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Indice

Saggi

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Pathways to the Problem of Founding in Contemporary Political Thought

Eno Trimçev*

Abstract: The article argues that the dominant approach on political foundings as standing in for ordinary political acts loses sight of their uniqueness as polity–establishing acts. Relying on Claude Lefort and Eric Voegelin, it recovers founding moments phenomenally and philosophically by distinguishing them from revolutions. Phenomenally, it argues that whereas revolutions follow a three–stage form of mobilization, downfall, and constitution, foundings are missing such a pre–defined form. Accordingly, revolutions can be understood in the consecutive time–sequence in which the event unfolded in history, while foundings are endowed with a form only retrospectively, through the effort to understand them. A founding, therefore, cannot be a pre–fixed discrete event in history but is found in the displacement of that event in time by the understanding effort. Philosophically, the nature of the problem of founding reemerges out of (a) the constitution of a founding act as the difference between the visible phenomenon and its invisible form, and (b) the common experience of philosophizing and founding as an act of resistance to the pre–existing political order. Accordingly, the social sciences may be more appropriate to the conceptualization and study of revolutions, political philosophy is more appropriate to the conceptualization of foundings and the hermeneutic sciences are more appropriate to the study of particular founding moments.

Keywords: Founding, Revolution, Post–Foundationalism, Eric Voegelin, Claude Lefort.

1. Introduction

There is an understandable degree of confusion regarding the relationship between revolution and founding in political life.[1] At times, the confusion is compounded by the political science literature on revolutions which is prone to subsume founding under the generic term — and, phenomenally, far more *visible* occurrence — of «revolution» (*e.g.* Huntington 1968: 264; Goodwin 2001: 4; Pincus 2011: 398). But a moment's reflection may serve to question this: foundings and revolutions sometimes overlap; sometimes

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1. The article develops ideas first presented in Trimçev 2017.

they occur with a time gap; we can even think of revolutions without foundings and of foundings without revolutions. For example, the American founding seems to be inextricably linked to the fire and fury of the Revolutionary War (Bailyn 1992). But even here the coincidence is not complete — the revolution was a rather protracted, drawn–out affair, while the founding seems to have occurred later, at a far more fixed point in time and space, in the summer of 1787 at the Pennsylvania State House in Philadelphia. Further, the governing principles and practices of American political life have substantively changed over time suggesting additional moments of re–founding. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, the Populism of the Gilded Age, the activism of the Progressive Era, Roosevelt's New Deal, or the Anti–War and Civil Rights movements of the Vietnam era — are all these founding moments at times bloody and at times so peaceful and unassuming that we may miss them altogether? Does political failure (*e.g.* the Populists) or success (*e.g.* the New Deal) reliably mark the boundary between extraordinary foundings and ordinary politics? These questions indicate two things. First, it may be the revolution rather than the founding that occurs at a discrete, fixed point in history. Second, we can even think of the possibility of obscured or non–evident foundings — concealed rather than revealed by phenomenal events — which is impossible in the case of revolutions. Further examples show that the confusion, if anything, is liable to increase the closer we come to our own time. Is Konrad Adenauer, the non–revolutionary founder of the *Bonner Republik*, the true founder of contemporary Germany, or is the honor to go the failed revolutionaries of 1968? Or, is the present Federal Republic haunted by multiple, competing founding narratives all devoid of a revolution? Has Maoist China been re–founded and, if yes, by Deng, by Xi or both? Is Brexit a founding moment? Is Donald Trump a founder? It seems impossible to say; more impossible, indeed, than with recent revolutions whose success (Tunisia 2011), equivocity (Egypt 2011) or failure (Syria 2011) seems to follow a more evident *3–stage form* of (1) collective, extra–institutional forms of political mobilization; (2) downfall of old regime, and; (3) constitution of new regime. In the case of founding, however, that *form* seems to be not apparent.

