Towards a Genealogy of Experience

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Change the way you look at things and the things you look at change.

– Wayne W. Dyer

1. The Challenge of Experience

Remembrance of things past is a way of thinking about experience. I first started thinking about experience when I was twelve. One evening, I was sitting at home in the kitchen looking out of the window. My parents had settled next door in the living room, reading the newspapers. It was a clear and pitch-black night, starlit with no moonshine. Kneeling on a sideboard fixed to the wall, I leaned against the windowsill holding a pair of binoculars that my father had received as a Christmas gift from my grandfather, which I was using now to get a good look at all the wonderful stars. I recall looking at Orion, Sirius and the Pleiades when all of a sudden my awareness changed direction from the quiet shine of distant stars to myself watching them. Rather, it was a doubling of focus, as both sides were present simultaneously: Up there were the stars on the nightly sky, down here was I, the observer, and both sides were somehow connected. For the first time in my life I realized myself as someone who was part of a bigger picture: a stargazer in touch with the universe.[1]

Overwhelmed by that new awareness I rushed to my mother to tell her. At that age I had no conceptual framework to understand or even name this event, being primarily interested in art and astronomy. My mother told me that my experience was called *self-awareness*. This was new to me. Although I already knew the words, I had no idea that they referred to this kind of experience. My mother, however, was familiar with the abrupt shift of awareness and knew its proper name. She also assured me that other people encountered the very same change, usually around a comparable age, adding that it happened to her when she was milking Rosalinda, the family's goat. And my father joined in, saying he had the same experience when doing math homework. Now the event was not so extraordinary and disturbing anymore. I shared something with my parents and many others. To have a label attached to the new experience comforted me, as a manner of categorization.

At the same time I knew that the event had changed my world. Nevertheless, the discovery was kind of strange. Something that *must* have been there all the time, had escaped my attention all the time, but out of a sudden it had become part of my world and me. From then on, everything I experienced turned into *my* experience. Yet despite the label of *self-awareness,* the very nature of this new dimension remained oddly out of reach. In one respect it was quite simple and clear, as the 'self' in *self-awareness* was I myself—but at

the same time, and compared to the tangibility of sensory perceptions, the rest eluded me. Nevertheless, the event gave me a basic understanding of the nature of experience: two poles linked in participation. Ever since, the study of experience became a key task of my reflections, and about a decade later, the matter turned into a theoretical challenge, from which, in the end, the *genealogy of experience* has emerged.

The key points of this theory can be summarized as follows: The genealogy of experience explores the history of experience as it unfolds from the Paleolithic to the present day and studies its impact on the dynamics of culture and civilization. My main thesis is a paradigm shift: The structure of human experience is not a universal constant, but changes over time. This thesis runs against general consensus that views the architecture of experience to be immutable since the oldest days of human history. This, however, applies only to sensory perception, which is just one of nine varieties of experience, such as imagination, contemplation and spiritual experience, to name but a few. The way we get in touch with reality has passed through nine phases since the Paleolithic, the first being the phase of sensory perception. A first transformation eventuated with the development of the inner eye, or the discovery of imagination. A total of eight transformations took place in different regions and at different times. Each time a new variety of experience evolved, another link was attached to this "chain of experience". The characteristics of cultures as well as their different designs of political order are based essentially on the respective mix of experiential dimensions. Thus, in developing a genealogy of experience, the first and foremost question to answer is: What is experience and how can it change?

1.1 From Remembrance to Theorizing

To answer the question we need to carefully scrutinize the nature of experience and analyze its *structure*, which, if it is alterable, must contain a variable element. At first, the task may seem trivial, since experience is a familiar concept, a commonplace of everyday language and a core principle of science. However, the issue turned out to be a formidable challenge, and the first challenge was: where to start the inquiry? In modern science (as in philosophy) there is a strange ambivalence concerning experience: on the one hand, empiricism (which is nothing else than experience-based research) is the silver bullet to knowledge, on the other hand, as science is aiming at *objective* knowledge, to argue from personal experiences is frowned upon since the *subjective* point of view is considered to be arbitrary and unreliable. However, there is no getting away from the fact that *all* experience is inevitably subjective – even if we are aiming at 'objective' knowledge. In the end, if we want to discuss the role of personal experience or to analyze the structure of experience there is no other way than to start from our subjective perspective, as many philosophers such as Socrates and Plato have done before. They had even coined a special term for their approach: *anamnesis* or remembrance. Adopting the term*,* Eric Voegelin (1901–1985) created a method to restore theoretical dignity to personal memoirs, detailed in his book *Anamnesis* — an approach very much alike to what is now called*narrative inquiry.*[2]

His main point was that in our search for truth and reality, experience is more basic than concepts. While concepts or ideas are useful to articulate our encounter with reality, in the end all concepts derive from experience, which is the only way we can get in touch with reality. Therefore, to study and to understand reality and ourselves we must start from here. To understand how experience turns into ideas, we need to begin with our own

experiences, since they provide the only source that we can observe directly. The inquiry into personal episodes, then, is not a nostalgic pastime but a serious theoretical task. It aims at finding the experiential impulses that have inspired our theoretical curiosity. Thus Voegelin presented his readers with twenty episodes from his childhood days to show how they shaped his own philosophical inquiry.

This impelled me to take a new look at my own remembrances, recollecting my own philosophical inspirations, one of which was the story of the stargazer. This event turned out to be the key occasion kindling my quest for the understanding of experience as a major principle of philosophy and science. In recording the episode, I first noted its strong momentum that urged me to immediately look for an answer in order to identify the matter. My parents' response comforted me as it put a conceptual label on it, calling it the discovery of *self-awareness*, and classifying it as something common to all people. At the same time, I had the vague notion that what mattered was not the occasion which stimulated the new kind of experience, since the occasions were quite different as far as my mother's, my father's and my own recollections were concerned: milking a goat, doing math homework, or gazing at the stars. What mattered was something else for which I had not yet the theoretical means to identify.

The issue deserved more attention. Some aspects of the experience were quite clear. The whole incident was made up of three components: the stars observed, the stargazer who looked at the celestial bodies, the action of looking through the binoculars that put me in touch with the stars. Furthermore, there was that special moment when my attention changed direction, doubling its focus in a rapid flash of awareness. Yet everything was united in a single fluid moment of experience. Hence the stargazer episode created an impulse to search for the structure of experience: how do all the various elements interact and relate to one another? That was my initial question after I had written down the episode, some ten years after the original event.

At that time, armed with the modest theoretical education of a young student, I did not know how to make sense of it. However, I realized that I had just started a process of theorizing that typically moves through a series of stages. In the first step the experience in question creates a sense of wonder, the feeling of an unsolved problem. The challenge initiates a second move that drives us to search for an answer, and first of all to identify the impulse and name it. In my case, my parents provided an immediate solution to this. Once we have identified the experience, and if the matter is of some importance to us, we will, in a third step, attempt to articulate and express our experience, to tell the story of what had happened. This I did when I put it down in my journal. In a fourth stage we turn to systematic reflection in order to understand the specific nature of a specific experience as well as *what* is experienced, a stage, which can lead to a definition or a fully-fledged theory. In my case, even after recording the event, I was still facing many unanswered questions. Thus my quest for experience entered the fourth stage, that of serious investigation into the subject.[3] Hence I extended my search to study the history of ideas from Antiquity to the present day. The results were quite disappointing. One would assume the concept of experience is quite clear, since all kinds of authors used the word well enough to be understood by their audience. The term is popular since Antiquity when its career started as the Greek term *empireia* (from which the modern words 'empirical' and 'empiricism'

derive) and via the Latin *experientia* entered into modern usage. However, despite its popularity, I have searched for a systematic analysis in vain. One of the few to notice the deficit was the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, a student of Martin Heidegger, who wrote in his study on *Truth and Method* of 1960: "However paradoxical it may seem, the concept of experience seems to me one of the most obscure we have."[4] Though many other key topics, like justice and virtue, God and nature, time and history, the human soul, truth and knowledge, were subjected to theoretical examination and definition, experience was left alone and its meaning remained vague, a fact that is evident through the varying and confusing ways the term has been used since Antiquity. To this day nothing has changed.

