

Transcendent Experiences: Voegelin's Pneumatic and Noetic  
Differentiation of Consciousness, and the  
Phenomenology of Ontological and Religious Interiority

The transcendent experiences in this paper's title are defined and phenomenologically analyzed in book by Louis Roy.<sup>1</sup> I was excited to read Roy's book because I believe that the very fact of the transcendent experience has significance as an argument against the contemporary restriction of consciousness to an immanent material horizon that deforms the basis of modern intersubjectivity in the public life of society, its politics and cultural endeavors. Roy writes, "a significant percentage of the Australian, British, and North-American population (from 35 per cent up to 50 per cent) recall having had a transcendent experience at least once in their life,"<sup>2</sup> underscoring this fact of human lived experience. And Roy uses the ensuing evidence and its analysis his book provides concerning the fact of human experience of the infinite to argue for the essential openness of the human being to divine reality as practically integral to an anthropology of the human being,<sup>3</sup> that is just such a significance.

The use of the word 'openness' intimates the reason that interiority is included in the title of this paper. Even if the transcendent experience is a fact, as raw experience it must be given meaning. To produce lasting insight, meaning and change in consciousness, we must look to the interior operations of the human spirit plumbing the depths to the site where transcendent reality and human person meet and communicate. There are nuances in the definition of interiority; but I am using this word to refer to the place where soul opens out to Beyond reality and to the

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<sup>1</sup>Louis Roy, O.P., Transcendent Experiences: Phenomenology and Critique (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 219.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. xi.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. xiv.

attuned character of such souls. Voegelin has written about the *anima mundi* in two senses: hence ontological and religious interiority. The symbol *anima mundi* images the depth of the psyche below consciousness as well as, and one with, the depth of the Cosmos below the primordial field, that is the underlying reality that makes all creation partners in a common order.<sup>4</sup> It is from this depth that symbols engendered by the transcendent experience arise since the symbols themselves are a part of the reality they have been engendered to symbolize.<sup>5</sup>

The *anima mundi* is a philosopher's myth, and like all myth it carries a truth which inculcates faith and trust in the real potential for order in the cosmos and in history. This truth concerns the solidarity and mutual participation of all the partners in the community of being, a solidarity only discovered in the common ground of being despite the endless diversity in the material world that greets our senses. As Voegelin writes, "our perspectival experiences of reality in process" may look fragmentary, heterogeneous and "even incommensurable, but the trust in the underlying oneness of reality, its coherence, lastingness, constancy of structure, order, and intelligibility will inspire the creation of images which express the ordered wholeness sensed in the depth."<sup>6</sup> Hence, human beings need to plumb the depths to aid in the quest for order.

Thus, the reason that human interiority is part of my title is related to first, the question of achieving any meaning from and secondly, to my ability to claim to find the meaning of, the fact

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<sup>4</sup>Eric Voegelin, "Equivalency of Experience and Symbolization in History", in Published Essays: 1966-1985, The Collective Works of Eric Voegelin Volume 12, edited by Ellis Sandoz, (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), pp.126 - 127.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 120 -121.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

of transcendent experience. One disclaimer and a review of Voegelin's theory of symbolization can help clarify that compound statement. First the clarification. The transcendent experiences as experience will need translation into the concrete language symbols used to identify them and delve into their meanings. In turn, these symbols also become heuristic helpmates for a life long project of reflection into their meanings. Therefore, the "raw" experiences engender symbols to engage in this interpretation project. Because the Reality is so "full", any interpretation of these experiences in a literal manner, i.e., at the stage of human conceptualization, would so reduce the meanings of these experiences that their whole import would be obscured and lost.

Indeed, as we all know, Voegelin believed that the *modern* crisis is in large part due to the separation of experience from its engendered symbol. The resultant dogmatization has thwarted the work of the divine movement of self-revelation in existence<sup>7</sup> to which these experiences both bear witness and supply real life meanings. One important goal of my paper is to demonstrate the relationship between the categories in its title in affirmation of Voegelin's insistent point that revelation as divine call and self-disclosure of divine reality enters into the very processes of natural reason to produce human understandings. I hope to do this by investigating how revelation is received in the interplay between experience and the symbols arising from the depths of the psyche. Voegelin used the word, complex, to explain the not-to-be-broken connection between experience and symbol. Together they form the basic unit which allows the revelatory power of experiences of transcendence (and the transcendent experience will fit into this category of experiences—the apperceptive as opposed to the sensory experience) to bear fruit in knowledge, faith, hope and love and of course, order. Experience/symbol move

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<sup>7</sup>Eric Voegelin, "The Gospel and Culture", in Collected Works 12, p. 199.

to a form of continuous investigation of mystery yielding new discoveries of the unknown.<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, the disclaimer: because awareness happens in consciousness (of course), the meaningful interpretation and translation of the transcendent experience is highly influenced—received or rejected---by the differentiated or the deformed restriction of the consciousness of the human individual who has such an experience. A transcendent experience can occasion a personal “leap in being” for the individual human being who has an instance of insight into the mystery of transcendence grounding reality. But it may become fruitless without certain receptive habits building the structure of consciousness, ones I attribute to the virtues of philosophy and religion and the unique forms of interiority these virtues bring into existence.<sup>9</sup> These virtues will result in the philosophic and religious differentiation of consciousness that will carve out the receptive awareness for the transcendent experience, for as adage of Aquinas goes, “everything is received in the manner of the receiver”.