This paper grows out of these practical puzzles. But, turning to political theory for some clarity, it confronts an even greater puzzle; namely, the disappearance of foundings altogether. Curiously, in that part of contemporary political theory that has a specific interest on foundings, founding acts seem to have lost their phenomenal specificity. In the attempt to overcome the alleged reduction of founding to a problem of logic by the tradition of Western political philosophy, foundings have been dissolved into ordinary political acts (Jenco 2010: 13–4). Jean–Jacques Rousseau's articulation in Book II of the *Social Contract* is perhaps the most famous example of this

supposedly reductionist view (Rousseau 1968: 86–7).[2] Rousseau famously solved the problem by positing a Lawgiver; a perfect outsider who in his genius, virtue, perspective (*longue durée*), and place (simultaneously outside and within the people) is the exact opposite of the people he is founding. His perfection is, of course, a logical requirement of the task awaiting him; not only must he frame suitable laws, but he is to mold each individual into a citizen and the folk into a political community. The act of denaturation with which he has been tasked is as perfect as divinity.

It has been rightly observed that this ratiocination works neither for political theory (Honig 2007: 3; cf. also Agamben 1995: 15; Arendt 1973: 183–4) nor for religion (McCabe 2007). The very starkness of the paradox seems to have forced Rousseau's hand to deliver a solution. For this reason, contemporary post–foundationalist theory[3] has transformed the extraordinary paradox of founding into the ordinary paradox of politics; all political acts now stand for founding acts. This transformation of the problem — or, its *dislocation* from the abstract (logic) to the concrete (politics) — has productively brought the open–ended nature of politics more sharply into view. It has come, however, at a cost. Foundings no longer exist either as phenomenal events in history or as an independent theoretical problem. Our common sense, however, rightly resists this dissolution: politically, does it not matter that foundings are acts that aim to subvert and re–substantiate existing forms of politics while other ordinary acts (*e.g.* voting) aim to legitimate them (Wolin 1973: 344)? That foundings, revolutions and everyday political acts can no longer be properly distinguished from one another? Philosophically, does it not matter that we can think it — we even, indeed, seem to be required to think it by thinking's need to grab hold of its own beginning (cf. Voegelin 1999: 27–62)? Does it not matter that the thought of founding refuses to flatten out to particular founding acts?

This paper sets out to recover founding moments along both planes. It argues that, differently from revolutions whose phenomenality is more evident, a founding occurs only if our retrospective account of it differs from — or *displaces* — what is commonly taken to be the historical found-

2. Exemplary of this interpretation of the traditional view is also Plato's view who, in the *Laws*, depicts founding as a deliberate act of will that replaces custom (Plato 1980: 681d; cf. also 752 c–d) while in the *Republic* the beautiful city (449a–541b) must begin out of nothing (Plato 1991: 540e–541b). But this observation ought to be qualified. After all, Rousseau gave us also an eminently narrative account of founding in the *Second Discourse* while the speech–nature of Plato's best regime (Plato 1991: 369c; 473a) and the sheer multiplicity of foundings in the Platonic account radically transforms its meaning in the Platonic oeuvre away from a purely logical construction.

3. I use Oliver Marchart's definition of post–foundationalism as «the assumption of the impossibility of a *final* ground» which views «the political as the moment of partial and always, in the last instance, unsuccessful grounding». Thus, post–foundationalism is distinguished from anti–foundationalism or the «assumption of the total absence of all grounds» (Marchart 2007: 2).

ing. The phenomenality of a founding must be retrospectively uncovered. The coincidence between what founding *seemed to be* (the historically given account) and what it *is* (the displaced account) cannot occur because understanding proceeds dialectically. In this account, foundings may be singular or multiple, noisy and seemingly evident or silent and obscured by the actual phenomena until they are unsuspectedly found. By comparison, the phenomenality of revolutions is less controversial; the completion of the three–stages of the form of revolution makes for a successful revolution. Foundings, on the other hand, may or may not be so extraordinarily evident from a phenomenal perspective; they may or may not follow a revolution; in fact, they may even proceed it, as the argument has been made for the American case (cf. Kirk 1991; Kendall 1970). An *a priori* phenomenal definition of founding — of what a founding *looks like* in history — is not available. Indeed, as I show in Part III, this non–availability is key to recovering the theoretical problem of founding. The difference between revolution and founding, it turns out, is not unlike the difference between Appearance and Being in philosophy (Arendt 1971, 19ff.). Accordingly, the science appropriate to the study of revolutions is social science (*e.g.* Tilly 1993, 2006; Skocpol 1979) while the science appropriate to the problem of foundings is political philosophy in the precise sense that Claude Lefort (1988, 11) gives to this term as the inquiry into the (invisible) form of a society.