However, initially I did not know where to start. Since the humanities usually start from ideas, and basing an argument on personal experience had the fishiness of subjectivism. Yet the traditional method of starting from ideas and concepts, did not procure satisfactory results, accordingly the only alternatives were to proceed by axioms (which makes no sense when dealing with experience) or to start from experience, and that meant from personal experience. Again, Eric Voegelin was the first to break with the tradition of studying the history of ideas exclusively by studying ideas. Instead of taking ideas as the fundamental objects in the study of history, he refocused his approach on *experience* as the point of departure.[5]

Since all ideas refer to and are in fact derived from experience, experience is prior to ideas and concepts. To understand ideas, we first of all have to identify the experience, from which they have originated initially, and the subsequent ways of their symbolic articulation. In Voegelin's view, symbolic articulation and ideas are two fundamentally different things: experience produces a symbolic articulation, but ideas are just conceptual shorthand for such an articulated experience. To take an obvious example, the idea of *history* is the conceptual index for a certain way how human beings have experienced and interpreted their existence in time. When ideas start living a life of their own, the symbolic articulation that refers to an experience, is turned into an index (like a word, a number, or a sign) that expresses an idea, which in turn is just something imagined and memorized. By this metamorphosis, ideas lose contact to the original experience of reality. Thus 'history' is turned from an exegesis of temporal existence into a mass of collected information about past events that becomes the raw material for an academic discipline by the same name. The 'idea of history' (and all the rest of the long list of 'ideas', such as: liberty, justice, salvation, happiness etc.) does not exist as a thing in itself. Therefore Voegelin gave up 'ideas' as objects of history and turned to the experience of reality on the personal, social, historical, and cosmic level respectively.[6] In his *New Science of Politics*, Voegelin states that we find the substance of history in the experiences in which man gains an understanding of the human condition.[7] Voegelin's focus on experience turned the methodology upside down and put the study of order and history on empirical feet— empirical in the original sense of *being founded in experience*. Now we have a hypothesis, where to look for the reasons of change.

1.2 What is Experience?

However, the question of *what is experience* escaped Voegelin's attention. Experience, introduced as a fundamental concept, requires special methodological attention. First of all,

we need to answer the question as to what experience is, i.e. we have to define it. When talking about experience, we usually refer to its *content*. If we study the content of experience, the result will only be a compilation of various experiences. If we want to *define* experience, we must focus on the *structure* of experience instead. This shift in perspective is crucial. Dealing with the changing content of experience is very common, as it is changing continuously. In dealing with content we focus on *what* we experience. When dealing with structure we turn to *how* we get in touch with reality.

In a first step, we need to remove some basic obstacles originating from the many and confusing ways the term has been used since antiquity. Sometimes 'experience' denotes the very moment we get in touch with reality, for example the instant when we observe something. Equally, experience can mean a longer process, such as when we attend a good concert and praise it by saying: 'What an experience!' However, experience can also refer to the result of such a process, acquiring the meaning of familiarity, like in the term 'an experienced politician'. Furthermore, we observe two major traditions in the Western understanding of the term. One is the monist view of experience, identifying experience with perception. The other is the pluralist version that allows for many different kinds of experience. Since 'experience' remains undefined with both traditions there is no valid argument for either side. Instead, most people base their choice on personal liking or on chance and circumstance. As long as we adhere to the principle of sufficient reason, such an unfounded choice is not satisfactory. First of all we need a clear and distinct concept of experience. I begin with a brief look into the history of the two traditions in the Western understanding of 'experience'.

The monists assume that all experience is based on perception. In antiquity, Aristotle is the most famous protagonist. He claims that all science (epistéme) starts with perception (aísthesis).[8] Even in his time, this position is an established tradition already, going back to Alkmaion of Kroton, a student of Pythagoras, as its earliest progenitor. Socrates refers to this tradition in Plato's *Phaedo*: "does the brain furnish the sensations of hearing and sight and smell, and do memory and opinion arise from these, and does knowledge come from memory and opinion in a state of rest?"[9] The sequence of sensation, memory and knowledge became a standard with the empiricists. In a suggesting paraphrase, Thomas Aquinas popularized Aristotle's version in the Middle Ages: "From the senses comes memory, but from many memories: one experience."[10] Leonardo da Vinci upheld the very same tradition in his diaries, saying "Ogni nostra cognizione prencipia da sentimenti." — All our knowledge has its origin in our perception.[11] Locke and Kant shared this view, and the mainstream of modern science adheres to it until today.[12]

Alongside the mainstream we find a pluralist minority. Among the ancients Plato is the most celebrated representative. In the famous *allegory of the cave* he argues that sensory perception is but a secondary and imperfect experience of reality (I shall return to the allegory of the cave later on).[13] The Platonists in general adhere to a pluralist concept.[14] In the 16th century Robert Fludd is an early modern exponent.[15] In the 18th century, Francis Hutcheson develops another theory, arguing that Locke's epistemology does not account for moral and aesthetic ideas. Thus he proposes additional senses like a 'moral sense' and a 'sense of beauty' as sources of non-representational experiences like the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly.[16]

Both traditions, however, leave the structure of experience undefined. Thus, the concept remains obscure, as noted by Gadamer. In addition, both views take for granted that the way humans get in touch with reality is a historic constant. In the case of the empiricist majority the principle of historic invariance is a logical necessity. Since experience is identical to, and exclusively based on perception there is no room for variation. Popular ideas and science agree to that: The five senses are a common biological heritage we share with other humanoids and all mammals since the Paleolithic. Accordingly, variability is restricted entirely to the content of experience and the way we understand, interpret, or analyze it. Even with the pluralist tradition, the search for changes in the history of experience is a completely foreign idea. To introduce the idea of a genealogy of experience we first must show how the structure of experience *can* change. Prerequisite for this argument is an analysis of experience as a concept, i.e. a definition.

We start with the empiricist ideas, being the most common variant. They believe all experience to derive from sensation. There are, however, at least five varieties of sensation, each of them based on a specific sense: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. Common to all the different sensations is the use of a sense. Different sensations are determined by different senses. When we use the same term both for the general term and the specific difference we end up with a definition that is logically meaningless saying 'a sense is a sense' and 'different senses are different senses'. The only thing we have achieved so far is that there are different senses. The general term of which the different varieties of sensation are the specific cases remains obscure. What all sensations have in common is: they all get us in touch with reality. The phrase 'getting in touch with reality' indicates a common denominator, for which 'touch' is just a metaphor. The philosophical term for it is the Platonic *methexis* or the Latin equivalent *participatio.* When we translate 'to get in touch' into Latin we take the verb *capere*, meaning to grasp, to catch something, combining it with *partim*, i.e. partially, since we do not grasp reality entirely or as whole, but only partially. A partial grasp (of reality) then is *participation*. Our sensible capacities usually get us in touch with some specific aspect of reality. By *looking* at something, we get in touch with the part of reality that reflects or emits *light*. By *hearing* we participate in *sounds*, and so forth. Experience then is not just identical with sensation but it is a way of participation.

Getting in touch with reality is a kind of participation. However, we do not notice all kinds of participation. We do not notice of a wide range of radiation, though it can affect us and we feel its effects (like burns) quite painfully. Within the range of participation that we can experience, we do not participate in all our senses simultaneously. While we are constantly enshrouded in participation, only a small fraction turns into experience. This is because the five senses present us with a vast panorama of impressions, too much to be processed simultaneously. Therefore we limit our participation to a restricted range. To achieve this we focus our attention or awareness on certain things. This is a basic function of consciousness. Indeed, by the power of awareness, participation becomes experience. John Locke, an acute observer of the process of perception and reflection, stresses this function of consciousness in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.[17] We may use it for defining experience more precisely. When we become conscious of some sort of

participation, it turns into experience. The special kind of participation called 'experience' then is qualified by the involvement of consciousness. Thus we define experience as *conscious participation*.

Accordingly the structure of experience consists of three components: the experiencing person, the 'something' experienced, and the reference between these two poles. Participation is the reference between the two poles. The experiencing person is the pole of consciousness, also called subject. The pole of the experienced 'something' is sometimes designated by the umbrella term of reality, otherwise it may be called 'object' as well, particularly if we participate by sensation. As we shall see, there are other forms of participation besides the sensory ones where the use of the term 'object' is inadequate. When I use the expression 'structure of experience', I do not refer to the content of experience (which, of course, may be something with a structure as well) but to this complex structure of conscious participation.