Thus we have come to the third essential category in this talk. Since experience is a transaction in consciousness, consciousness as human self awareness and self presence, with its mediating role in the effective reception of the full meanings of reality revealed in a transcendent experience, plays a part in the drama of the quest for order. Noetic persistent inquiry with endless questing into the mystery of being and obedient grateful longing for integration with the

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<sup>8</sup>Barry Cooper gives a clear explanation of Voegelin’s ideas in this matter. See Barry Cooper, The Political Theory of Eric Voegelin (Lewiston, New York and Queenston, Ontario: E. Mellon Press, 1986), p. 129.

<sup>9</sup>Michael Franz, “Brothers under the Skin: Voegelin on the Common Experiential Wellspirings of Spiritual Order and Disorder”, in Glenn Hughes, editor, The Politics of the Soul, (Lanhan, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999), pp. 139 - 161. “Voegelin argued that well-ordered and disordered consciousness arise as distinct patterns of response to a single complex of fundamental experience,” p. 151.

divine ground of creation which characterize the two forms of interiority in our title do indeed create a an open consciousness, bringing insight into new and fuller areas of emergent reality that in turn can help found a more universal order.

And indeed, when Voegelin speaks of differentiation of consciousness he does so first in the context of an advance in human understanding of the truth of existence, from its compact form in the primary experience of the cosmos to a more sophisticated and specific insight into that very same reality that will structure one's awareness of that reality and one's relationship to the community of being. The abiding awareness of insights into ever fuller/divine reality and the import of its meanings received with consciousness as a mode of participation in the process, effects consciousness. The symbol interpreted-experiences structure and form it. And changed consciousness, through its noetic and pneumatic differentiations, stands in a radically opposed way to the deformed consciousness that arises from life lived in oblivion of full reality and/or of the advanced understanding of reality coming from humanity's great leaps in being. "Forgetfulness" of transcendence in this political age and/or the separation of the transcendent experiences from the interpreting "engendered symbols" regulating our common order in societies were, according to Voegelin, the cause of the "restrictive deformation of existence . . . [which was] a social force that had, and still has, a long course to run."<sup>10</sup>

Voegelin has referred to Clement of Alexandria's belief that there are "two Old Testaments", thus two forms of interiority and two major differentiation of consciousness. He was writing in regard to the Saving Tale (culminating in the life work of Jesus Christ) of the

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<sup>10</sup>Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, translated and edited by Gerhart Niemeyer (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1978), p. 6.

progressive self-disclosure of the Unknown God unfolding in the drama of the history for the sake of order in material creation .<sup>11</sup> The social fields preserving and augmenting the differentiations of consciousness, i.e., the philosophical and religious communities of interpretation, have also protected and carried the important engendered symbols from the “leaps in being” in history, engendered through the two forms of interiority. The paradigmatic ontological changes in humanity, were the result of special “divine in-rushing”, normative transcendent experiences, theophanies really, in the lived experiences of real “questing” persons in history. The wealth of engendered symbols preserved by religion and philosophy can provide an exegesis of the experiences of transcendence for “everyman”. It is therefore the specific tasks of religion and philosophy to carry and continue the differentiations of consciousness in my title.

It should be reiterated that we are adhering to Voegelin’s comprehensive theory of revelation’s interjacence to reason’s judgments about reality and its order in this study of the transcendent experience. Every human being experiences reality in the mode of matter and spirit, from the primary encounters of the cosmos to illuminations disclosing the scope of the human nous with all its spiritual talents. There have been and continue to be *revelatory* movements which bring a conscious awareness of whole new areas of reality to reason. Thus Voegelin writes that elementary compact understandings of reality i.e., simpler differentiations of consciousness, give way to differentiated fuller understandings of this world. Hence, there is more to reality than the physical world and a sense model of knowledge can not do justice to the full range of reason’s capacity. The great revelations in history with the ontological changes to

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<sup>11</sup>Voegelin, “The Gospel and Culture”, p. 208.

humanity they have bequeathed are a paradigm for how ordinary revelation works. New insights and meanings of spiritual reality come to us as “gifts” , discoveries we could not have reached on our own or force.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the revelatory impact of the transcendent experience—interpreted and brought into the self awareness of a differentiated consciousness---can shock us in a concrete circumstance as to the limitations of ratio in its logical conclusions, when the new emergent realities reveal the ignorant bases of our logic.

Finally, it should be noted that the abiding awareness of interiority behind the differentiations in consciousness has taken place due to the imperative for reflection or meditation that the excitement of the experience itself provokes. Thus anamnesis is the word needed to explain the relationship between the categories in my title if the transcendent experience is to reach its potential meaning and revelatory fruition in grounding order. Anamnesis is also behind Voegelin’s understanding of how experience/symbol work in ordering consciousness. But once again there are two reciprocating paths to anamnesis. Philosophical meditation, or noesis is to Voegelin “a meditative wandering among the poles of human existence, . . . when the self achieves a differentiated awareness of itself as the site of the meditative experience.” Pneumatic meditation, one supported by the prayer and ascetics of religion has a different stress---one on the infinite Spirit known through the medium of the finite material world and its movement in the individual human heart.