I proceed in three steps. First, I examine the resurgence of interest on the problem of founding in contemporary post–foundationalist theory on which I built my contribution. Second, I note that if founding acts have come to symbolize political acts more generally, they are things to be understood, *i.e.* their symbolic narrative nature must be deciphered. In the third and final step, I sketch out how the phenomenal and theoretical specificity of foundings in post–foundational theory.

2. The Dissolution of Founding in Contemporary Post–Foundational Political Theory

After a relatively long silence (Isaac 1995), the last decade and a half has witnessed a great resurgence of interest on founding moments. This return is, unsurprisingly, prompted by both practical and theoretical motives. On the first, political theory is rethinking foundings to recover an emancipatory dimension of politics judged to be missing in more deliberative or consensual theories of politics. On the second, political theory returns to past texts to enrich our theoretical understanding of foundings.This section argues that both lead to what I call the *punctuated view of foundings* as a series of

iterations in time of the paradox or incapacity of ordinary politics.[4] As a result, founding acts dissolve into ordinary political acts and the founding problem disappears into the problem of politics.

Emancipatory readings of founding moments have challenged the liberal democratic consensus (Arditi 2007, chs. 4–5); expanded or changed the nature of contemporary political debates (Honig 2001); found new ways to motivate action in concert in extra–institutional settings (Honig 2009; Ackerman 1992; Kalyvas 2008); or shed light on problems facing modern societies as a result of profound theoretical misunderstandings of our political situation (Agamben 1995: 15–26; Markell 2003). Actual founding moments, such as the American Declaration of Independence, are used primarily to raise questions and re–theorize politics in a manner that reverses the perceived anomie of our contemporary political situation (*e.g.* Honig 2007). While this has enriched theoretical debates on issues such as sovereignty, the exception, and recognition in politics, the primary aim has been to challenge the perceived pre–existing theoretico–political consensus.

Bonnie Honig's rearticulation of the problem of founding is representative of this practical strand of contemporary thought. Honig displaces the problem away from its traditional philosophical expression as a logical paradox opposed to everyday, ordinary politics. Foundings no longer signify extraordinary moments; they become immanent to every genuine political act. For Honig, this paradox of politics is «to be negotiated, not [. . .] to be solved or overcome» (Honig 2009: 13). Indeed, the very displacement of the paradox into the political everyday lessens its stark, almost absurd, logical formulation that demands a solution. Accordingly, the demiurgic founders, architectural metaphors, and transcendent grounds of the traditional account have given way to plural, continuous, and contestable re–foundings between actors and communities.

On the other hand, the representative text of theoretically–motivated returns to the problem of founding may be Oliver Marchart's reconstruction of *political difference* in the post–foundationalist texts of French «Left Heideggerians» (Marchart 2007). Marchart points to the necessity of philosophical engagement with the problem of foundings because of the *difference* between «politics», which operates at the empirical level of historical materials, and «the political» as an ontological concept that points to an «empty» cause beyond politics in a post–foundationalist sense (Marchart 2007: 18–19). Similarly to Honig, every properly political act signals this overflowing of the empirical; a «dislocating and disruptive moment in which foundations crumble» (Marchart 2007: 2). But, differently than Honig, no direct practical conclusions follow to substantively determine a particular form of politics.

4. The name recalls Urbinati's «punctuated sovereignty» (2006: 28).

At stake here is the theoretical illumination of the tragic character of politics as expressed by the necessity of grounding acts and the contingency of all actual grounds in politics.