1.3. Varieties of Experience and Changing Structures

Once the structure of experience is understood, its multidimensional nature and the dynamics of change become clear as well. In this section, I first look at the varieties of participation, and then discuss their historical dynamics. The multidimensional nature is based on the many different ways of participation within the threefold structure of experience. Within this structure we identify additional modes of experience when we focus on one of these three aspects.

We distinguish two basic types of participation. The first involves the sensitive parts of our body, constituting all sorts of sense perceptions. The other does not encompass senses, for example imagination. Sensory perception dictates that an object must have an effect on some part of our bodies that is on our senses. Accordingly, when we participate by way of our body what we experience must be of a bodily nature as well. In philosophical terminology, this 'something' is called 'object'. The Latin word *ob-iectum* denotes this kind of participation: *iectum* means 'something thrown' or 'put in a place, standing somewhere' and *ob-* means 'against'. 'Object' denotes the *mode* of participation between bodies, a 'standing against one another', which is a relationship between bodies in general and the sensible parts of our own bodies in particular. This mode then is *objective* or *representational participation*. To identify other modes of experience we next explore other types of participation. In contrast to the sensory type, we may call them *non-objective* or *non-representational*.

Now we look for a mode of participation that does not involve our senses. This is first of all the *imagination*, like our memories. In memory we do not participate in something that is present to our body. We may lose one of our senses but we will still remember its earlier impressions. Even if we would become deaf we could still imagine hearing music. A good example of acoustic imagination was Beethoven. He could not only remember the sound of music, but could invent new music as well. Imagination then comprises a reproductive and a productive variety, i.e. memory and fantasy. Dreams and hallucinations seem to be another case of imaginations. There are yet other non-objective modes of experience, for example feelings or *emotions*, like joy and fear. While imaginations present something with

a more or less clear and distinct content (the 'image'), emotions may be quite clear (since we identify them easily) but they remain confused, as they do not evoke a specific (mental) image.

Next we focus on the participatory reference itself. The reference between an object and its sensory impression, or between a memory and the occasion remembered is something that we can focus on as well. This reference constitutes the *experience of participation* in a proper sense, i.e. the awareness of the fact that our ideas refer to a source, or more generally, that things are related to other things. This type of participatory experience is at the heart of our sense of order. Furthermore, we can focus on ourselves as the experiencing pole. In turning inward we discover ourselves to be a part of the whole context of participation. The discovery of ourselves as the experiencing pole is the discovery of the human self as participating in the encompassing whole which we may call the *cosmos*. This type of experience may be called self-experience or the reflexive experience of ourselves, or *self-reflection*. From this reflexive turn emerges yet another type of participation, the experience of *consciousness*. Here, consciousness turns to itself, thereby becoming the pole of experience and the pole that is experienced at the same time. The difference of the two should be noted: The reflective turn reveals the self of the participating person as the pole of experience, which is a relevant and indispensable part of the structure of experience. The turn to consciousness on the other hand emphasizes the nature of the self-reflecting person as someone who consciously participates in the cosmos.

The discovery of consciousness is crucial in our analysis of experience. An adequate definition of experience requires the concept of consciousness, and therefore the *turn to consciousness* must have already taken place. As long as our consciousness is not present to itself the nature of experience, as conscious participation, must remain obscure. Only after discovering the involvement of consciousness, we can define *experience* as *conscious* participation. The turn to consciousness will lead to yet another new dimension. As soon as consciousness becomes an ingredient of the experiential horizon the 'internal' limits of this new horizon may be noted as well. This leads to the awareness of the unconscious. The *turn to the unconscious* discloses a kind of inner transcendence. This discovery of the inner transcendence shows that we may participate in sources, which are not consciously accessible unless we use some special way to remove the veil, e.g. by psychoanalysis or hypnosis.

Thus far we have considered seven experiential dimensions including the sensory dimension, reproductive and productive imagination, participation and self-reflection, consciousness and the unconscious. To compare these seven modes of experience we need to look at all of them from yet another perspective, the perspective of *contemplation* (sometimes also called *metacognition*). Here all the different kinds of participation can be surveyed and compared simultaneously. Plato's allegory of the cave is the best representation of the contemplative experience. In the cave scenario the author and the reader contemplate both the sensory and the intelligible world. Such a comprehensive mode of participation surveying everything else is the specific experience of the *nous* ('reason') and in the ancient Greek usage is sometimes called *theorein* ('theorizing'). We should, however, avoid assigning modern connotations. In ancient Greek the verb *theorein* denoted a special kind of visual participation, meaning a particularly focused attention, later

on expanded to include the contemplative experience of the *nous* or reason. The ancient *nous* was not Kant's *pure reason*, but an experiential capacity for a specific kind of participation.[18] This activity of reason may be called the experience of theoretical reason. Appropriately understood, all *noëtic* and *theoretical* activities are *empirical* in a strict sense. It is a kind of 'birds eye view' of the activities of the human mind. 'Metaphysics', as well as logic and methods, originally emerge from this theoretical experience that illuminates the activities of the human mind.

Finally we address how religious or spiritual experience fits into the picture. Based on our definition, the structure of experience includes three components: a conscious person who is the experiencing pole, some other pole that is experienced, and some sort of reference, the bridge of participation between these two poles. The other pole besides the participating person usually is a something, which we become aware of (even though it may not be a 'thing' or an object in all cases). Something becomes present. In religious experience, however, this is not the case. It differs from all other kinds of experiences since there is *no-thing*, no other pole in the focus of our attention — but we still experience the attention of 'something' from 'somewhere' outside our horizon. The other pole remains absent but we nevertheless are aware of a reference. The reference, however, is different from all others that we have studied so far in several ways: (a) It is non-representational – that is: it is not a perception, since all perceptions include another pole that refers to one of our senses. (b) Yet it is neither an imagination, as all imaginations include some "image" as the other pole. (c) Further more it is also not a kind of self-reference of the consciousness, because there can be no doubt of the self-reference of consciousness. Finally the reference is (d) not a contemplative experience, not the noëtic transparency of the *nous.* Instead, religious experience is the awareness of an absent presence referring to us: the other pole beyond myself remains *absent* while the *reference* that originates from some sort of an absent pole nevertheless is *present.* This experience is a specific mode of participation where nothing except some 'reaching-out' is present to our *mind*. The Greek and the Latin word respectively denoting a mind that can be touched by the divine, is 'pneuma' or 'spirit'. Accordingly we may justly call it a *pneumatic* or *spiritual* experience. Quite appropriately, the absent pole can be called 'numinous' since it is a particularly powerful source, beyond the ordinary confines of all our other dimensions of experience, the unconscious included.[19] All personal and collective forms of the unconscious *can* be made present albeit it may take some time and psychological efforts. And in all ordinary cases where something is "beyond" our empirical horizons this transcendent element may become present sooner or later, by approaching it, by research, by psychoanalysis, by hypnosis, or simply by waiting for it. The absent presence on the other side is a particularly powerful source since it can reach out to us but we cannot touch it at will. It is the experience of radical dependency, according to Schleiermacher.[20]

So far, the picture of our experiential dimensions looks static, but in reality the development of experience is dynamic. When we examine our own experiential biographies more closely, we notice that dimensions are changing over time. For many people spiritual experience is not an everyday occurrence since it usually presupposes some meditative practice. The same is true for other dimensions as well: The turn to self-reflection is a distinct event in our lives, as may be, for example, the discovery of creative imagination, of

the dimensions of contemplation, of consciousness, and of the unconscious. We can even imagine that some of these experiential turns are not happening in everyone's life. There are several reasons for this.