The emphasis in philosophy is thus on the human spirit and its attraction to the mysteries

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<sup>12</sup>“It seems to me ridiculous to pretend that there was nothing to consciousness but the consciousness of objects of the external world.” Eric Voegelin, Autobiographical Reflections, edited with an Introduction by Ellis Sandoz (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), p. 71.

of being itself. This form of meditation will shape an ontological interiority. Such interiority is characterized by an abiding awareness of the causes and principles of being and of the primordial presence that remains in communicative contiguity with all being(s), upholding each's internal constitution.. Religious interiority ripens as the result of a wondering gratitude for the gift, creation, and through ascetic attunement to the presence of the provident Upholder of the world. It is the human openness of meditative receptivity to "the ground's loving offer of grace."<sup>13</sup> In addition, the latter is an abiding awareness of the orientation of all material creation--an "obedient" reaching out, led by conscious human beings---to its Source.<sup>14</sup>

And to conclude this introduction, the fundamental task to fulfil in this paper will be to describe and explain the functional interconnection between the symbols arising from these two forms of interiority in opening consciousness to ever widening horizons of reality in response to a transcendent experience. Also, the analysis of these experiences to follow unearths both an ontological and religious character to the experience which depends upon a double interiority. Practically speaking, the presence of this dual interiority, as a stage of meaning in consciousness, in turn has an indebtedness to philosophy as a virtue which actuates the noetic power of full reason in human nous with the perfected ease of intellectual virtue. It also depends upon the virtue of religion, *religio*, which actuates the moral power of ascending in surrendering eros to infinite Goodness. Religion, and with its constitutive word and ritual act, integrates the ordered spirit with matter and thus the divine with the human as an embodied spirit. Thus the call and

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<sup>13</sup>William M. Thompson, "Philosophy and Meditation: Notes on Eric Voegelin's View", in The Politics of the Soul, pp. 124 - 125.

<sup>14</sup>Kenneth L. Schmitz, "Modernity Meets Tradition", in Crisis (12 April 1994), pp. 32 - 36.

response of revelation flourishes in its human subject through the correlative symboling of these melded interiorities interpreting the transcendent experience. Hence as Voegelin writes, “the structure of theophanic experiences reaches from pneumatic center to a noetic periphery.”<sup>15</sup>

The transcendent experiences that Roy takes up in his book fit under the broader category of Voegelin’s “experiences of transcendence” that he studied and interpreted in his work as a philosopher. In the second section of this paper I will provide a summary definition of Roy’s understanding of these experiences, sufficient examples to illustrate exactly what they are to distinguish them as “vertical” experiences of transcendence in contrast to “horizontal” experiences of transcendence,<sup>16</sup> analyze and describe the elements of these experiences, and in sum, elucidate these experiences as a fact. I will also discuss the revelatory import of these experiences and their ability to disclose the truth of reality, both human and divine.

However, I must first make a distinction, another disclaimer actually, in regard to both authors’ understanding of these experiences. Neither writer would categorize such experiences as a form of mysticism. If we used the natural/supernatural theorem, we must classify these experiences as “natural” phenomena in the lived experiences of your average human being living in the de-divinized, secular societies of the here and now. Hence, as we mentioned, a study of

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<sup>15</sup>Eric Voegelin, The Ecumenic Age, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), p. 244.

<sup>16</sup>Karol Wojtyla distinguishes between horizontal and vertical transcendence in his book, The Acting Person. The object of the former are the still finite, abstracted “transcendentals” of the good, of beauty, of truth. The objective of vertical transcendence is the infinite and in this transcendence the human being achieves “ascendency to his own dynamism.” Art will deal in both forms of transcendence but Roy’s transcendental experience are specific restricted to vertical transcendence. See Karol Wojtyla, The Acting Person, trans. By Andrzej Potocki (Dordrecht, Holland, Boston: U.S.A.: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), pp. 155-6, 179 - 81.

them would be able to cast light on the “theophanic” nature of every human being, how one can become the mature human or *spoudaios*, thus develop “anthropological order” to use Voegelin’s terminology. Or, they point to the essential “human openness to the infinite” in Roy’s transcendental anthropology. The context of the following review of the transcendent experience and the purpose of the paper lies in the search for order—in the natural world and as a human delegated task from God.

The experiences which are under investigation in my paper can and often do happen outside of a religious or philosophical setting even if they do have philosophical and religious implications. They are transient, fleeting, and come at the beginning rather than at the apex or final stage of living out the life of a mature spiritual humanity.<sup>17</sup> In a word, they are not differentiated sufficiently in their content to be described as mystical. They await translation.