In contemporary post–foundational theory, then, a founding moment is no longer a unique *disruption of time*, but a series of *iterations in time*. Since each properly political act is neither caused nor justified by what precedes it, foundings unfold as a discrete series of acts in time. In this punctuated view of founding, precisely because each act may freely affect time, none stages time. The series is thus not founded, but always already there. Yet, while this dissolution of foundings in political acts is complete on the first practical strand, on the second the possibility of recovering the distinction between founding and ordinary politics remains in principle open. The second approach has the advantage that it has the potential to a) restore the theoretical autonomy of the question of founding, while; b) insisting on the importance of its actual, empirical embodiments, by drawing attention to the difference between the visible («politics») and its absent or invisible ground («the political»). But the split is subtly subversive of these very gains. The result is a double–movement that concomitantly calls on us to understand politics through its historical materials and discourages such understanding by interrogating the materials through a non–material outside cause — however «absent». By itself, politics is seen as structurally deficient (cf. Chaitin 1996: 4–5); it «necessarily fails to deliver what it has promised» (Marchart 2007: 8; cf. Stavrakakis 1999). If politics always seeks its own closure, and post–foundationalism is the commitment to open up the instances of closure, post–foundationalism is necessarily suspicious of politics. But something that is condemned to fail cannot ultimately give an account of itself; it is to be rejected, transcended, or manipulated but not understood on its own terms. Yet, this view is appealing because it holds out the promise of bringing philosophy back into political science. This must be a peculiar sort of philosophizing though; a philosophizing wedded to the empirical materials for foundings are now understood as concrete re–symbolizations of socio–political space. The shift of the problem of founding away from abstract logic to concrete politics is analogous to a shift away from pure thought or philosophy to situated understanding or political science.

3. The Phenomenal Re–emergence of Founding

By displacing the problem of founding away from ratiocinated abstractions, post–foundational theory has transformed it into the problem of understanding. As we have seen, this dissolves the phenomenal specificity of

founding acts as well as their theoretical articulation. To recover them, I harken back to the post–foundationalist thought of Eric Voegelin (Dallmayr 1989: 421; Petrakis and Eubanks 2004: 21). True, the problem of founding is not systematically treated by Voegelin for whom, in a way that recalls post–foundationalist theorists, founding was a ubiquitous rather than independent problem (Trimçev 2017: 225). Accordingly, Voegelin carries the same displacement of founding that we observed in Part I. There is however a difference. In my reading, Voegelin's view that human acts require a *displacement in time* in order to be meaningful opens the possibility of reconnecting the post–foundationalist series of undifferentiated discrete acts in time; a possibility which I draw out more fully in the next section.

On a first step, Voegelin reiterates the post–foundationalist dissolution of foundings into all political acts when he defines both as narrative acts. If political acts in general have a narrational structure (Heilke 1996), Voegelin maintains the same for foundings: «to set up a government is an essay in world creation». Founding is an evocative act through which a «little world of order» emerges, which gives human life «a semblance of meaning» (Voegelin 1997: 225).

The difference between Voegelin's and others' treatment of founding arises in the structure of human acts. As I read it, narrative gets its meaning from being *displaced in time*. That is, a narrative is, at the same time, *what it is* — the written text, the finite speech or deed — and radically dependent on *what it points to*, *beyond* or *before* itself.[5] Each act is therefore simultaneously complete and incomplete; or, it is apparently complete (*e.g.* the finished speech, the published text), but in actuality it remains incomplete — by itself, the speech is meaningless. It is in the process of understanding the meaning of an act that we become conscious of its radical incompleteness; that neither its beginning nor its end stands on its own. In Voegelin's words «[n]either the beginning nor the end comes first», (Voegelin 1999: 27) for «the story cannot begin unless it starts in the middle» (Voegelin 1999: 41).[6]

5. Voegelin illustrates the paradox of narrative with the example of beginning to write a book. Nothing in the process of writing is pre–determined (*e.g.* the first sentence says nothing about the final form of the work). The narrative is composed of its materials — first sentence, chapter, book, and the social debate to which it responds — but, each of these relentlessly points beyond itself (*e.g.* the sentence points before itself to authorial intentions and the social debate that provoked it, and beyond itself to the book chapter etc.). For Voegelin, no narrative can exist without this relationship to what it points to (Voegelin 1999: 27–8).

6. In his meditation, Voegelin illustrates the radically unstoppable displacement from beginning to beginning: «By now the Beginning has wandered from the opening of the chapter to its end, from the end of the chapter to its whole, from the whole to the English language as the means of communication between reader and writer, and from the process of communication in English to a philosophers' language that communicates among the participants in the millennial process of the quest for truth. And still the way of the beginning has not reached the end that would be intelligible as its true beginning; for the appearance of a 'philosophers' language' raises new questions concerning

Hermeneutics is the science of this displacement.