First of all, the changes (or turns) are based on the shifting focus of consciousness. In the complex structure of experience it is the specific function of consciousness to turn participation into experience by directing our focus of awareness. In this respect, consciousness works like an 'inner light' or luminosity by which something is moved to the center of attention. Since a wide range of participations envelops us, the focusing power of consciousness permits us to be selective. From an evolutionary perspective, the attention to sensory participation in the environment has a high priority since it is necessary for survival. It needs some extra effort, when we want to turn away from sensory attractions, redirecting our attention to non-objective varieties of participation. In a first step to enable humans to turn towards imagination, the working memory of the brain needs to be sufficiently large, in order to enhance "the mind's ability to hold in attention, and process, task-relevant information in the face of interference".[21] This development has probably taken place during the Middle Paleolithic. Once the neurobiological prerequisites are there, redirecting the focus of attention still requires some special effort. We have to learn how to hold attention for some time. In recent studies on the evolution of consciousness, deliberate practice and meditation, among other factors, are assigned a crucial role.[22]

Beyond the domain of sensation, all other types of experience arise and exist only if they are cultivated and kept alive by deliberate practice. While sensory capacities are parts of our biological nature, the other varieties of experience are part of our 'culture'.[23] Changes in the focus of attention occur when the focus of consciousness moves in a new direction. As we will see further down below, historic evidence suggests that the range of non-sensory participation develops slowly by certain turns to new dimensions. This sheds new light on cultural dynamics. Since the discovery of all experiential dimensions beyond sensation results from cultivating efforts, the genealogy of experience is a fragile process. It is fragile because dimensions may wither away and vanish completely if their practice is neglected or if they are declared to be 'non-existent' altogether. Such was the fate of spiritual experience in modern times. Even sensory dimensions change by training, as seen in the developing palate of a wine connoisseur or the increasingly subtle ear of a music lover. While sensory dimensions are critical for survival, the others are critical for human culture.

2. A History of Experience

Up to this point, our reflections on the definition and structure of experience are primarily based on our own experience accessible by introspection. Since all experience is subjective and personal, the only direct access to it is by my own. Thus the reflections base their validity on the premise that all partners in the discourse can reiterate the analysis of experience, and subsequently either agree or reject it. When we now look into the changing structure of experience throughout history, we must find evidence in symbolic artifacts. First we have to make a distinction between technical and symbolic artifacts. The distinction is based on two different ways in using such objects. We use technical artifacts like tools to impact on objects. We use symbolic artifacts—like sculptures, paintings, all sorts of written testimonies etc.— to impact the human mind. All symbolic artifact represents a specific

mode of experience. For example, a sculpture or an image expresses a visual experience. Accordingly we can subdivide symbols into varieties of symbolic forms. A symbolic form represents the regular relations between the components of an experiential structure.[24] For example, an inscription is a symbolic artifact with a certain symbolic form. Its form is defined by the regular relationship of at least six components: a *text* using a certain *writing system*, that in turn represents a given *language*, and was composed by an *author*, presented to a *reader*, and that was done by a specific *mode of communication* – e.g. presenting the text on a public monument. These six components altogether make up for what we call a public inscription. When we analyze symbolic artifacts we adopt an indirect approach to the structure of experience, and a note on method may be appropriate.

2.1. A Note On Method

As a point of departure I use Eric Voegelin's experiential hermeneutics. As already noted above, he pioneered the approach that experience is a precursor to ideas and concepts, thus substituting the history of ideas for a history of experience. Voegelin however assumed that the structure of experience and participation in reality is historically invariant while on the other side there exists "a plurality of symbolizations". However different in articulation "the structure of reality expressed by myth and philosophy is the same".[25] The differences that make up for the plurality of symbolizations arise as a shift from a compact to a more differentiated articulation of experiences. In *Israel and Revelation* Voegelin enumerated three guiding principles for his analysis of the experience of order: (1) the nature of man is constant; (2) the range of human experience is always present in the fullness of its dimensions; and (3) the structure of the range varies from compactness to differentiation.[26] While Voegelin focused exclusively on the *content* of experience, in my analysis of experience I introduce one major modification by turning away from the *content* of experience to its *structure*. So far, my conceptual analysis of experience was based on direct access to it. A historical inquiry, however, needs to proceed by indirect evidence using symbolic artifacts. The methodological challenge is how to identify changing structures of experience without having direct access to them.

This inquiry calls for a careful design.[27] Therefore I propose three principles. First, the structures we want to identify must be well defined. To this end, I will use the definitions developed in the preceding sections. These include both the concept of experience itself, and its multiple forms. Secondly, we examine material with regard to the experiential structure, not regarding its content. Therefore we have to identify the modes of experience that are expressed in the material. To identify a mode of experience, we need to detect symbolic forms that require a specific form of experience as a prerequisite for their articulation and expression, e.g. producing an image requires a mind capable of imagination. Here the image is the symbolic form and the imagination the specific variety of experience required. When we search for evidence of imagination, we do not concentrate on the content or meaning of images but its symbolic form of representation. Whether Paleolithic statuettes, engravings and cave murals express 'artistic' or 'religious' meaning, remains of secondary relevance. Instead our primary focus is on the fact that symbolic artifacts represent a turn to imagination. Finally, we assume that newly developed varieties of experience will produce new method to enable deliberate practice of the new experience for a larger audience.

When we want to find a turn in experience, we have to search for such new methods and symbolic form first. Later on, with the advent of writing, our sources will explicitly address the discovery of new experiential dimensions, a case for which Plato's allegory of the cave is a good example. In the allegory he does not only present a model of contemplative (or theoretical) experience to his readers, but also expresses a lucid awareness of a turn in experience. The turn itself is the central theme of his story, and he also presents a methodical approach how to achieve such a turn, calling it *priagogé* or 'turn-around'—a training to reorient mental focus away from sensible objects towards the contemplation of abstract ideas, the practice of which is the recurring theme in all of his dialogues.

In many cases, the resulting classification (as new) can only be provisional, particularly when symbolic artifacts are rare, like those from the Paleolithic period. When new material is discovered, the placement into the historical context may change. For example, discovering any earlier evidence may falsify the statement that the verses of Zoroaster show the oldest evidence of self-reflection. In my subsequent exploration I briefly sketch some major turns in human experience from the Paleolithic era to the present. Whenever material permits, I point out consequences of the transformation for political ideas.

2.2 Imagination and Participation

Accordingly, to discover a new turn in experience, we must search for the oldest evidence of new symbolic forms and methods. The oldest symbolic artifacts come from the Middle Paleolithic period. Early Paleolithic humans produced technical artifacts only, including complex tools that are deliberately shaped to a certain design. Beginning sometime in the Middle Paleolithic, humans started creating symbolic artifacts of many kinds. Among the portable artifacts there are decorated items of ochre and beads, as well as little figurines and other decorated objects. From about 40,000 BC onward, stationary artifacts appear as mural cave paintings.[28] Since cave murals are a distinctive new symbolic form produced by *Homo sapiens*, I focus on these images. Following the second rule, we ask what kind of experience is employed in the production. The artisan producing complex tools as well as the person that creates figurines and paintings, both have to use the 'inner eye' of imagination before they can start working or painting. There is, however, a crucial methodological difference between the older production of complex tools and the younger one of symbolic artifacts: in the tool industries the imagined design is used to produce the tools while in the case of symbolic artifacts the imagined item itself is being represented. What is stored in mind when making tools is just the manual procedure to produce an object, located in the parietal cortex. Humans can execute the procedure without paying conscious attention and can learn the movements just by imitating another person. In the production of a symbolic artifact, the artist must focus on a mental image, accessible via introspection only. Symbolic artifacts presuppose a turn to conscious imagination. It is the first turn in the structure of experience we can detect in the history of mankind. I would like to call it the *imaginative turn*.

At the same time, symbolic artifacts present a new field of content, as they do not represent technical designs but present a different topic: mostly animals, to a lesser extent human figures, and occasionally a combinations of both, so called *theriomorphs*. Besides that we also find abstract signs like dots, hands, lines etc. There exists an extensive debate on the meaning of these images and sculptures, which I will leave aside here.[29] However, to aid

our examination of other cultures, I would like to point to a remarkable feature of the cave murals: the composition of the images, which is quite different from later styles in the Mesolithic and onward.

