The First mystics? Some Recent Accounts of
Neolithic Shamanism

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The First Mystics?

Remember that it is not you who sustain the root; the root sustains you (Rom. 11:18).

1. Introduction: Voegelin, Mysticism and the Stone Age

Before discussing the evidence and significance for political science of shamanism in the late or Upper Paleolithic period (~50KYBP-10KYBP), I would like to make two preliminary points. The first concerns the meaning of Voegelin’s use of the term “mysticism” and why it can, with caution, be applied to shamanism. The second concerns the issue of why political scientists might be interested in prehistoric, or as we now say, early historic periods, which includes the late Paleolithic, the focus of this paper, but also the Neolithic (10KYBP-5KYBP). Voegelin became interested in prehistory during the late 1960s, though arguably his concern with human symbolism and consciousness, which would include prehistoric consciousness, began forty years earlier. In any event, we conclude this first section with a discussion of a few of his relevant remarks prior to his encounter with Marie König in the fall of 1968. The next section deals with her arguments and why Voegelin found them attractive. In the final section we examine some of the recent discussions of Shamanism, chiefly by David Lewis-Williams and his colleagues (and criticism of their views) in the context of the late Paleolithic. I might add that this paper is intended to be even more exploratory and suggestive than is usual even for the EVS. Given the existing controversies among specialists and the enormous amount of material still to be digested, in no way is it intended to be conclusive.

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The short but superficial answer to the implicit question of my title, “were shamans the first mystics?” is: no. Quite apart from specialized arguments among anthropologists regarding the meaning of the term “shamanism,” to which we advert below, the commonsensical reason for answering this way is obvious enough: “mysticism” is a term apparently coined by Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagitica (fl. ca. 500 AD) to symbolize an experience of reality that transcended the noetic and pneumatic experiences and symbolizations of divine
presence. As Voegelin remarked in a letter to his friend Gregor Sebba, the term “mysticism” refers to “the awareness that the symbols concerning the gods, and the relations of gods and men, whether myth or Revelation, are secondary or derivative to the primary experience of divine presence as that of a reality beyond any world-contents and beyond adequate symbolization by an analogical language that must take its meaning from the world-content.” In this sense, he went on, Plato and Thomas were mystics: “It may horrify you: But when somebody says that I am a mystic, I am afraid that I cannot deny it” (CW, 30:751).

Whether Sebba was horrified or not, the first thing to note about the term “mysticism” and about the experience to which it refers is that they are comparatively recent, at least relative to the enormous 50,000-year span that concerns us at present. To speak of “Stone Age mysticism” is clearly anachronistic, even if we assume that shamanism existed at that time. Moreover, mysticism is (to use a Voegelinian term), a highly differentiated symbol, referring, as he said, to the inadequacy of world-immanent analogies to convey the experience of world-transcendent divine presence. Shamanic symbols, as we shall see, are by comparison highly compact.

On the other hand—and leaving aside for the moment the question of evidence regarding the spiritual life of the Upper Paleolithic—that Pseudo-Dionysius was the first to give this experience a name does not mean that this particular stratum of reality had not been experienced previously even if humans had not developed the language symbols to refer to it explicitly. That is, we would argue (but not on this occasion) that the experience indicated by the term “mysticism” can also be expressed in the more compact symbolism of the shamans. Central to that longer argument is a justification of the validity of Voegelin’s concepts of compactness and differentiation and an analysis of his discussion of the equivalences of experiences and symbolizations (cf. CW 12: 115ff). These hints will have to suffice at present as an indication that, for purposes of this paper, we accept without analysis Voegelin’s arguments and distinctions as valid.