The paradoxical definition of all human acts recalls, of course, the ubiquitous paradox of politics in post–foundationalist theory. Consequently, just like for other post–foundationalists, for Voegelin no founding act stands alone as an absolute beginning. Since all human acts have a plural structure, the singular, divine Legislator is dethroned. Human beings, says Voegelin, «encounter a plurality of middles, validating a plurality of quests, telling a plurality of stories, all having valid beginnings». And plurality is not merely a theoretical presupposition; it is an empirically verifiable «structure in reality» (Voegelin 1999: 43). If truth — like all human things — is encountered only experientially, and experience is never singular (cf. Voegelin 1978: 179), then truth unfolds only in plurality rather than from a singular source *in* or even *outside* of time.

The very displacement in time which undercuts the possibility of an *objective*, singular first act, however, opens the possibility of the retrospective constitution of a *meaningful* first act. Voegelin illustrates this point with the best candidate for a singular founding act — «where the Beginning makes its beginning» (Voegelin 1999: 33) — namely the act of creation in Genesis I. Even this first beginning, says Voegelin, shares the narrative structure of all beginnings. Insofar as Genesis narrates the divine command, it is bound to make the divine appear humanely:

The authors of Genesis I, we prefer to assume, were human beings of the same kind as we are; they had to face the same kind of reality, with the same kind of consciousness, as we do; and when, in their pursuit of truth, they put down their words on whatever material, they had to raise, and to cope with, the same questions we confront when we put down our words (Voegelin 1999: 33–4).

The task of its authors was to find the language symbols that adequately express the formative movement that founds the world; Genesis 1:2 responds with the symbols of «the *ruach*, of God, or rather of a plural divinity, *elohim*» (Voegelin 1999: 34) moving over and giving shape to an «emptiness» or a «formless waste» (*tohu*). As Voegelin notes, *tohu* is no material nothing; it is «neither nothing nor not–nothing» (Voegelin 1999: 22) It is *not* nothing, for then no creative evocation would be necessary. Indeed, there is a presumption in the Genesis text that the evocative act of God encountered some «passive resistance» (Voegelin 1999: 34) from the «formless waste». Yet, it *is* nothing because it is experienced as unreal after the founding act. The crucial point of Voegelin's exegesis is that pre–creational reality *qua*

a problem that begins to look rather like a complex of problems» (Voegelin 1999: 28–9). Note the nature of that displacement from the apparent narrative materials to philosophical speculation, which shifts reality «from the position of an intended object to that of a subject» (Voegelin 1990c: 29–30).

Gestalt–less *tohu* comes into being only retrospectively.

If God's speech is a literal first, why then — or, better, to whom — asks Voegelin, does He speak? It seems that He speaks necessarily: «The spoken word [«Light be! Light became». Genesis 1:3 — E.T.], it appears, is more than a mere sign signifying something; it is a power in reality that evokes structures in reality by naming them» (Voegelin 1999: 33). Like all founders, *this* founder must put the founding act into words before an audience capable of hearing Him:

If the story is to evoke authoritatively the order of a social field, the word must be spoken with an authority recognizable as such by the men to whom the appeal is addressed; the appeal will have no authority of truth unless it speaks with an authority commonly present in everybody's consciousness, however inarticulate, deformed, or suppressed the consciousness in the concrete case may be (Voegelin 1999: 40).

Hence, the story «cannot begin unless it starts in the middle» (Voegelin 1999: 41). Even the divine founding, it seems, must conform to the narrative structure of all foundings and convey its truth through «an aura of analogy with the human process» (Voegelin 1999: 34).

God's speech act founds by clearing a space for human acts. Its paradoxic nature consists in the fact that it is simultaneously an act like all human acts that will proceed it and the first act which makes them all possible — the paradox of founding. Indeed, the text succeeds only insofar as it illumines how the divine act overflows its apparent, objective boundaries (Voegelin 1999: 34–5).[7] In order to be understood, Genesis I must be read symbolically.