First we take a look at the elements depicted in the caves. Like in portable artifacts, the themes are highly selective. They often feature large herbivores, predominantly the horse, followed by bison, ibex, deer, and some mammoths, few carnivores like lion, wolf, and cave bear. We frequently find geometric signs like dots and bars, but human shapes (mostly fragmentary) are very rare with the exception of indexes like hand-prints and female genitalia.[30] For a period of more than 30,000 years most images display a high grade of standardization, almost exclusively portrayed in profile view, without much variation. The horse heads for example are not individuals but standardized schemes. The artistic perfection, however, may vary, with the highest quality found in Lascaux. If, however, we study the composition of these elements, all standardization is gone: there are no two caves with an identical or in any way similar order. Each cave is individually organized. The Paleolithic imagery presents a highly developed iconic vocabulary but no regular pattern of composition.[31]

When we proceed to Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age cultures, the situation changes profoundly.[32] Murals, pottery and other artifacts feature design elements that are regularly arranged displaying "a network of relationships that unite the figures (men, women, animals) in a significant way".[33] Well-ordered relations emerge as the characteristic feature of the new symbolic form. The first witness to this change is architecture. The earliest specimen found to date, is the complex of buildings in Göbekli Tepe in the Southeast of Turkey. Building D (named after the sequence of excavation), dated at 9,600 BC, is a fine example: in the nearly circular shape of its outer walls flat stone pillars are radially arranged, pointing towards the intersection of the diameters: The structure is built to show the symbolism of the center. Furthermore, two taller pillars, facing each other on their flat sides, accentuate the center. The parallel stones are aligned to a Northwesterly axis, aiming at an azimuth position of 353°. Today we would assume that this axis is oriented at the polar star. Yet in the early Mesolithic, due to the precession of the Earth, there was no polar star. From about 12,000 to 10,000, Vega had obtained the polar position. From about 4,000 to 1,700 BC Thuban, a star of only moderate brightness will move there. In the meantime, the celestial pole is vacant – starless and dark to the naked eye. However, when Vega left the pole position, together with Arcturus, she still was the brightest star on the night sky. If we adjust a planetarium to 9,600 BC and to the date of the winter solstice, we see Vega as the first star at nightfall, appearing exactly at the azimuth position of 353°, which enclosure D is aligned to. Arcturus is standing just a few degrees to the East. As the night progresses, the two stars circle around the vacant polar position, like two lights that follow each other, the smaller one chasing the brighter. The process is reminiscent of a hunting scene. If we turn around to look southward, we see another prominent constellation appearing on the southern horizon at the very same moment: The Hunter or Orion. Due to its impressive appearance the constellation obtains a prominent position in celestial mythologies worldwide. The accurate opposition of two circling stars in the North and the Hunter in the South, combined with the obvious orientation of the temple by its North-South-axis and the context of the winter solstice do not look like a random arrangement. The geometry of the design suggests that the builders placed the structures

in a cosmological context. In the Mesolithic era, we can deduce the symbolic meaning only hypothetically. Yet the change in method is obvious, as orderly patterns produced by geometrical construction did not exist in earlier ages.

As soon as written texts exist, the basic ideas are much easier to understand. In mythological texts of Neolithic and Bronze Age literature, two patterns are characteristic: a sequence in time, from a primordial beginning to the present, and a cosmic hierarchy in space, the top-down-order of heaven, earth, and underworld. The cosmic tree is a typical symbol for the spatial order, while in the historical succession each element emerges by metamorphosis and transfer of substance from a superior source. The process usually begins with theogony, the birth of the Gods, who represent the ultimate source of all things to come. Very often, a fight flares up among the Gods (theomachy), then the story continues with the creation of the world (cosmogony) and mankind (anthropogony), ending with the creation of order.[34]

Furthermore, in mythology, the origin of human knowledge becomes an explicit topic and produces specific symbolism. Based on the idea of participation, knowledge originates from the same source as anything else, i.e. by transfer from divine sources. The Gods own the privilege of knowledge and may transfer it as a gift occasionally, usually to an exceptional person like a king, hero, queen or fortuneteller. They are nothing but the recipients of knowledge, not its author (in Latin 'auctor' denotes 'the maker and originator of knowledge'). Accordingly, all mythological texts are anonymous—but they always name the divine source instead, like Marduk in the *Enuma Elish*.[35] The transfer of knowledge takes place in typical ways. The most common being Gods themselves, who directly transfer knowledge in a message, like in the Babylonian Genesis, or send a divine messenger, like the Greek God Hermes. Some legendary ancestor-king may be another source, a story told e.g. in the 'Instructions of Shuruppag'. In Sanskrit the term for knowledge is *veda*. This knowledge is eternal and sacred. Thus all Vedic texts and classical Upanishads are *shruti* ("something heard of").[36] Another way of transmitting knowledge in mythology is by eating, for example Adam and Eve eating fruit from the 'Tree of Knowledge'.[37] Other typical methods are traveling or dreaming. We find both versions in the Gilgamesh Epic.[38] Since the recipient is not responsible for knowledge, he does not search for truth, but for a treasure called knowledge or wisdom. In mythological language there is no word for truth.

The main task of humans is obedience to divine order and to the sacred word, to write messages down, or to recite text. Submission and ritual are important, whereas mental attitude is not. Similar to geometrical construction, the basic method of cosmological experience is the strictest observation of the practice of sacred traditions. If submission and ritual were not performed correctly, order would collapse. Accordingly archaic myth is obsessed with order. During this period, 'political' ideas and institutions correspond to the cosmological form. Like knowledge all social and political institutions pre-exist as part of the divine cosmos. That 'kingship is lowered from heaven' is a common feature in most texts of the ancient Near East. The climax in time, the most powerful and perfect moment of reality is at the beginning of creation, documented in myth by the super-human lifespans of the early kings and the exceptionality of their heroic deeds. Lifespans shorten with distance to the origin. The present is the most fragile moment, exceptionally exposed to the decline of cosmic and human order.

2.3 Self-Reflection and Theory

While myth speaks anonymously, a new symbolic form appears later that links the text to an author. The author is a new figure: he (or she) identifies himself (herself) as a real person who refers to experience and takes responsibility for presenting the knowledge obtained. While the experience may still refer to a divine source, the responsibility for its correct representation moves to the author. The new form involves new methods and new concepts. A new word denotes the correct representation of an experience, and that is *truth*. The criterion of truth becomes the key quality of many post-mythological symbolic forms. The turn to self-reflection entails social changes as well. While the recipient of myth usually belonged to the social elite, an author may come from all strata of society: priests and poets, shepherds and soldiers alike can speak truth and their messages can gain social acceptance. The earliest texts of this kind probably are the *Gathas*, the songs of Zarathustra, who lived in the 13th or 12th century BC.[39] These songs are dialogues between the 'prophet' and his divine partners. In the Ushtavaiti-Gatha the supreme God Ahura Mazda approaches Zarathustra, asking him to identify himself as a person, and to declare which side he is on. He answers: "First, I am Zarathustra", then he declares to "support the truthful one" (i.e. Ahura Mazda), and finally starts a dialogue with his God about the 'good thoughts' and 'truth'.[40] By this *reflective turn*, the person discovers himself as the center of experience, as a personal 'I-myself', who is the recipient of knowledge and responsible for its representation. The experience of personal responsibility for truth is the key quality of all post-mythological symbolic forms.

As the triumph of truth depends on human support, the choice between truth and lie becomes the central task in a person's life. This is the birthday of personal liberty and responsibility for truth, a change that affects everybody. As a consequence, external acts are subordinate to a truthful state of mind. From now on the effectiveness of a ritual depends on right intentions. At the same time, the process of conscious participation turns into a topic for reflection, stimulating the discovery of the mind and its structure. On the biographic level, the reflective turn constitutes a cardinal event, dividing the life of the prophet in a period before and a period after the turn. Zarathustra knows that he is a watershed in the relations between God and man. The perspective in time and space is reversed: now the present is the most powerful moment of reality and the place of its breakthrough becomes the center of the cosmos. Older mythologies are degraded to lies or otherwise devalued. The thoughts, words, and deeds of the prophet constitute the new gravitational center. We observe the very same pattern in all prophetic religions (with Moses, Isaiah or Mohammed as protagonists).