However necessary such simplifications and assumptions may be—and we must make some additional ones below—they indicate another problem. By naming an experience “mystical” we need be aware as well of a temptation, as it were, that seems endemic to naming in the first place, namely that the name will be understood as the reality. In the high middle ages, for example, in the generation after St. Thomas, this particular problem was highlighted in the split between the dogmatic theology of nominalism associated with Ockham and the mystical theology of Eckhart. By dogma is meant the separation of symbols, usually words,
from the experiences of reality to which they give articulate linguistic form. When this separation takes place, symbols can be treated as truths independent of their originary experience. The opposition of dogmatic truths sometimes expands to what Voegelin called a dogmatomachy, leading spiritually sensitive observers to recall, time and again, the derivative status of dogma. They invariably do so on the grounds of mystic experience or mystic insight into the fundamental reality experienced in sufficient profoundness to indicate the derivative and so comparatively superficial character of dogma. Voegelin mentioned this pattern several times, often in connection with Bodin and Bergson (e.g., CW, 6: 393-8), but it may also be detected in Ficino and Pico during the Renaissance as well as in Pseudo-Dionysius in antiquity, or Hugh of St. Victor in the twelfth century (CW, 21: 47ff). The outcome, so to speak, of the rejection of dogma on the grounds of mystical experience, as with Bodin or Bergson, for example, is toleration (CW, 23:196-204; 239-40). Finally, on this point, it should be mentioned that Voegelin did not simply refuse to deny his own mystic inclinations, which in the context of the Sebba letter looks like a methodological rather than a spiritual precept, but he considered his own work to be a continuation of “classical mysticism” by means of a restoration of “the problem of the Metaxy for society and history” (Voegelin to Sandoz, 30/12/1971. HI, 27:10).

In their introduction to The History of Political Ideas, Hollweck and Sandoz distinguished between “good and bad mysticism” (CW, 19:35). Apart from Bodin, Bergson and Pseudo-Dionysius, the “good mystics” included Hugh, Eckhart, Tauler, and the Anonymous of Frankfurt, each of whom the Church categorized as being a heretic (CW, 22:136; see also Voegelin’s remarks on heresy, CW 29:541-2; 33:338). Voegelin also borrowed Jaeger’s term “mystic philosophers” to refer to the generation of Parmenides and Heraclitus (CW, 15: 274 ff). Indeed, in a letter to Aaron Gurwitsch, Voegelin spoke of the “origins of philosophy in mysticism” (CW, 29:645).

Among the “bad” mystics are ranged a mixed group distinguished from one another in Voegelin’s writings by the application of different adjectives. The mysticism of More and Cusanus, for example, was vague and indeterminate (CW, 21: 257, 265; 22: 117, 125); Siger de Brabant was described as an “intellectual” mystic (CW, 20: 195; see also 185ff and Peter von Sivers’ note, p. 188): the Amaurians and Ortliebians were “pantheistic” mystics (CW, 22: 155-7; 180-82); Spinoza was a “cabalistic” mystic (CW, 25: 126ff); Schelling and Hegel were “epigonal” (CW, 25: 214); Nietzsche was a “defective” or an “immanentist”

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1 See also R.C. Zaehner, Our Savage God, (London, Collins, 1974) which makes a similar argument in favour of this distinction.
mystic (CW, 25: 257-61; 264-5; 296); and finally the “People of God,” Bakunin, Comte, and Marx were all “chiliastic” or “activist” mystics (CW, 22: 169-78; 188-90; 26: 294ff; 304ff). It might be observed that Voegelin several times mentioned Rudolf Otto’s splendid study Mysticism East and West (1932). The modest conclusion towards which this brief survey directs us is that, for Voegelin, mysticism was useful analytic category.

So far as the other questions implied in my title are concerned, there is but one indexed reference to shamans in the Collected Works and it refers to William of Rubruck’s report of a famous debate at the court of the Mongol Khan in Karakorum at which Nestorians, Latin Christians, Buddhists and shamans disputed the superiority of their respective religions. It was a kind of precursor in everyday reality to Bodin’s literary production in the Colloquium Heptaploemes (see CW, 20: 79-80).

Turning to the second preliminary question: why are political scientists, especially those familiar with the modern political science established by Voegelin, concerned with what is conventionally referred to as prehistoric humanity? The adjective “prehistoric” is not the best. To begin with, it is a nineteenth-century French barbarism, like sociology. Even so, and ignoring its status as a linguistic mongrel, the term “prehistory” does seem to be a necessary starting point. Prehistory is distinguished from history by the existence or nonexistence of documentation and literacy. Given that literacy has been absent from some societies until quite recently, we have an obvious problem that prehistory ends at different times in different places. We will simplify matters by ignoring the problem.