4. Founding re–found

Voegelin's preservation of the post–foundationalist transformation of the founding problem, I argue, consists of a sublation; it affirms the philosophical nature of the problem as well as its phenomenal rescue from dissolution into ordinary politics. This double–rescue is mirrored in the doubled–up nature of the science appropriate to foundings — what Lefort calls «political philosophy» understood as a sublation of political science as the science appropriate to phenomena proper and «pure thought» (Lefort 2000: XL) organized solely on the principle of inner consistency. From Voegelin's perspective, however, this science of «forms of society» (1988: 11) — or, of the *difference* that brings them to light — is not a new (post–foundationalist or other) political philosophy, but political philosophy as it first emerged in the Platonic tradition. In other words, Voegelin's intervention opens the way to

7. Recall the common religious prohibition against the visible iconic depiction of God.

a transformation of our relationship to the tradition of political philosophy away from its foundationalist self–interpretation as the articulation of *the* ground and the post– and anti–foundationalist critique of *that* ground.

The upshot of Voegelin's paradox of narrative is that (1) every phenomenal beginning is embedded in further narrational contexts — *i.e.* in a Beyond — and (2) the narrative and the Beyond to which it points have different structures. The former calls for interpretative, empirical work while the latter requires philosophy to make that *difference* transparent. Narrative, namely, has an irreducible, objective and apparent dimension which the Beyond, as «unobjectifiable difference» (de Beistegui 2004: x), lacks. However, while this structural *difference* between Appearances and their Other requires philosophising, for Voegelin philosophising must remain bound to the Appearanes in order not to make of the Beyond what it is not: a free–floating object of thought, independent of the experience that gives rise to it. The Beyond thus falls within the domain of empirical study; it is, an «exegetic, not descriptive» term (Voegelin 1990b: 185; cf. Heidegger 1997: 43). Yet by being a structure that cannot be collapsed into the narrative materials simply, it cannot be thought by positivistic scientism. Appropriately, this doubled nature presents itself under a double–name: political philosophy.

The difference between a narrative and what it points to is equivalent to the traditional difference between Appearance and Being;[8] or, *what seems to be* and *what is*. Crucially for us, nowhere does this difference emerge with more clarity than in a founding act. As an extraordinary first appearance with «nothing whatsoever to hold on to» (Arendt 1973: 206), a founding act cannot gesture unproblematically beyond itself to other appearances like it — for it does not so much presuppose them but acts as their «clearing» (Agamben 2004, 50 ff.; Heidegger 1994: 379). Therefore, the displacement that is crucial to make sense of all appearances is particularly tricky in the case of founding acts for, as first appearances, they cannot be simply displaced along historical time. The kind of positivistic scientism that looks for the prior causes of the event in time therefore will not do.

These reflections allow us to differentiate between founding and revolution. As already noted, revolutions have a more apparent three–stage form. This is suggested also by their causes — a non–exhaustive list includes ideology, class, modernization (Pincus 2011), institutional regime form and performance, demography, ecology (Goldstone 1991) and external factors such as war (Walt 1996) — which all have a strongly phenomenal dimension.

8. Plato's Socrates alludes to the congruence of the Beyond and Being of human things when he designates the site of Being as «[t]he place beyond heaven» (Plato 1995: 247c); cf., Plato 1991: 508 and the analysis of *epekeina* in Voegelin 1999: 30–31.

Indeed, the very partisan division of the literature into acclamatory and negatory camps (Kollmorgen, Bartels and Stopinska 2007: 10) points to a visible, phenomenal form that is missing in the case of foundings. Accordingly, explanations of a revolution may follow the course of events as they unfold in historical time, which is precisely the way not to recognize a founding.

On the other hand, a founding act is that species of the genus narrative that is unable to unproblematically gesture beyond itself to others of its genus; it is the species of first speeches and deeds.[9] The semiotic name for this species is 'symbol.' The paradox — of founding, politics and narrative — that we have been unfolding comes at a rest here, in the paradox that defines a symbol.[10] On one hand, symbols are phenomenal appearances that stand, as it were, by themselves; differently than a sign, a symbol «displays itself with all it has created» (Tindall 1955: 19–20). On the other hand, symbols do not have to resemble their referent or Beyond (*e.g.* fish as symbol for Christ). It is in fact more appropriate if they do not, for a symbol is an «exact reference to something indefinite» (Tindall 1955: 6) which we cannot exhaust in words, *i.e.* convert into an appearance.