When the reflective turn achieves social acceptance, it transforms the temporal existence of society into a time before and a time after the establishment of truth. A climax in the presence of God substitutes the mythological idea of a primordial past and its cyclic reaffirmation. The Behistun inscription of Darius the Great (550–486 BC) provides an excellent example for the political adaptation of the new symbolic form.[41] Darius believes Ahura Mazda to support him because he lives righteously in accordance with truth, the *asha* of Zarathustra's teachings. Similar to the prophet, he tells the story of his life and works, describing himself as the greatest king and the climax of history. The rise of the Persian Empire is told in reverse order. The story starts with Darius himself then goes back

to his father and forefathers. Based on the dualistic principle of Zoroastrianism, he portrays a world divided into good and evil, where all rebellions are the work of *druj* (fraud, deception), the enemy of truth.[42] In analogy to the prophet's pivotal position in the history of religion, Darius sees himself as the culmination of political history and all earlier emperors shrink to precursors of the Great King. The only way to outperform the past is by expansion and increased heroism. The idea of an expansive ecumenical empire is born.

Another fundamental change occurs in Ancient Greece, where the discovery of a new mode of participation called *theoría* or 'theory' is based on reason (*nous*) as its experiential faculty. In ancient Greek, *nous* did not denote Kant's pure reason, but a specific mode of participation. Accordingly I would like to call this the *noëtic turn*. In the ancient usage, 'theory' is not a set of propositions or a system of judgments but a particular mode of participation.[43] Derived from its Latin translation as *contemplatio*, the English word 'contemplation' would be the most appropriate modern equivalent. The subject of contemplation is the structure of thought itself (*logos*), the nature of the soul (*psyche*) and the intelligible world in general, i.e. the world of ideas. In Antiquity, the change of symbolic forms left enough documents to study it quite closely. For Hesiod (8th/7th century BC) and Pindar (ca. 522–443 BC), the Muses still are the forces that inspire the 'blind minds' of men, telling *alétheia* (truth). Later, Anaxagoras (ca. 500 – 428 BC) introduces reason (*nous*) as the ordering power of the cosmos. Since men participate in the *nous*, they are able to recognize the order (*logos*) of the world (*cosmos*). For Anaxagoras, God is the epitome of *nous*. With him, it is no longer the Muses who guide men in their search for truth, but a power by which mankind participates in the ordering source of the cosmos. The noëtic turn reaches its climax with the Sophists, Socrates and Plato.[44] When looking for a modern phrase, we can use 'rationality' or 'theoretical reason' as an equivalent – however, we should be careful not to confuse it with the Kantian notion of 'reason' that excludes the experiential dimension of the *nous* (thus deforming 'reason' into a mysterious 'a priori' source of knowledge). While both mythology and prophetic wisdom depend on divine inspiration, theoretical reason turns the acquisition of knowledge into an autonomous human activity that leads to preliminary results only. Socrates coined the motto of the new era: "I know that I do not know."[45] Thus *questioning* became the central element of the new symbolic form, called philosophy and science (*episteme*), with a plurality of schools competing for the right answers.

Plato's allegory of the cave is a vivid account of the noëtic turn. In the story he argues that sensory perception only provides us with a secondary and imperfect representation of reality. In his allegory Plato describes a group of people living in a cave. They are chained to their seats and watch the shadows on the opposing wall, initially considering these phenomena to be reality. Later one of them is unchained, dragged out of his seat, and turned around to look in the other direction, henceforth facing the scene that produces the shadows on the wall. Now the spectator observes a fire burning higher up. Between the fire and the spectator there is a low barrier, behind which some people are carrying figures up and down a walkway thus casting the shadows on the opposing wall. The figures behind the barrier are the origin of the shadows casted on the wall. The intervention forces him to face the primary reality.[46] The former perspective is rejected as a truncated form of experience. According to Plato, we can face primary reality by a special mode of experience only, that which he calls *noësis*, a word denoting the activity of the *nous* or

reason. While our senses let us participate in sensory reality, by *noësis* we participate in the intelligible reality of ideas. This is the key message of the allegory of the cave. At the same time, Plato points out that the noëtic experience requires some special effort, an aspect expressed by the forceful nature of the turn. Men do not command all modes of experience from birth; some require deliberate practice, like instruction and discipline, training and education. The Greek term for this is *paideia*. This is a basic insight we owe to Plato.

While not all Greek city-states may have become part of the movement originating from the noëtic turn, the movement nevertheless became the paradigmatic achievement of the Hellenic world. Accordingly most Greek city-states pictured their own way of life in sharp contrast to ecumenical empires. The contrast is not about size but about the way of life.[47] While empires, such as Persia for example, are organized by a hierarchical structure of command and obedience, the new type of political life, as seen in Athens, is built upon new institutions that reflect a new form of rationality. To take just one example, scientific logic and political rhetoric are parallel developments. In both cases, the validity of reasoning substitutes for the authority of divine origin. Just as theoretical reason opens the road to questioning, critique and revision, bidding farewell to the eternal validity of cosmological myth, so political reason creates a corresponding form, with public debate and decision-making as its basic features. In the wake of the noëtic turn, the new city-states regard political order as a system of profane institutions, built on conventional rules that are open to revision. While the *physei dikaion* (the 'law of nature') remains a guiding principle, founded in the cosmological background, there is no prefabricated order in the profane world. Men themselves discuss and decree the laws of society. The classical age separates the public from the sacred, a split becoming manifest when the temple, the sacral center located in the 'acropolis' (the 'high city' or 'citadel'), is dissociated from the political center, which is situated around the public market square, where profane activities such as trade and debate take place. Accordingly, the antique experience of liberty emerges from political life. to be 'free' means to participate in an autonomous society. Thus liberty is self-government.

2.4 Spiritual and Creative Experience

However, in Plato's allegory of the cave one dimension of experience remains obscure: the participation in the divine ground. Plato symbolizes the deity by a fire in the background, i.e. by a symbol of the God of truth and light, *Apollo*. Yet at the same time, he does not theorize the specific nature of spiritual experience. Plato locates all symbols of higher reality on the same level, i.e. in the intelligible world. The objects and their shadows are clearly differentiated by the metaphors the primary level of the figures and the secondary of the shadows. The shadows are projections of the objects, but the objects are not the projection of the fire. However, the reality of ideas and the superior reality of their origin are confused, since they both are objects that jointly produce the shadows. Yet is the sun of Apollo on the same level as ideas? This obscurity is typical for Greek and Roman antiquity. In pagan antiquity we do not meet a symbolic form that adequately expresses the reality of spiritual experience. Two typical examples of such obscurity are Cicero and Dion of Prusa in their respective discussions of the concept and the origin of religion. In his book *On the Nature of the Gods*, Cicero studies the *natura deorum* by looking into mythological and

philosophical texts, analyzing the coherence of concepts, definitions and arguments. In his Olympic speech, Dion reflects a similar deficit very clearly: We access the reality of the divine ground through ideas only. The Gods are but imaginative concepts.[48]

In the Bible, both the Jewish Tanakh and the Christian Gospel, we encounter a new approach to spiritual experience, an experiential transformation that I call the *pneumatic turn*. It begins with Deutero-Isaiah and culminates in the Pauline letters.[49] During the turn a new symbolic form emerges: the biographical account of a person's spiritual experience. As its key-symbol, the awareness of the *hágion pneuma* or Holy Spirit (spiritus sanctus) denotes this experience. St. Paul describes it as the awareness of God referring to man. Now we meet with an adequate symbolization capturing the unique structure of spiritual experience. While God may reach out to us and touch the human soul, man cannot actively reverse the direction of participation to turn to a vision of God. Since Isaiah, God is a *deus absconditus*, a hidden God. God is an absent presence.[50] Thus the pneumatic turn keeps a distance both to the mythological idea of participation by metamorphosis and to the obscurities of pagan philosophy. To avoid any confusion with the immanent use of *pneuma* St. Paul usually qualifies the term by the attribute *hágion* or 'holy'. This means: (1) the spirit flows from a divine source, but it is not an immanent substance; and (2) although the source of the spirit remains inaccessible to human experience, we nevertheless participate in the movement by which the source focuses on us. The Gospel equates this participation with love (*agápe*), which becomes the universal pattern of spiritual participation between God and man and the entire creation. Since the Father is not only a spectator but also a creative actor, spiritual participation means practical participation as well. This newly discovered pneumatic receptivity of man then constitutes a characteristic of mankind, known as 'human dignity', thereby establishing a new paradigm for human relations. The 'love of neighbor' is thus the temporal equivalent of the 'love of God'.