Political scientists usually deal with texts. The absence of texts from the Paleolithic means we must rely on the evidence unearthed (sometimes literally) by archeologists. But what is it that archeologists do that might be relevant to political science? According to one contemporary school called “postprocessural” (discussed below in section three) the goal of archeology “is to resuscitate deceased culture” by interpreting their material remains and artifacts. At the very least this approach seems promising because it allows contemporary human beings to say something meaningful about the extensive phenomena connected to preliterate human existence. Of course, matters are never so simple: Historians of

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2 See, for example, CW, 33:333 and his amusing remarks on Meher Baba, Voegelin to Ernst, 7/01/1974 in CW, 30: 780.
archeology usually distinguish between classical archeologists concerned with the material remains of Greece and Rome and archeologists interested in prehistory—in German Archäologie refers to the former only; the subject-matter of prehistory archeology is usually referred to as Urgeschichte or Frühgeschichte. Prehistorical archeology developed from early modern antiquarianism and was initially mixed up with speculation on such matters as dating the Great Flood and the origins of specific national and ethnic groups. Thus the subject-matter relevant to political science will have to be distinguished from what is of concern to archeologists, the several “schools” of which have different approaches and priorities anyway.

One of the inevitable consequences of the Enlightenment was to separate questions of religious doctrine from those of what, to use a later term, came to be known as natural history. In France and the English-speaking world, Paleolithic archeology grew out of geology not nationalist or ethnic antiquarianism. The speculations of Lyell and Darwin are a well known part of this story. Less well known, but equally important, is the development, particularly in Scandinavia, of principles of chronology. Specifically, Danish and Swedish nationalist antiquarians developed a “three-age theory” that postulated the succession: Stone Age, Bronze Age, and Iron Age. More finely calibrated chronologies soon enough were developed: the Old Stone Age was distinguished from the New; within the Paleolithic, the Lower, Middle, and Upper were distinguished from one another as well as from the Neolithic. Here we would note only that these eras were distinguished chiefly in terms of the predominant tool-making technologies, since stone tools are mostly what is left from these early times for archeologists to study easily. It might also be worth noting that chronology and dating still pose significant problems, despite enormous improvements in calibration.

Leaving aside another complex question regarding the emergence or differentiation of Homo sapiens and stability of the species, it is probably fair to say that most of the nineteenth-century accounts of the origins of stone-age humans relied either on a Darwinian model based on Malthusian liberalism or on the approach of Marx and Engels, neatly fitting new archeological evidence into the argument developed in Engels’ Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State (1884). During the 1920s Gordon Childe advanced a kind of modified

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Marxist approach based on “diffusionism,” a view that Renfrew later mocked as “the diffusion of European barbarism with Oriental civilization.” Renfrew could do so because of the invention of radiocarbon dating in 1947, a technique that made possible the relatively accurate dating of ancient civilizations and societies independent of any postulated Darwinian, Marxist, or diffusionist “theory.” Whatever their shortcomings, the great advantage of such theories was to provide an intelligible and relatively simple story that was, in principle, a single story of human development.

As an aside, I would note that, about the same time as prehistorians were coming to terms with the problem of the disjointedness or discontinuity of early human history, and by implication the discontinuity of all human history, Voegelin was working on a number of problems that he discussed in “Historiogenesis,” the first version of which appeared in 1960. Of particular interest in this context was his eventual rejection of a single line of historical meaning along which various events, societies, civilizations, and so on, can be strung, which was rather similar to Renfrew’s criticism of Childe (Cf. HI, 30:2). Only a brief gesture towards the problem can be made here. Those familiar with Voegelin’s argument can, one hopes, see its bearing on the present problem.

During the 1950s and 1960s archeologists and prehistorians discovered another problem: dating the appearance of Homo sapiens and charting the spread of anatomically or morphologically modern human beings across the globe. There have been plenty of revisions during the past half century: today there is a general agreement that genetic and anatomical evidence suggests the appearance of Homo sapiens in Africa between 100KYBP and 200KYBP. The margin of uncertainty is impressive. Evidence suggestive of what archeologists call symbolic behaviour—the use of pigment, for example—can be dated to around 164 KYBP (± 12KY), a more modest margin of uncertainty.

The interesting point for political science concerning the sites from which the evidence has been collected to make these early estimates, seaside caves in South Africa at Blombos and Pinnacle Point, is not just that the inhabitants used red ochre for symbolic purposes, but that they ate shellfish, mostly brown mussels that South Africans still consume. Gastronomic continuity is always interesting to contemplate, but the real significance of these early mussel-eaters lies elsewhere. As the team leader, Curtis Marean, explained to his boss at the Institute of Human Origins, Don Johanson, people think shellfish are an easy food source to exploit