These experiences are revelatory; they reveal the full dynamism of our transcendent nature to us and the spiritual timeless reality of the “Metaxy”. Therefore, I am making a distinction between mysticism and revelation. It is very true that Voegelin does write about the mystic consciousness of the philosopher.<sup>18</sup> And with the transcendent experience, there may be what Henri Bergson describes as the “whisper of an echo of mysticism”. Certainly one can point to the beginnings of luminosity—that characterizes the mystic consciousness---with such

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<sup>17</sup>Roy, p. 127, 134.

<sup>18</sup>Henri Bergson, The Two Sources of Morality and Religion, trans. by R.A. Audra, C. Brereton with the assistance of W.H. Carter (Notre Dame, ID: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), p. 214. Voegelin does refer to the “mystic consciousness” of those graced individuals in history whose experiences of divine reality led to humanity’s “leaps in being.” Eric Voegelin, The Drama of Humanity and other Miscellaneous Papers, 1939 - 1985, edited with an Introduction by William Petropulos and Gilbert Weiss, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin 33 (Columbia and London: The University of Missouri Press, 2004), p. 361.

experiences because reason's horizon has been stretched by opening to infinity. The new light of the infinite Nous forms its horizon illuminating the pondering and reflection that the one who undergoes a transcendent experience performs over and over again in life.

Louis Roy uses the scholastic distinction between habitual and actual grace to particularize the experiences. The transcendent experience is an instance of actual grace, he writes; we should look upon it as a memorable call regardless of any choice to respond and explore its implications. These experiences can be given before and/or during the development of a differentiation of consciousness and its fruition into a matured, abiding interiority.<sup>19</sup> Existential consciousness in the here and now is the site of these experiences. Their purpose is both timely and practical because they allow historically situated humans in contemporary societies to recognize life as one lived in the "In-Between of divine and human poles.

A brief review of Eric Voegelin's definition of "experiences of transcendence" will help set the context of the definition of the transcendent experiences in Roy's book. A simple definition Voegelin gives for these experiences is that they are ones "that impel toward reflection and do so because they have excited consciousness to the 'awe' of existence. There is a call and response movement to these experiences because there is first "the irrupting experience" and then, "the excitements they induce", both of which result in an "attunement" of consciousness to the problems of reality raised.<sup>20</sup> The content of these experiences has to do with the excitements arising from "an experience of transcendence in space, time, matter, history, wishful

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<sup>19</sup>Roy, p. 140.

<sup>20</sup>Voegelin, Anamnesis, p. 36.

dreams and wishful times”.<sup>21</sup> What ever the mode they take, they are experiences of a timeless spiritual transcendent order. By means of anamnesis they will instigate a participatory manner of existing in the tension between life in the temporal/material world and the timeless, spiritual transcendent order grounded in divine being which has been opened up in these experiences.<sup>22</sup> They introduce us into a participation in being in which whatever one may know, one knows oneself as a part of being. They include an experience of movement in the direction of a more eminent degree of belonging to reality and of tensioned questing due to the attraction of reality.<sup>23</sup>

The experiences of transcendence as Voegelin defines them will likely occur in one of two forms. There may be the sudden, surprising irruption of the Ineffable—the Larger Reality—that will characterize some experiences of transcendence which in turn almost compels human response. The permanent sudden change these experiences effect opens a new dimension of reality. Paul’s parabolic “thief that comes in the night” or Jesus’ advice to be ready for the coming of the bridegroom exemplifies the unexpected serendipity of such experiences. A good example is Voegelin’s encounter with the legend of “the Monk of Heisterbach”, one that still excited him in his old age.

However, one could also describe the nature of these experiences as a steady percolating unrest that lies just at the edge of consciousness which now and then forces itself into our direct attention with a feeling of instant recognition of reality. These are the questions of where from and/or what-for that stem from the condition of everyday life. Or one thinks of Augustine’s

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 37

<sup>22</sup>Sandoz, “Introduction”, Collected Works 12, pp. xii, xx -xxi.

<sup>23</sup>Eugene Webb, “Eric Voegelin’s Theory of Revelation,” The Thomist 42, 1 (January, 1978), pp. 100 - 101.

“restless heart.” Voegelin speaks of “man’s experience of his being pulled in various directions among which he has to choose the right one.”<sup>24</sup> Then there are life’s serious mysteries: i.e. life and death, order and disorder, etc., which when encountered, stimulate transcendent wondering.

If we keep in mind then, that experiences of transcendence arise from the very dynamism of the human psyche, or from human unrestricted openness to infinity, it should be clear that such experiences are an ever present even if largely unnoticed phenomena of ordinary human existence. Given the great “pneumatic” and “noetic” differentiations of the primary experience of the cosmos, it is often the engendered symbol or community carried interpretation preserving these “leaps in being” which can, when encountered by individual persons, trigger the attunement to what is an equivalency experience of transcendence. In fact, notwithstanding the possibility of the dramatic experience of transcendence, and this is the type of experience that Roy deals with in his book and are in my title, the heuristic catalyst of community symbols of meaning coupled with the experience of transcendence integral to the unique acts of these virtues is the more normal cause leading individuals to the recognition of the presence of a multitudinous unnoticed experiences of transcendence that echo these major revelatory moments in history, ignored perhaps due to undifferentiated consciousness.<sup>25</sup>

The experience that Roy identifies as a transcendent one, and to which we now turn, is an example of the first type of experience of transcendence we have described. It is an exceptional, unusual event that will be an always treasured, easy to remember time of special

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<sup>24</sup>Eric Voegelin, “The Gospel and Culture”, Collected Works 12, p. 183.