In Medieval and Renaissance Europe, we encounter another turn: the discovery of creative imagination. Antiquity looked at imagination as a reproductive faculty, usually equaled with memory. The corresponding symbolic form was *mimesis* or *imitation*. For this Seneca coined the popular phrase: *Omnis ars naturae imitatio est* (All art is but imitation of nature).[51] Although the experience of something unprecedented, of the New (to neon, novum) existed, creative imagination as a specific mode of human experience did not. In cosmologic mythology, prophetic religion, and the Judaeo-Christian traditions alike, creativity was a privilege of the Gods. Divine creativity usually happened as genetic production or metamorphic transformation.

We catch a first glimpse of human creativity as a productive form of imagination with Hugo and Richard of St. Victor who coined the term *imaginatio creatrix*.[52] Nikolaus of Kues developed the concept of creative imagination in his writings *De Beryllo* and *Idiota de mente*.[53] Since then creativity became an integral part of human dignity. Simultaneously a new method emerged to practice human creativity. It begins with a creative idea (*concetto*, 'vision' etc.) leading via experimentation, trial and error to something new, to a 'discovery' or 'invention'. Since the 19th century *modernity* became the central idea in the historic self-interpretation reflecting the turn to innovation and discovery.[54] Creativity drives the modern age.

The revaluation of creativity profoundly reshaped Western culture triggering revolutions in

the arts and sciences, in personal and public life. A flock of new big ideas turns up: The *novum* and novelty, invention and innovation, avant-garde and progress emerge as key values. They promote the training for discovery and invention as an integral part of the arts and sciences. In the initial phase, people like Leonardo and Galileo became paradigmatic figures. Machiavelli was the first to present himself as an *innovator*, introducing a creative approach to the study and practice of politics. In *The Prince* as well as in the *Discorsi*, we find a strong emphasis on new modes and orders, as well as a Machiavelli who uses Christopher Columbus as a paradigmatic figure to interpret his own project.[55] Modern contract theories, to give just one more example, transfer the idea of creative innovation to the political arena.[56] Since the times of the myth, in one way or another, the gods had lowered kingship from heaven. Now men, empowered with creativity, establish the order of society by contract according to a rational design. In earlier times, *liberty* meant to have certain privileges or rights, and to participate in public affairs. Now the idea shifts, designating individual autonomy to shape ones own life without public and political interference.[57]

2.5 The Discovery of Consciousness and Unconsciousness

In the modern age we encounter two more changes in the structure of experience: the turn to the consciousness and to the unconscious. The creative turn suggested a new question: What is the source of creativity? In scholastic discourse, a hierarchy of authorities was the source of all knowledge. Highest in rank was the Bible, the second place belonged to St. Augustine, followed by the other church fathers. Philosophers came next, with Aristotle in first place, supplemented by more authorities further down the line. Since these authorities represented an archive of knowledge already existing, there was no room for anything new. Thus modern theorizing relocated the source for new ideas in experience and reason banishing authorities to the rear seats. In his *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia* (1641) Descartes identified the *res cogitans*, the 'thinking thing' or 'mental substance' as the domain of reason and experience.[58] In his *Recherche de la Vérité* he gave the name of *conscientia* to this realm of "internal testimony which everyone experiences within himself".[59] In Antiquity *conscientia* usually denoted either a moral knowledge of one's actions or a literally 'knowing with', i.e. sharing knowledge with someone else, while modern usage refers to the new dimension of an inner awareness or luminosity. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) John Locke introduced the term into English philosophical vocabulary: "Consciousness is the perception of what passes in a man's own mind."[60] This turn to consciousness induced a new symbolic form where theorizing took the form of a testimony recording first hand observations and original thinking. Descartes' *Discourse* and Locke's *Inquiry* rose to the paradigms of this method.

Exploring the realm of consciousness gave rise to another discovery: a region beyond the horizon of awareness called the 'unconscious'. One of the first to systematically use the term in his philosophy was Arthur Schopenhauer in his *The World As Will and Idea* (1818/1819).[61] In 1869, Eduard von Hartmann published *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, the most popular book on the topic in the 19th century (an English translation appeared in 1884).[62] With Hartmann's best selling book, the *unconscious* became firmly established as a public idea. Scientific research culminated in the theories of Sigmund Freud and his student Carl Gustav Jung. The turn to the unconscious revealed a new mode of

experience: We participate in psychological impulses whose origins we normally do not know and cannot control. Like all other experiential turns, this spawned a new symbolic form, based on the idea of an internal transcendence in the psyche that is nonetheless characterized by certain structures and specific dynamics. To access, describe and control this region psychoanalysis and other sciences (such as social psychology) created new methods using dreams, hypnosis and associative techniques, or statistical methods in the analysis of groups and masses to identify the patterns and stimuli of behavior. Gustave Le Bon and Wilfred Trotter initiated mass psychology, while Edward Bernays, Freud's nephew, combined their ideas with psychoanalysis in his writings on propaganda, 'public relations' (a phrase he invented) and advertising. Since the 20th century, these manipulative techniques exerted a strong impact on democratic and totalitarian political practice alike. As a countermovement, the *Critical Theory* of the Frankfurt School (Adorno, Benjamin, Fromm, Horkheimer, Marcuse) and others like Wilhelm Reich combined psychoanalysis with Marxist ideas to unmask manipulative ideologies and institutions, a critique that had a massive impact on the *New Left* and student movements in the 1960's and 1970's.

3. Epilogue

The achievements of experiential turns do not necessarily become permanent parts of a cultural configuration. They may deteriorate in various ways. Ideas and symbols may loose their reference to the experience, from which they were stimulated. For example, when religious symbols and institutions get detached from spiritual experience, they will deteriorate into empty rituals and doctrines, named 'religion' – a Roman concept which literally means the habit of observing rules related to the sacral sphere. When the noëtic turn loses its empirical foundation in *theoria*, the remaining doctrines become 'Metaphysics' as an a priori product of 'pure reason', i.e. philosophical nonsense. Whenever symbols are detached from experience, they deform into a 'doctrine', i.e. a collection of words and sentences for memorization. Another kind of deformation is the atrophy of experience. For this, modern empiricism is a typical case: When all experience is identified with perception, the other dimensions become obscure and seemingly do not refer to an original reality anymore. They get reduced to a secondary reaction derived from an original sensation. The atrophy of experience combined with a loss of reality is reductionism.

We have found eight experiential turns from the Paleolithic to the present day. The earliest of them, the imaginative and the participative turns, are located in deep history. All symbolic forms and artifacts evolve from the imaginative turn without which no sources would exist to study the articulation of experience. In the archaic and antique civilizations we witness three more turns: the reflective turn as exemplified by Zarathustra, the noëtic turn of Greek philosophy, and the spiritual turn evolving through Jewish and Christian traditions. The same kind of changes we can identify in other places as well. The reflective turn occurs with Echnaton in Egypt as well as with the Jewish Prophets. Other protagonists of the noëtic turn are Buddha, Confucius and Laozi, to name but a few examples. During the last millennium three more turns happened: the creative turn, the turns to consciousness and the discovery of the unconscious. All of them induce changes in symbolic form, and they all transform the dynamics of social and political life. None of these turns are limited to a single culture or geographic region. Instead of a single 'axis-time', the genealogy of experience shows a series of altogether eight experiential turns, which are spread over the entire

history of mankind. Thus history does not perform a single drama with a single climax (the 'axis age'), but resembles an extensive theater season, which takes place at several venues. With every successful turn the cast of experiential dimensions changes and a new type of culture is born, beginning with the Paleolithic turn to imagination.

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Notes

[1] For assistance in preparing the manuscript I wish to thank Kerstin Höfgen, Corinna Pehn and Elisabeth Schreiber. Special thanks go to Mika Thuening and Thomas D. Young for reviewing grammar, structure and style.