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8 Renfrew, Prehistory, 41.
9 The term often used today to refer to anyone, whether formally trained as an archeologist, an anthropologist, a paleontologist etc. who is concerned with prehistoric human beings.
because they don’t bite or run away. Not so. They live underwater most of the time and even at normal low tides there is a danger of being washed off the rocks by waves. The only time brown mussels are fully exposed is during low spring tides caused (we would say) by the combined gravitational pull of the sun and the moon. From earth, such tides occur during the appearance of a full and a new moon. The significance of the mussel shells in cave 13B at Pinnacle Point dating from 164K years ago (± 12KY) is that it is highly likely that the fisherman would have developed a tide chart based on the lunar cycle to time their visits to the shore.\textsuperscript{10}

The conclusion of importance to political science is this: about the same time as the genotype \textit{Homo sapiens} was more or less stabilized, which, as noted sometime between 100KYBP and 200KYBP (or to use the site 13B date, around 164 KYBP), this type of human began to engage in “symbolic behaviour” and began to develop a calendar. The calendar in question linked what happened in the sky, namely changes in the appearance of the moon, to changes on earth, namely the appearance of spring tides that made it relatively safe to collect brown mussels from the intertidal area. The first person to make this connection in the remote past (and obviously somebody did) had a great imagination or, to sound more scientific, he or she had a rare cognitive ability.

There are many other exciting problems to consider in a thorough account of these issues, including the implicit question of “more-or-less” genotype stability, before we can consider the phenomena of late Paleolithic shamanism. Consider the following questions. Given widespread agreement that the initial out-of-Africa dispersal (as it is called in homage to Isak Dinesen) took place around 60KYBP, why did it take so long, somewhere between 40KY and 140KY, to develop the great variety of artifacts that occur in the archeological record –“bone, antler, and ivory technologies, the creation of personal ornaments and art, a greater degree of form imposed onto stone tools, a more rapid turnover in artifact types, greater degrees of hunting specialization and the colonization of arid regions”\textsuperscript{11} -- after that date? Did these changes in the tempo of change as well as in extent signal a change in human cognitive capacities? And if so, what? What happened when \textit{Homo sapiens} encountered \textit{Homo neanderthalis}? Why, as early as 30KYBP, were caves and grottoes decorated with images?\textsuperscript{12} And why only in Northwestern Europe?


\textsuperscript{12} Some prehistorians and archeologists connect the extinction of the Neanderthals to the symbolic capability of the newly arrived \textit{Homo sapiens}. The argument, very simply, is that \textit{Homo sapiens} could create symbolically
Does this mean that the familiar sequence noted above, from Stone to Bronze to Iron ages really applies only to this area and that elsewhere the anthropological succession from band to tribe, chiefdom, village, city, empire, etc. may prove more useful? Many of these questions have been addressed by the relatively new subfield of cognitive archaeology, and we shall consider some of their findings in the third section.

To conclude this section, let me remind you of a few of the opening remarks to major studies made by Voegelin that bear upon the problem of early human consciousness and political science. The first is from 1940.

To set up a government is an essay in world creation. Out of a shapeless vastness of conflicting human desires rises a little world of order, a cosmic analogy, a cosmion, leading a precarious life under the pressure of destructive forces from within and without, and maintaining its existence by the ultimate threat and application of violence against the internal breaker of its law as well as the external aggressor. The application of violence, though, is the ultimate means only of creating and preserving a political order; it is not the ultimate reason: the function proper of order is the creation of a shelter in which man may give to his life a semblance of meaning. It is for a genetic theory of political institutions, and for a philosophy of history, to trace the steps by which organized political society evolves from early ahistoric phases to the power units whose rise and decline constitute the drama of history. For the present purpose we may, without further questions, accept the fact that as far back as the history of our Western world is recorded more or less continuously, back to the Assyrian and Egyptian empires, we can trace also in continuity the attempts to rationalize the shelter function of the cosmion, the little world of order, by what are commonly called political ideas. The scope and the details of these ideas vary widely, but their general structure remains the same throughout history, just as the shelter function that they are [destined] to rationalize remains the same (CW, 19:225-6).

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The second is from 1952: “The existence of man in political society is historical existence; and a theory of politics, if it penetrates to principles, must at the same time be a theory of history” (CW, 5:88). The third is from 1956.

God and man, world and society form a primordial community of being. The community with its quaternarian structure is, and is not, a datum of human experience. It is a datum of experience insofar as it is known to man by virtue of his participation in the mystery of its being. It is not a datum of experience insofar as it is not given in the manner of an object of the external world but is knowable only from the perspective of participation in it (CW, 14:39).

The last is from 1966: “The problems of human order in society and history originate in the order of consciousness. Hence the philosophy of consciousness is the centerpiece of a philosophy of politics” (CW, 6: 33).