<sup>25</sup>There will be a transcendent experience that the very agency of a transcendent act will produce upon the agent of the act but this is another paper.

grace and insight for the individual who has one. Roy defines the transcendence experience as “an apprehension of the infinite through feeling, in a particular circumstance”.<sup>26</sup> Since he uses the word apprehension Roy is also speaking of a “knowledge” revealed, a fresh discovery with the element of surprise due to the “uncanny dimension of reality” it has opened up. It is driven home, he writes, by a peculiar kind of feeling that this dimension goes far beyond the limits of normal life. It is a dimension that cannot be artificially closed off and that commands absolute respect.<sup>27</sup> He uses the word feeling because such experiences entail the affective recognition of something ultimate which in turn is a call both to contemplation and to engagement with the perceived ultimate. The aesthetic or artistic feeling which imparts a special kind of knowing is the model that Roy will use, then, to explain how a transcendent experience carries its attraction, its powerful presence, and meaning.<sup>28</sup>

Roy lists six elements to explain the transcendent experience. First, there is a preparation or the cognitive or affective setting that pre-disposes one to the experience. Second, there is a specific occasion or the immediate factors that trigger the experience. Third and fourth are the real experience seen from “two sides” as it were. The feeling implies an intimacy reached, an interiority found and/or the whole world is “felt” in representation. The feeling is accompanied by a compulsion to contemplate this happening and its implications. At the same time a discovery which is a new insight strikes home, one with “cosmic import” and unrestricted significance—all pointing to the “noetic” function of the feeling. The fifth element

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<sup>26</sup>Roy, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 3 - 4.

<sup>28</sup>Roy, pp. 5 - 6.

is the follow-up reflection or interpretation. It occurs in two stages: first the one of dawning awareness and wonder and then, the attempt to understand more which will drive a search or a recourse to the community held public symbols to aid interpretation we have mentioned above. Finally, Roy speaks about the fruit of the transcendent experience. There will always be a benefit that a person obtains from it—a cognition, a conversion, a wisdom, for example. The fruit may mature over years of time, Roy writes. Perhaps even a lifetime will be need for the fruit to be fully formed ; one thinks again of Voegelin’s experience of the Monk at Heisterbach.

Roy writes that there are many modes in which the transcendent experience can occur. He gives four examples of transcendent experiences: aesthetic, ontological, ethical and love.<sup>29</sup> Roy does not give an example of a religious transcendent experience, which I would classify as the most transcendent level of the ethical or moral mode of response to divine reality, partly because he wants to underscore the broader occurrence of these experiences beyond any formally religious setting and partly, I do believe, because he finds the religious motif in all forms of these experiences. Roy’s definition of the word experience and transcendence, which follows, demonstrate the religious and the ontological character of these experiences.

Roy calls experience a “weasel” word. It will not carry its more parochial meaning of practical wisdom in the context of its use in the phrase transcendent experience. It means, rather, an unusually moving and memorable single event that is an adventure enabling life to be felt in more breadth and strength.<sup>30</sup> This word implies an immediacy with which something real is grasped, thus already one senses the “ontological” realm of meaning. The word experience

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<sup>29</sup>Roy, Chapter 2, “Narratives”, pp. 14 - 22.

<sup>30</sup>Roy, p. 147.

also can connote the possibility of universal meanings that can be shared. So even though I may be talking about “my experience”, I am not talking about a private matter but rather a something of universal import, Suffering as an experience exemplifies our point. Suffering is something all humans undergo; when it is our experience of suffering, we receive an awareness of a common circumstance of life.<sup>31</sup> Finally, an experience can result from human action or response to events or be the result of an “undergoing” or receptivity to happenings in life.<sup>32</sup>

When an experience is a transcendent one it reaches the infinite.<sup>33</sup> Hence, the transcendent in the context of this paper is always ontologically more than the finite world, it is a non-objectified mystery. The human ability to have a transcendent experience is based upon the work of that form of consciousness that is participatory and is structured with an intentionality that intends and loves that which lies beyond the limits of any known finite horizon of truth and goodness.<sup>34</sup> As we have explained using Karol Wojtyla’s vocabulary, the transcendence at work in this experience is not horizontally aimed at a this-worldly phenomena, a “transcendental”, but rather it ascends vertically towards that which absolutely surpasses the universe of finite being in the broad terms of meaningfulness, truth, worth, being, etc.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 155. It could be mentioned here that this is the very form of consciousness that secularism destroys. Mircea Eliade calls non-religious consciousness the “second fall” for the human race because secularism pushes awareness of the depths where God and humans meet into un-consciousness, a complete forgetfulness of the ground of existence. Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane: the Nature of Religion (San Diego/New York/London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1959) p. 213.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 155 - 160.