An act or event, then, is discovered to be foundational when the hermeneutic effort is constrained to become philosophical. In these cases, the hermeneutic displacement happens symbolically through thinking rather than in historical time through the investigation of prior causes, actors and events. The conjunction of philosophy to founding is made even more appropriate if philosophy is understood as the inquiry into the symbolic nature of existence through «the creation of an order of symbols through which man's position in the world is understood» (Voegelin 2002: 83). In this account, symbols are nothing but «carriers of a truth about nonexistent reality» (Voegelin 1990c: 52) (*e.g.* Christ). It is the experience of what is not visible, however, that orders appearances by making possible their recognition (cf. Augustine 1998: 12.28). According to Voegelin, the philosophical tradition ought to be undrestood as talk of this symbolic referent through symbols. Not only then is philosophy appropriate to the problem of founding, but it is appropriate insofar as it is not merely abstract logic but concretely metaphysical understood as the «process in which a philosopher explicates in rational symbols his various experiences, especially the experiences of transcendence» (Voegelin 2007: 187). And these experiences, for Voegelin, are an empirical fact of order explicated in his five–volume *Order and History*.

But the recovery of the theoretical nature of the founding problem also

9. We may recognize foundings even without being able to trace them back to particular phenomenal acts. For an excellent literary example, see the recognition of police captain Stres in Kadare (2010: 139ff.).

10. Note that it is far easier to think and describe, say, politics free of its paradox; one would be hard pressed, however, to do the same with symbol.

recovers the phenomena of founding acts. If, indeed, a founding act does not easily gesture beyond itself to other acts — if founding suggests *prima facie* fixity as a discrete event in historical time — we, now, let it emerge by way of a retrospective account that displaces the original account of founding that has been handed over to us. Founding, then, *is* when it is other than what it *seemed to be*; it is achieved — or found, as it were — in the hermeneutical effort of understanding. That is, it is no longer the founders *then*, but the scholar, story–teller, or political partisan *now* that founds. Two things follow in comparison to revolutions. First, we may be surprised by the retrospective uncovering a founding moment of whose existence we were not aware. This cannot be the case with revolutions. Second, founding demands of us to move in the exact opposite temporal dimension than revolution. That is, to find out whether a revolution constitutes a founding, we cannot proceed simply to unfold its three–stage form in historical time.

It is the nature of the materials as «traces in the world of sense perception» (Voegelin 1990c: 53) that commands this retrospective displacement. If they are taken for what they are, *i.e.* symbols — «the exterior residue of an original full truth comprising both the experience and its articulation» (Voegelin 1990c: 53) — they must be re–evoked by those seeking to understand them. But, as it is clear by now, to re–evoke symbols is to decisively move beyond them towards what they gesture. The techniques of this displacement in historiography are many and well–known; what counts here is that their mobilization excludes their mimetic retelling.

A clear example of this phenomenal displacement which has a long tradition in historiography is, I think, Jules Michelet's naïve «republican–romantic» account of the French Revolution in *History of the French Revolution* as Jacques Rancière tells it (Rancière 1994: 42–56). Michelet's account restores the eventful nature of the Revolution by doubly displacing it (1) in phenomenal time and; (2) in symbolic space. More specifically, the displacement occurs: a) in time–space — from Bastille and Versailles to the peaceful Festival of Unity; b) in speech away from «les mots» of the documentary evidence to its own invented «narrative discourse»; c) in the causes of founding, away from the recognized causes, whether material — the misery of the *sans culottes,* the arrogance of Versailles — or theoretical — Rousseau's *volonté générale*, the *hybris* of the *philosophes* — to an uncaused event, and; d) in the symbolic result of what is founded: France the «incarnated abstraction» of Michelet's account which cannot be superimposed on the real France. Michelet achieves his founding, Rancière tells us, by resolutely avoiding the logic of mimesis that continuously haunts historiography.

Finally, in this thought–movement *beyond what appears to be* we may note the ground common to both philosophizing and founding. For both, the philosopher and the founder, at stake is the «right order in human existence»

(Voegelin 1990c: 53). If founding is to be seen in light of its symbolic nature, it is neither a contract, nor an act of constitution–making, or still less a rightist putsch or leftist revolution; it is nothing more or less than the transformation of the prior substance into something new. The task of the founder is indeed that of Rousseau's Legislator: the movement from untruth (what seems to be) to truth (what is and should be).[11] It thus consists of a doubled experience of resistance to *what is* and creation of *what ought to be*; a displacement of reality *tout court* through its symbolic re–evocation.