In 1940, when Voegelin wrote the first introduction of the History of Political Ideas, Western history was not usually considered to have begun with Assyria and Egypt but with Homer or even with later Greek thinkers. Voegelin was already pushing the historical horizon of political science well into the area covered by the Altertumswissenschaft of Eduard Meyer. Indeed, his reference to “early ahistoric phases” may have pushed beyond what even Meyer might have considered proper. Notice as well that, in principle, the creation of a political cosmion from the disorder of passions and against external threats was considered a cosmic analogy that need not, in principle, be limited by any particular set of political institutions. The point of the cosmion, Voegelin stressed, was to provide a shelter within which meaning may flourish.

The opening of The New Science of Politics located philosophy of history at the centre of political philosophy, and the magisterial beginning of Order and History indicated the scope of Voegelin’s political science. Equally important, the quaternarian structure of being is known insofar as human beings participate in it. Hence the final opening sentence, from Anamnesis, which placed philosophy of consciousness at the centre of politics and history. The clarification of the structure of consciousness would also clarify the structure of being.

In his introduction to Anamnesis, David Walsh summarized Voegelin’s insight: “Philosophy of consciousness replaces the one-directionality of philosophy of history” (CW, 6: 17). The question of unidirectionality was addressed in “Historiogenesis” along with its motivating centre in the anxious experience of imperial precariousness. But what of pre-imperial cosmological order? How was it symbolized? How was its precariousness and the anxieties of consciousness aware
of that precariousness expressed? Such questions, it seems to me, were brought into focus by Voegelin’s attention to philosophy of consciousness that was historical in the sense that the subject-matter to be investigated ranged from phenomena dating from remote antiquity to the present, but it was not historiogenetic in the sense that the investigation did not try to cram the archeological and paleontological evidence onto a simple time line or turn it into elements of single story. And yet, obviously the Stone Age preceded our own, which reintroduces the problems of compactness and differentiation, and of equivalences, neither of which are we able to discuss here.

One conclusion to be drawn from this section on mysticism and remote antiquity is that the application of the term to the archeological materials of the Stone Age involves a number of major problems. If they are not insuperable for a Voegelinian approach to political reality, if indeed we can say something intelligible about this evidence, considerable credit for this relatively happy outcome must be accorded to the work of Marie König.

2. Marie König

Marie König was a year older than Voegelin and had a very different personality. She was what the Germans call a “private scholar” (Privatgelehrtin), a mother and grandmother who apparently enjoyed doing her work surrounded by children. She often said that she did not set out to write books or pursue scholarship but was compelled to do so because of the absence of any decent studies on the caves and rock-shelters that she so much enjoyed exploring and observing.

After the war when she began her studies, German archeology, like much of German science, was still affected by the Nazi enthusiasm for Aryan-ness. The work of Gustav Kossina, particularly his two-volume Ursprung und Verbreitung der Germanen (1926-7), was particularly influential and very much in step with National Socialism. Even merely nationalist and folkloric archeologists benefitted from Nazi patronage, the purpose of which was to show that the archaic Germans conformed to the Nazi image. One consequence was that, in the postwar milieu,
German archeologists tended to keep their heads down and get on with digging, measuring, and recording. In short, they avoided “theorizing” in any way, which is to say, they simply passed on existing “theories” from the pre-Nazi period or from France.

Specifically, when König began to study the petroglyphs in the rock-shelters of the Fontainebleau forest and the images on the cave walls at Lascaux, the standard interpretative strategy was to understand the images by analogy with contemporary “primitive” peoples. Indeed, even today such hunter-gatherer peoples are often said to be “living in the Stone Age.” The assumption, called “ethnographic analogy” by archeologists, is that a San or a Navaho exists today or at the time of European contact in a way analogous to a Cro-Magnon, notwithstanding the intervening 35KY. The reigning postwar theorists of “cave art,” Abbé Henri Breuil, in France and Herbert Kühn in Germany, advanced their interpretations on the basis of that assumption. According to König, they also interpreted the images on the basis of untenable and a priori “theories” of primordial history (Urgeschichte) and primordial religion (Urreligion), namely that the images were evidence of magic practice designed to gain control over reality, especially hunting and fertility. As we shall see, some elements of this approach are still favoured by contemporary prehistorians.