Some examples of transcendent experiences will help to clarify this description and analysis of them drawn from Roy. I will provide an example of “ontological experience” and of a religious experience. The former is from Roy’s chapter, “Narratives” that records transcendent experiences.<sup>36</sup> It is an episode reported by Arthur Koestler, a Hungarian writer who was jailed in Spain for fighting the Fascists. To pass the long hours he was scratching mathematical formula on the wall. In thinking about Euclid’s proof of unlimited prime numbers he remembered the aesthetic rather than intellectual satisfaction he always had with this theory.

Suddenly he understood the reason for this enchantment: “the scribbled symbols on the wall represented one of the rare cases when a meaningful and comprehensive statement about the infinite is arrived at by precise and finite means.” Even though the infinite was “mystical mass” it was possible to gain some knowledge of it in a non-ambiguous manner. “The significance of this swept over me like a wave”, Koestler wrote, . . . “ [which] had originated in an articulate verbal insight, but this evaporated at once, leaving in its wake only a wordless essence, a fragrance of eternity, a quiver of the arrow in the blue.”<sup>37</sup> Koestler goes on to describe his experience as a “state more real” than any other personal experience; he felt he was in touch “real reality” and “the hidden order of things”. It was a participatory experience in the whole of reality for him, a “process of dissolution and limitless expansion which is sensed as the ‘oceanic feeling’” bequeathing in its event “the peace that passeth all understanding.”<sup>38</sup>

Roy writes that Koestler’s experience was an ontological one. It had supreme clarity

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 14 - 24.

<sup>37</sup>Arthur Koestler, The Invisible Writing (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1961), pp. 428 - 30, in Roy, pp. 16-17.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., pp. 17 -18.

even as it was incommunicable by its nature. “Its ontological character appears in the impression that . . . he, Koestler was . . . is in touch with ‘real reality’, the hidden order of things.” He was filled with the certainty not only that a vaster order of reality existed, but also that it was this order that brought all meaning to existence. It was the occasion then that stimulated the ontological character of this experience, and gave it an intellectual, noumenal content, which was his deep serious thinking about Euclid’s proof that the number of primes is infinite.

For an example of a religious transcendent experience I will draw upon an event related to me by my daughter’s sister-in-law when she heard I was giving a talk on “transcendent experiences.” Immediately, Teresa, (this is her name) remarked, “I had a transcendent experience”, and eagerly proceeded to relate it. Once, when she was a young girl, her next door neighbor came over and urged her to see something in the neighbor’s back yard. It was dusk and already starting to get dark. In a grove behind the neighbor’s house there were thousands of fireflies moving and spiraling, creating a bright swirl of light, that inundated the back yard with its brilliant glow. Tera’s experience induced her awe in face of a revealed “greatness” to the material world of time and space; it was the cosmos itself taking on an ability to call forth wonder via the marvels therein; that generated her praise of nature’s mysterious glory. Her experience can be characterized as an “hierophany. Mircea Eliade’s life-long research has recorded the repetitiveness of the hierophany in the history of religion; in each hierophanic event something sacred shows itself within ordinary matter. Eliade writes that it will always be the same mysterious act: the irruption through our physical sense knowledge of something of a

wholly Other order.<sup>39</sup>

Such an experience of the infinite in ordinary *matter* is then a religious one. One of the best phenomenological descriptions of the religious transcendent experience comes in the work of Rudolf Otto in his book, The Idea of the Holy. Using Abraham's religious experiences of God as his model, he describes the experience as one of awe-filled surrender to the "numinous." Such experiences always involve a great emotion, one of the creature conscious of the overwhelming dependency of its creature-hood in the presence of the Holy that creates. The emotion is a unique, *sui generis* feeling which "appears as a strange and mighty propulsion towards an ideal good know only to religion." The experience of the "ineffable numinous" gives an overplus of meaning to the word goodness. Indeed, in one's future pondering one soars in spirit to complete goodness so mysteriously present in the concrete material circumstance of the brief moment of the event.

Teresa's religious transcendent experience has remained with its intensity in her memory, even when she was a young woman enjoying a baby shower to prepare for the birth of her first baby. There was also an ontological character to this experience that also remained and that is Teresa's awareness of the actual being of her noetic powers to be the site of this encounter with transcendence and the continued awe at existence she felt through life when she remembered it.

We can say as much for the ontological transcendent experience of Arthur Koestler. He saw it as a "seeing the light" which induced a spiritual and intellectual search and a struggle that

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<sup>39</sup>Mircea Eliade, p. 11.

altered the course of his life.<sup>40</sup> My point is that both of these experiences had a ontological and religious character. One can point to their rational and “non-rational” contents. On the one hand there is a concomitant consciousness of created-ness and a “metaphysical feeling of absolute dependence.”<sup>41</sup> On the other this is matched with the contingent feeling of creature-hood and the overwhelming nothingness in contrast to the Sacredness revealed. There is both an experience of the trust-ably true and a provoked loving response to the not-able-to-be controlled serendipity of Divine benevolence surprising one in life. Finally, a life long response which is both moral and intellectual comes in the event of the call to both mind and heart.

