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## **A Friendship in Letters, 1944-1984**

**Charles R. Embry, Robert B. Heilman, and Eric Voegelin**  
**Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004**

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**Review by: Donald Pickens, University of North Texas**

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Professor Charles R. Embry, Department of Political Science, Texas A&M– Commerce, has masterfully edited the correspondence between Heilman, a Professor of English and Voegelin, historian of political thought. As the flow of letters demonstrate the two men were different with Heilman a student of English literature and Voegelin whose scholarly reputation rested a massive study of *Order and History* in five volumes (1956-1987) The theme was ideology. From ancient times to the present He argued that ideological movements indicated a deep spiritual and psychological constant in the human condition. Imperfection was man’s fate. Efforts to escape this condition into a transcendental realm or a total revolution, creating “a new heaven on earth” were equally tragic for humanity. Only a recognition of the eternal tension between human limits and the desire for transcendence can lead to a proper way to live an authentic existence.

The letters are fascinating. Combining gossip, ideas and prospects for jobs and scholarship, the letters cover forty years in which Voegelin achieved a world-wide reputation while Heilman’s reputation remained relatively modest. Both men were dedicated to their

respective crafts and worried about the condition of scholarship. The editorial support enriches this collection. From Embry's detailed introduction to a foreword by Champion B. Heilman, Robert's son, the text always informed and delights (especially the academic gossip). This book is a worthy addition to the Eric Voegelin Institute Series in Political Philosophy. The letters were drawn from the Eric Voegelin Papers, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University and the Robert B. Heilman Papers, Manuscripts, Special Collections and Archives, University of Washington, Seattle.

The correspondence had a modest beginning. In 1941, Voegelin gave a lecture at Louisiana State University for Department of Political Science. Heilman wrote a brief note of appreciation. At the time the Department of English at LSU had several outstanding scholars. In time Voegelin joined the faculty at LSU and their friendship developed and remained constant until Voegelin's death in 1985. Heilman is still living. Heilman moved to the University of Washington but the letters continued. From discussions of literary figures to academic projects to job prospects, the pace of letters was constant.

Historians will appreciate Heilman's questions regarding Voegelin's philosophy of history as expressed in his major work. Both men were not bound to academic boundaries. Interestingly, Heilman's questions turned on the art of Voegelin's historical narrative. Accepting Voegelin's research, Heilman was often concerned with how the historical material was organized. After all on definition of history is as the organized past. Issues of drama, human nature and issues of modernity fill their letters.

As a new reader and admirer of Voegelin's writings, this book was most instructive and I believe that even the most veteran student will find intellectual insight and philosophical merit within its pages.

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