König proceeded on the assumption that Stone Age humans were fully capable of abstract speculative thought, a position that is sometimes explicitly stated today by cognitive and postprocessural archeologists. The real problem was that no one understood how cave images expressed such thought. As her biographer, Gabriele Meixner, observed, “precisely the stylization and abstractions in the Paleolithic human’s pictorial world gave her cause to suspect that an ordering spirit (Geist) lay behind these creations.” Accordingly, König’s 1954 book, Das Weltbild des Eiszeitlichen Menschen, examined the Lascaux images in terms of lunar symbols rather than hunting magic. This interpretation was


Meixner, Auf der Suche nach dem Anfang der Kultur: Marie E.P. König, eine Biographie, (Munich, Frauenoffensiv, 1999), 77.

Marburg, Elwert, 1954.

The subtitle to this book, “the sign language of early man,” indicated her thesis. Very simply it was that the “art” in the French caves should be understood as religious imagery or documents. Just as a painting of a dove outside the context of a church ceases to symbolize the Holy Spirit and represents just a bird, so the paintings and images in caves lose their significance when viewed outside that context as “art.”20 Instead of considering the images as magic formulae or as expressions of totemic, primitive, or even shamanic experiences, König argued “that the development of religion began with a primordial image of the world” and that these primordial images could be detected in these early “documents.”21 That is, by looking at the cave images and rock-shelter petroglyphs in terms of the most basic orientation, one discovers in them the expression of the fundamental experiences of reality.

In Voegelin’s terminology, one would call König’s “primordial oneness” or “primordial image” the compact symbolism of “the primary experience of the cosmos,” a term Voegelin began using in the late 1960s. “We must look for explanations based on authentic material discoveries,” König wrote, “but we must do so not simply on the basis of facts in the positivist sense but rather must also take into account the world of the spirit, the supernatural, the supersensory, the realm of faith.”22 If we chose the right interpretative course, she continued, we will be led to the intellectual categories (Denkkategorien) of the high civilizations, the rich spiritual life of which is familiar to us through writings and other documents. Once the notion of the superlatively stupid (urdumm) primitive is abandoned along with the outmoded evolutionary theory that supported it, we need to consider the best way of understanding the spiritual world of early humanity. This approach must be based on the “documents” as she said—Voegelin would likely have referred to the “materials”—namely the evidence found in the tools and images created by early human beings.

König’s example, tool-making, illustrated her point. Tools may be thought of as “materialized ideas” and were typical, not idiosyncratic or random. Hence

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21 *Am Anfang*, 22.
there was an order or a tradition and even a beauty to them. But the first act – of creating an axe from a stone, for example—was entirely creative, an initiative. Once patterned it could be reproduced and inspire other inventions – needles, for example. “Every cultural object,” König said, “concretized a thought,” which means that the thought was primary or determinative of the result. Accordingly, the “tool” was initially multi-purpose before being specialized into knife, scraper, axe, etc. Likewise –and here she followed Arnold Gehlen—with the spiritual development of humanity: in the beginning was a relatively undifferentiated experience and symbolization of the whole.

König provided a commonsensical analysis of the genesis of Homo spiritualis as well as what occasionally amounted to a speculative philosophical anthropology. For example, the experiences of hunger and cold quickly inform anyone of the physical basis of existence. Hunting and control of fire answer that experience with food and warmth—and it is perhaps worth stressing that for large stretches of human prehistory, the inhabitants of, say, South or East Africa, were refugees from extensive glaciation and desertification. In such refugia as existed, food and warmth would be high priorities. But the eyes of early humanity exceeded the ability to do something directly on the world around us (Umwelt): the stars and the sky brought human beings new ideas, but of a different kind, and this, too, needed explanation. Thus the mysterious rhythms of the heavens were seen as being connected to the mysteries of birth, life, and death, as well as practical matters such as estimating the times of low tides to collect brown mussels.

At the same time as hunger was sated and early human beings achieved what Hegel called “sentiment-of-self,” a glance at heaven, as Aristotle said, initiated a new experience for which nothing is to be done except think. No tool, no material embodiment of thought is possible. What is possible is a different mode of cognition that required the imagination or what König called “faith” and Voegelin called “participation.” And at the same time, this mode of cognition was directed at the mystery of birth, life, and death, which are obviously connected to the material issues of eating and keeping warm, but are not exhausted by them. That is, if you don’t eat or keep warm, you die. But even if you do eat and keep warm, you still die. Thus the first mode of consciousness, Hegel’s Selbstgefühl, cannot account for, or be reduced to, the second, Aristotle’s wonder. Wonder is autonomous even while it is dependent upon a body that needs to be fed and kept warm. In addition to the stars and the sky and their rhythms, there were other forces that could not be seen but nevertheless were there –the wind and the seasons, for example-- and still

23 Am Anfang, 30.
others—volcanoes—that, even though they could not be controlled like hunting and keeping warm, could be observed but not measured or anticipated.