To conclude this paper I want to return to its theme of order as served by the transcendent experience and the interpreting engendered symbols arising from the great “leaps in being” in human history. First, in regards to a common order in any modern society, a more like-mindedness can arise in lieu of the ontological and religious motifs in the transcendent experience and the wealth of interpreting symbols held in the religious and philosophic tradition. I can explain this best by referring to the acts of each virtue and hence, the common experience stemming from their act/interpreting symbol complexes and the common interiority cultivated. The paramount acts interpreted by religious symbols are prayer and sacrifice; those of philosophy are questing inquiry into reality and relentless noetic search into meaning in the pursuit of the truth of existence motivated by love of wisdom, all acts of transcendence.

The interiority such acts excavate is in both cases best summed up in terms of first, the transcendence and secondly, the integration found in the depths of the soul opened out to divine

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<sup>40</sup>Roy, pp. 19 - 20.

<sup>41</sup>Roy, p. 108.

reality by these acts. As I wrote above, there is a possibility of shared, equivalent experience of transcendence and integration emerging from the depths of every human psyche because it is the place where all reality meets in the ordered wholeness of all being. Generally speaking, it is philosophy which extends the human mind and heart out in a transcendence to being and hence, Voegelin has referred to the task of the philosopher as one of “translating experiences of transcendence”. And it is religion, with its root word of *religio*, meaning to bond, that brings a cohesion to humans in their societies as it fosters a surrendering union to the Creator in all, to which we could ascribe the function of integration.

But this is one of emphasis because you can find in both religion and philosophy the work of both transcendence and integration. Voegelin, the philosopher, has described the common order arising from equivalent experiences coming out of the ontological depths in terms of transcendence and integration. In terms of transcendence he writes about the human nous discovered to be the site of transcendence and the human faculty of ascending to the visions of being pulled by the divine nous Itself. In that discovery there is a recognition of reality as open and stretching between two poles, divine and human. This is the metaxy, the in-between of existence between a timeless spiritual order and a time and space inhabitation of the physical world. Order is this structure and humans must be attuned to it and adhere to it as one that is not one of their making.<sup>42</sup> In terms of integration the discovery of order in the structure of reality brings a call to participation in the community of being, with God, the human, world and society making up the mysterious, primordial four-fold structure of being. Thus philosophy brings the the order of being into the human spirit with noetic differentiation of consciousness.

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<sup>42</sup>Voegelin, Autobiographical Reflections, p. 75.

Religion with its acts of prayer and sacrifice will foster a unique and special form of interiority which adds to the breadth and depth of common human understandings of order. I think a final distinction is appropriate at this point. First, we should mention that religion, qua religion,<sup>43</sup> deals with the relation of the material world to its Creator, the ultimate integration then. Both religion and philosophy engage in an endless seeking for the ground and source of being and for this reason, religion has been called the “first philosophy”. But religion seeks the presence of that Ground in the individuated diversity of matter. More even, a phenomenology of religious interiority finds an openness and awareness of the compenetration of the divine spirit and matter throughout creation. Religion creates an attitude of obedient response and co-operation to the purpose of the Creator shaped by great feelings of gratitude for the reception of one’s existence. It involves praise, and desires a union with the Creator’s act. Religion produces the *excessus* of a pro-creative donation of self to the Creator’s project of creation. Voegelin writes about this.

The later creation story in Genesis, in affirming the idea that Israel is the expansion of divine creation into the order of humans and society, introduces the notion of obedient co-operation with the Creator or procreative agency (which through religion is continued by the human agent).

[ In the generations of creation] the earlier one procreating the later ones with the creative assistance of Yahweh . . . No modern translation can adequately render the Innuendo of the Hebrew text that the first generation of creation, that is, the heavens and the earth, become procreative with . . . Yahweh in the work of creation. . . . [Hence,] the

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<sup>43</sup>Of course religion is always joined with a faith in the concrete and the faith—Christianity, Judaism, Islam, etc.,—will inform the practice of religion which it serves. However, religion of itself as a human activity has its unique character and finality.

order of being is meant to rise . . . [via] the procreative response of his creation.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, the disclaimer: religion at its heart is both the recognition of God's excellences on behalf of creation by his human creature endowed with the intelligence and will to do so, and a real involvement through obedient surrender in the very work of creation. So religion's unique purposes are cosmic justice and order. Philosophy alone cannot meet all the exigencies for order in material creation. Religion's contribution and religious interiority are an irreplaceable component in ordering existence despite religion's proclivity to derail and deform into spiritless doctrinalization. Voegelin recognize the need for the religion. He wrote, "the prophets, philosophers, and saints, who can translate the order of the spirit in the practice of conduct without institutional support are rare." For the perpetuation of the great leaps in being, therefore, religion as an institution with all its wealth of revelation, word, ritual and symbol is needed for the "survival of . . . the order of the spirit." Even if such reliance "is apt to kill the order it is supposed to preserve."<sup>45</sup> There is another Aquinas adage that is apropos: "the corruption of the best (i.e.), the first philosophy, becomes the worse.