[2] Cf. Voegelin, E., 2002: *Anamnesis, On the Theory of History and Politics*, Columbia, MO, (The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 6), pp. 84ff. Cf. Clandinin, D. J., ed., 2007: *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry, Mapping a Methodology*, Thousand Oaks, CA, esp. pp. 35-75, pp. 120-145dd

[3] This phase culminated in my thesis on Francis Hutcheson, a Scottish philosopher who tried to base morality and aesthetics on empirical foundations, see Leidhold, W., 1985; as well as Hutcheson, F., 2008.

[4] Gadamer, H.-G., 2006: 341.

[5] Voegelin 2006: 104-105.

[6] Voegelin 2006: 104-105. The emphasis on experience was a focus shared by many of his contemporaries in the early 20th century. Cf. Jung 1938.

[7] Voegelin 1987: 78.

[8] Aristotle 1933: Book 1 (Alpha).

[9] Plato 1966: Vol. 1, *Phaedo*, 96a-b.

[10] My trans.: Ex sensu fit memoria, ex multis autem memoriis unum experimentum (Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de malo*, q. 16, a. 7, arg. 12; cf. Thomas Aquinas 2001: 900f.

[11] Italian quote from: Leonardo da Vinci 1958: 26; Engl. trans. from: Leonardo da Vinci 1883: 288.

[12] Cf. John Locke 1689: II. 1. §2, and II. 9. § 15; "all the materials of reason and knowledge" is coming "in one word, from experience", then equating experience with perception as "the first step and degree towards knowledge, and the inlet of all the materials of it"; cf. Ch. X. Of Retention; Ch. XI. Of Discerning, and Other Operations of the Mind [esp.: II, 1, § 2; II, 9]. For a recent version see: Popper, Eccles: 1977: 425.

[13] Plato 1888: Book VII, 514a–520a.

[14] Plotinos in the Fourth of his Enneads; Plotinus 1984: Vol. IV.

[15] Fludd 1617: cf. Tractatus 2nd, liber X, De triplici animae in corpore visione, 204 ff.

[16] For a brief summary of Hutcheson's argument see my introduction to: Hutcheson 2004: XI-XVI.

[17] Locke 1689: Book II, Chapter IX, Of Perception, § 3.

[18] Schadewaldt 1978: 71.

[19] The Latin *numinosum* derives from the noun 'numen', a word denoting "something

produced by nodding one's head", a majestic gesture, used as a metonymy for power, usually associated with a deity; thus it means an effect caused by a deity, not the deity itself. Cf. Rose 1926: 44-45.

[20] Schleiermacher 1999: I § 4, 4, 14-18 and passim.

[21] Wynn, Coolidge 2011: 1-12.

[22] Rossano 2003: 207-236. On recent developments in consciousness research: Fallio 2006. On impact on Paleontology cf. Lewis-Williams 2002: 100-135, 180-227. On neurohistory cf. Smail 2008: 112-156.

[23] The Latin word for deliberate practice is *cultura*, the practice of mental potentials was called *cultura animi*. The Greek term was *paideia*, its goal named *areté*, which does not mean 'virtue' in a moral sense, but perfect development of (human) potentials.

[24] I borrow (but redefine) the term from Cassirer, who defines as a symbolic form "every energy of mind con-necting a spiritually meaningful content to a concrete sensory sign and binding it intrinsically to that sign." (Der Begriff der symbolischen Form im Aufbau der Geisteswissenschaften, in: Cassirer 1997: 175, my translation; see also: Cassirer 1953-1957, 1996.

[25] Voegelin 2006: 104-105.

[26] Voegelin 2001: 99. Voegelin 1990: 115–133; cf. Hughes 1999: „Introduction", 3-4.; Rose 2012: 30-71.

[27] Here I follow the example of Wynn and Coolidge 2011: 3-4.

[28] Chase 2005: 159-170; Clottes 2008: passim.

[29] The major attempts in interpreting the artifacts seem to be (1) as hunting magic: Breuil, Lantier 1965; (2) male-female dualism: Leroi-Gourhan 1993; (3) astronomic cycles: Marshack 1972; (4) shamanist trance experiences: Clottes, Lewis-Williams 1998; and (5) the general classification as 'art' that pervades most of the scientific and popular literature.

[30] Clottes 2008: 20-21.

[31] Toporov 1982: 93-121.

[32] In the Near East, the Mesolithic starts during the Natufian-period, in the 12th millennium BC, in southeastern Europe about four millennia later, in other regions varying as well.

[33] Marcel Otte, 2009: 548; cf. Rowley-Conwy 1986: 17-32.

[34] Eliade 1978: 56ff. For related near eastern examples cf. Pritchard 1950. Cf. Leidhold 1990: 59-92.

[35] Enûma Eliš 1966: esp. tablets tablet VI, lines 5-8, 102-122; VII, 143-158.

[36] Clooney 1987: 659-684.

[37] Genesis, 2, 4-25 and 3, 1-24.

[38] Epic of Gilgamesh, 1st tablet: column 1, 1-10; column 2, first line; column 5, 25-45; column 6, 1-9. Many editions and translations of this text exist, the most recent one being: Gilgamesh 2012. Most comprehensive is: George 2003.

[39] Boyce 1982ff.

[40] Yasna 43, 7 ff, as in: Humbach 1991; cf. Insler, 1975. A ninth-century Pahlavi text presents a legendary version of this situation: *Zadspram* 1880, 1897: esp. Ch. 21, §§ 1-9; cf. Leidhold 2008: esp. 122-150.

[41] Cameron 1951: 47-54.

[42] Boyce 2001: 48-59.

[43] Nightingale 2004: 5-7, 14-26; Schadewaldt 1978: 71.

[44] Voegelin 1957, 220-240.

[45] Plato 2001: 21d.

[46] Plato 1888: Book VII, 514a–520a.

[47] Leidhold 2006: 189-199, esp. 193-199. Cf. Meier 1990.

[48] Cicero 1933: Book I. VI, 14-16. Dio Chrysostomos, *Man's First Conception of God* (also known as *Olympic Speech*; Discourse No.12), esp. §§ 39-47, in: Dio Chrysostom 1939: *Discourses 12-30*, Vol. II, 43-53.

[49] The period is appropriate for Mediterranean cultures. Some five centuries earlier, in the Upanishads, an analogous relationship is expressed as the participation in *atman*, the spiritual nature of both God and man. We find similar ideas in Buddha's writings, and the philosophical Daoism of Laozi. Is the later Judeo-Christian articulation but an echo of the earlier? Or do the two turns happen independently? Leidhold 2008: 121-157.

[50] Leidhold 2008: 30-38.

[51] Seneca 1917-1925: Book VII, letter LXV, § 3. Cf. Saunders 1967: 18-30. Seneca's source is Plato in the Republic, Book X, 595 c – 603.

[52] Hugo of St. Victor 1880: I, 6, 17, Richard of St. Victor 1855: V, III, 1.

[53] Nicolai de Cusa 1988: 7, 9. Nicolai de Cusa 1983: 94-96. Cf. Leidhold 2001: 51-72; Velthoven, van 1977: 48-128.

[54] Earliest English use of *modern* as referring to the particular identity of the present age is from 1604: "[fr] moderne, of our time" Cawdrey 1604: [text with unnumbered pages]; during the 18th century a concept of an epochal change emerges, see: Bailey 1756: 352 ("Modern Astronomy, takes its beginnings from Copernicus").

[55] Niccolo Machiavelli 1882: 93.

[56] E.g. Thomas Hobbes notes in the first paragraph of the introduction to his *Leviathan*: "For by Art is created that great Leviathan called a Common-Wealth, or State, (in latine

civitas) which is but an Artificiall Man".

[57] Locke 1764: 195-199, *Second Treatise of Government*, Ch. II, §§ 4-7; cf. Constant 1988.

[58] Thiel 2011: 43-60.

[59] Descartes 1908: 524. Engl. trans. cf. Descartes 1984: 399-420.

[60] Locke 1689: II, I, § 19.

[61] For the earliest English trans. cf. Schopenhauer 1883-1886: 150, 181, 195, 304, 330, 402 ("We saw that the inner being of unconscious nature is a constant striving without end and without rest.") Cf. Ellenberger 1970.

[62] Hartmann 1931; 1st English ed. in 3 vols. was publ. in 1882-84 (London), several reprints.