To put it another way, part of the primordial image of the world was that it was dangerous, precarious, as Voegelin said in The History of Political Ideas. Humans were at its mercy and so felt dependent, but they could reflect on their dependency and so felt connected to the world and grateful for their connection. Existence may be precarious, but not chaotic; there is order and human existence unfolds within a cosmion. This complex of experiences required special behaviour—a cult and a ritual space could make these invisible realities visible and so accessible. The primordial forces, more fundamental even than the material necessities of food and warmth, were accordingly symbolized not the control them, as contemporary prehistorians almost universally assume, so much as to connect early humans with an invisible reality. In Voegelin’s language, participation in reality, not control of phenomena, was the motivation for this basic experience and symbolization, what he called the primary experience of the cosmos.

“The oldest objects to have been found that were not too old and that therefore raised the question of their cultic purpose,” König wrote, “were spheroids.”\(^{24}\) The oldest of these, she said, dated from the end of the Lower Paleolithic, some 300KYBP. If this dating is accurate, it belongs to the very earliest possible time, according to the fossil record, of human habitation, shortly after the separation of Homo erectus and Homo sapiens. In any event, these spheroids were three or four inches in diameter and so could be held in the palm of the hand. That they were spheroids was of great significance to König. The spheroid, she said, “was the ideal shape (Gestalt) for the as yet undifferentiated fundamental concept (Grundbegriff) because alone it is the perfectly uniform figure” (Figur).\(^{25}\) In addition, the visible cosmos, especially as made evident in the nocturnal motion of the planets and stars, made the sky look like a vault. So, König argued, the cosmos could be represented in this primordial way either from the outside, as a sphere, or from the inside, as a vault with the observer at the centre. The skull, being both spheroid and hollow was highly suitable as a representation of both perspectives. This may be why so many skulls and skull fragments have been preserved. In any event, for one reason or another, skulls have long been treated in a special way.

The undifferentiated cosmos/sphere/vault was, she argued, the primordial and unstructured representation from which developed a more differentiated structure of an above and a below or nether world, often understood to be lying in water--a spring, for example, could also be an entrance to the netherworld.

\(^{24}\) Am Anfang, 32.
\(^{25}\) Am Anfang, 34.
Likewise a cave is a liminal space that, moreover, can serve as a terrestrial representation of the cosmos as a whole. From the Middle Paleolithic, 150KYBP to 50KYBP, or Mousterian (named after a French rock-shelter) spheroids were in continuous use and skulls were treated with care.

Mousterian burial remains, including those of Neanderthals, arranged along an east-west axis, presuppose close observation of the stars and especially of the sun. Such observation of the world axis gave additional structure to the cosmos. This axis, however, cannot be represented by a sphere or a vault, but only by a straight line. Nor can it be derived from a sphere or vault. Even more remarkable, a north-south axis, which also appeared in the Mousterian period, cannot be derived from observation of the rising and setting of the stars but is, so to speak, an act of pure speculation. By the Middle Paleolithic, therefore, humans used their imagination to develop a cosmic focal point where the two axes intersect. At the same time, humans created the four cardinal directions. Again, this articulation of the cosmos was likely known to Neanderthals who also laid their dead in square burial pits.

Without going into detail concerning the lines and scratches, the “cup-marks” and “nets,” some surrounded by circles, some not, to be found in the rock-shelters and caves in the Fontainebleau forest (some of which were visited by Voegelin in the company of König), we may simply note that, according to König, the process of distinguishing cultural achievement from natural formations began some 300K years ago, possibly prior to the appearance of anatomically modern humans. Whatever the date assigned to these artifacts, it seem plausible enough that the primordial and universal symbolization of reality was the sphere; increased specificity or “differentiation” to use Voegelin’s term, provided a more precise structure of upper and lower, symbolized, for example, as two bowls or cups or even two parts of a clam shell. Then the observation of the bowl of the sky could be structured in terms of lines and points, which in turn created a means of communication that enabled further differentiation of the structure of the cosmos as a grid or a net. Sometimes natural weathering of rock produced such an effect; sometimes it can be observed on sacred animal such as the turtle.