Moreover, even though we have quoted Voegelin as insisting that there is in fact a content to his consciousness that has not come to it through sense experience, the very fact of the need for the concrete engendered symbol to translate the spiritual experience is an indication that all knowledge begins with the phantasm. The mind must be anchored in particular creation if it is to incarnate the abstract or spiritual and thus bring it to consciousness and knowledge.

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<sup>44</sup>Voegelin, Israel and Revelation, p. 214.

<sup>45</sup>Voegelin, Israel and Revelation, p. 427.

Voegelin knows this very well and wrote about the imperative for an objectification in language. He writes, “it was the genius of Cicero . . . (who “invented religio”) . . . to discern . . . the necessity of protecting the truth through language symbols, through a ‘word’ that incarnates the truth of divine presence in reality.”<sup>46</sup> Religion thus provides its unique, *sui generis* service to the eros in creative divine reality to compenetrates the world of matter, everywhere at its depths. It does this through its constitutive word and through its ritual act.<sup>47</sup>

But we are speaking of one of two melded interiorities. It is religion, as the heart that seeks the beloved Source of all and hears the call in the time and space of concrete existence, which in turn depends on the noetic differentiation that prepares the human nous to translate and know, and so to touch, receive and learn from the communicating divine. To re-quote Voegelin, “the structure of theophanic experiences reaches from pneumatic center to noetic periphery”. I would add that without religion creation can lose its importance and there is a real danger of gnostic disregard of the world; in turn without philosophy the loving heart does not know it can know or understand the faith that is God’s responsive gift to religious love.

In sum, prayer, the rising of the mind and heart in a habitual way to God in praise, thanksgiving, adoration, obedient surrender to the Creator’s purposes brings a transcendence into religious interiority. Sacrifice bespeaks of human attempts to be in communion with the divine.<sup>48</sup> Sacrifice reflects human attempts to take up their abode in objective reality whose

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<sup>46</sup>Voegelin, *EA*, p. 45.

<sup>47</sup>Several authors have explained the how and why ritual “works” to bring the spiritual a material presence. For example, Erik Erikson, Paul Ricoeur, Mircea Eliade.

<sup>48</sup>Bergson, pp. 202 - 203.

source is the divine. Humans enact sacrifices both to express a debt understood as owed for the reception of one's own existence, and to integrate the spiritual reality of that obedient surrender symbolized by the sacrifice into the very matter of the world. These sentiments express the core of religious interiority. The order that arises in religion when joined to that of philosophy creates the conditions of possibility for a common human order--- of the ordered heart and noetically vibrant spirit, both integrated into the matter of humanity in obedience to the revelatory call present in each transcendent experience of the incarnating eros which characterizes Divine Reality.

But of course interiority exists as a stage of meaning in the religious and philosophical differentiated consciousness. As we have written above, in contrast to deformed, restricted consciousness, the dual differentiated consciousness with its larger expanded awareness and attunement to the call and response movement of reality is also the key to what Voegelin defines as anthropological order. Such order as meaningful and attractive will "catch on", forming ordered social fields, and is the basic building block of order in any society, and formatively so for the political theory upholding democracy.<sup>49</sup>

I can use the words tension and presence to give a content to the structure of the ordered consciousness that founds anthropological order. In philosophical differentiation, or noetic as is the case, the tension which structures consciousness is its always unsatisfied, intentionality for

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<sup>49</sup>“When articulation expands throughout society, the representative will also expand until the limit is reached where the membership of society has become politically articulate down to the last individual.”: thus the importance of anthropological order. Eric Voegelin, Modernity without Restraint: The New Science of Politics, Collective Works of Eric Voegelin 5, edited with an Introduction by Manfred Henningsen (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2000), pp. 119, 149-50.

truth residing in the “Beyond” of divine Nous. Luminosity represents the presence of Reality coming to its own awareness within creation in the consciousness of the human being who is part of that reality. In religious consciousness the tension lies in the heart, raised to awareness of its longing, loving desire for the good, always unsatisfied until it reaches the Good in itself. The habitual enactment of this love in response to the call of such goodness brings the presence of the Sacred as a structure into religious consciousness. But there is more with religion: the world itself becomes transparent for the presence of the Creator through the medium of the “material” religious word and ritual.

Arthur Koestler’s own interpretation of his experience lend support for these concluding remarks concerning the paper’s thesis. An examination of the Koestler’s writings exemplifies this ability of combined religious and philosophical engendered symbols as able to comprehensively interpret the transcendent experience in its revelatory insights about true order. Koestler employs the ontological symbols of “real reality” and the “hidden order of things.” He *knows* through this experience being in its marvelous wholeness and trusts the meaning that a vaster order of being brings to human existence in time and space. But he also uses the religious symbol, “a process of dissolution and limitless expansion” that expresses the union sought by religion with the Maker/Source of creation and which institutes order in the material world. Transcendent irruption of the divine calls forth from his interiority the interpreting symbols —ones publically promulgated and already made familiar by religion and philosophy--- to order his spirit and to integrate it into material creation in an act of conscious surrender to reality and this becomes an instance of anthropological order which will have its impact on all. His is just one example among many hence, the possibility of commonly shared

experiences of order also.