But this doubled experience is what, for Voegelin, lies at the founding moment of Western political philosophy. If philosophy is to be understood as a quest for truth — one of many types of such quest — then it must be «a movement of resistance to the prevalent disorder» (Voegelin 1999: 39; cf. also Hollweck 2012: 111–2). Plato's dialogues, for example, may be understood as his act of resistance to the apparent order surrounding him; an act which led him to found doubly:

> Philosophy [. . .] has its origin in the resistance of the soul to its destruction by society. Philosophy in this sense, as an act of resistance illuminated by conceptual understanding, has two functions for Plato. It is first, and most importantly, an act of salvation for himself and others, in that the evocation of right order and its reconstitution in his own soul becomes the substantive center of a new community which, by its existence, relieves the pressure of the surrounding corrupt society. Under this aspect Plato is the founder of the community of philosophers that lives through the ages. Philosophy is, second, an act of judgment—we remember the messenger to mankind sent from Hades by the Judges. Since the order of the soul is recaptured through resistance to the surrounding disorder, the pairs of concepts that illuminate the act of resistance develop into the criteria (in the pregnant sense of instruments or standards of judgment) of social order and disorder. Under this second aspect Plato is the founder of political science (Voegelin 1990a: 123).

The act of philosophical judgment is, simultaneously, an act of political opposition. It does not, however, stand in perfect symmetry to other political acts in the order it opposes — like, say, a socialist to a free market ideologue. Plato's response to the prevalent disorder founds right order. The salvific act constitutes a turning–around (*periagoge*) from one to the other (Voegelin 1990a: 169–70) through education whose «proper result is not merely a new intellectual perspective, but a new way of life» (Heilke 1994: 736). It is in this newly–found order that we, for better or worse, continue to participate (cf. Voegelin's analysis of the situation of «[t]he Western philosopher in the twentieth century» in Voegelin 1990c: 64ff.).

11. Recall the figure of the founding–prophet in history.

In this sense, both philosopher and founder are «quintessentially author[s] of political presuppositions» (Wolin 1981: 401). It is, perhaps, a telling coincidence that the two philosophers most commonly associated with founding in the tradition of Western political philosophy — Machiavelli and Plato — also moved away from the abstract logical paradox. Machiavelli, the political thinker most concerned with foundings, brought the narrative form of political theorizing to the tradition. The effort to understand foundings, which began with the aim of advising the Prince, spurred a thinking movement that theoretically illumined the whole political dynamic. Similarly, when Plato, the founder of the tradition, turned to politics, he got his Socrates to found and found repeatedly in the *Republic* and the *Laws*. And is not the final founding of the «pattern in speech of a good city» (Plato 1991: 472e)the displacement of the actual city of Athens which, like the luxurious city (Plato 1991; 372c–376e), has become feverish in pursuit of money and power towards what it ought to become, *i.e.* the re–founding of Athens?[12] Both founding thinkers are constrained by the subject matter to reconcile politics with philosophy in a manner other than what is politically — or apparently — available.

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12. If we take the healthy city (Plato 1991: 369b–372c)to be constructed in the Spartan pattern and the luxurious cityto stand for Periclean Athens, does not the *kallipolis* represent the philosopher's answer to the original historian's (Thucydides) solution to Greek ills? That is, to the historian's suggestion that Greekness can be saved only if Sparta overcomes its autarchic conservatism by dialectically merging with its direct opposite — Athenian daring –, the philosopher responds that it is not by diluting the higher (Athens) with the lower (Sparta) but by raising the higher (democratic Athens) to what is highest (a sophocratic Athens «in speech») that true Greekness can come into being (cf. Strauss 1964: 148 ff.). However, note that both answers resemble one another in the principle (the restoration of self–limitation to Athenian action) and space (the symbolic displacement of really–existing cities) of their solutions. By seeking to re–found Greekness, Thucydides and Plato become founders of historiography and political philosophy.

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