols of truth might seem to lead to a chaotic and despairing relativism, Voegelin makes it the basis of a profound conception of the historical process: "the attempts to find the symbolic forms that will adequately express the meaning [of a society], while imperfect, do not form a senseless series of failures. For the great societies have created a sequence of orders, intelligibly connected with one another as advances toward, or recessions from, an adequate symbolization of the truth concerning the order of being of which the order of society is a part."

In this view, history has no obvious "meaning," yet each society makes a similar venture after truth. Although every society works out its destiny under different conditions, each nonetheless creates symbols "in its deeds and institutions" which bear the meaning of its own existence. History, then, acquires a unity in the common endeavor toward meaning and order. The rationality and nobility of this view of history has much to say to the present age.

Dante Germino's powerful introduction to this edition of *Plato and Aristotle* eloquently directs the reader into Voegelin's search through the thought of Plato foremost and Aristotle secondarily and toward a full understanding of their relevance to the "modern" world. This masterpiece, Germino argues, provides a welcome antidote to the spirit of an era Voegelin once called the Gnostic age.

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