From spheroids, to crossed lines, to grids, representation of the order of the cosmos grew more elaborate in its internal articulation. “The crossed lines,” König

\[26\] I was able to examine several sites in May 2008 and in May 2010 thanks to the support from the Earhart Foundation and to Joe Donner and the Donner Canadian Foundation. The 2010 visit was assisted by the expert guidance of M. Alain Bernard of the Groupe d’Etudes, de Recherches et de Sauveguard de l’Art Rupestre and of M. Guy Blanchard, a local inhabitant with an interest in caves and other rock formations; to them both I am very grateful.
wrote, “are part of the commandments of order (Ordnungsgeboten). Its axes make up the imaginary lines of connection between the cardinal points.” The point at which the lines crossed was seen as the centre of human existence and the square cultural world put boundaries or limits on space. The fifth cardinal point could divide the cosmos into four squares or four triangles if the lines were drawn diagonally. Sometimes the boundary rectangle was not incised and only the four corners of a diagonal or rectangular cross is today visible in the rock. If the centre of the world can be symbolized by an intersection of two lines, a third dimension can also be symbolized by a vertical line, thus connecting the sky and the netherworld. Again, these petroglyphs can be bounded or not. In all such ideograms the focus was at the centre where all the axes intersect, rather like the crosses on the Union Jack.

König followed the discussion of spatial order in and of the cosmos with a discussion of the order of time, starting with circadian and lunar rhythms. Here the central symbol was not the four cardinal points but the three phases of the moon, which could be symbolized as three lines, a triangle, three cup-marks, dots, and so on. König argued that the pictorial representation of the “horned moon” (A Midsummer Night’s Dream, V:1, 245) could be found in the horns of aurochs painted on the walls at Lascaux, for example, but that the later representation, however appealing to modern aesthetic sensibilities, was supplementary. In other words, since both the horns and dots or lines of three represented the phases of the moon, they can be understood as expressing an equivalent meaning.

König provided a great deal of evidence from Fontainebleau, Lascaux, and later agricultural societies to support her account of the Paleolithic origins of cosmological symbolizations of space and time. She argued that the symbolization of time by way of the moon and then by representational images was subsequently used to symbolize death and rebirth, for example. Of course, the details can grow complex rather quickly. Granted that moon was a heavenly clock and that it could be compared with earthly phenomena, which ones? And if these earthily phenomena then could change from one thing – a pair of auroch’s horns—to another – a triangle, three dots, etc., then “any number of symbolic images that bore

27 Am Anfang, 102.
28 One might make the same argument regarding North American “rock art,” with the racks of bighorn sheep, which are often “exaggerated” serving in the place of European aurochs. See David S. Whitley, Cave Paintings and the Human Spirit: The Origins of Creativity and Belief, (Amherst, Prometheus Books, 2009), 93-4; 145. The notion that the horns on the Lascaux bulls are images of the moon and so of the order of time is supported by the argument of Eduard Hahn, that aurochs were first domesticated not for beef but for “religious purposes” such as sacrifice. Animals were selected and selectively bred, he argues, because the “gigantic curved horns resembled the lunar crescent.” Hahn’s Die Hausteiere und ihre Beziehungen zur Wirtschaft des Menschen, (1896) is summarized in Eric Isaac, “On the Domestication of Cattle,” Science, 137 (1962) 195-204.
no external relationship to one another” might yet be responses to the same experience.29 This was especially true with the new moon and its constituting an “answer” to the anxieties of life and death. Complexities aside, König’s chief point was that, if we examine the “documents” in caves and rock shelters with this perspective in mind, it becomes clear that the earliest humans had a more differentiated culture than they at first appear to do, especially if we think of human prehistory as a development towards historical and eventually modern and contemporary humanity.

To summarize König’s admittedly speculative argument: the spiritual comprehension of the cosmos began with the creation of a spheroid cosmic image. Subsequently it was differentiated into space and time, which nevertheless remained constituents of the whole. A new problem arose as a consequence of differentiation: how to relate the spatial and temporal “dimensions” of the cosmos to one another in an intelligible representation of reality that is both a primordial unity and a differentiated reality? Some late Paleolithic examples would be: (the order of space = 4) + (the order of time = 3) = 7. Or: a grid of 3x3=9 lines, cup-marks, dots etc. make a square (nine is also the number of nights for each phase of the moon) that serves as a comprehensive ordering image of the cosmos.

One further observation: Marie König has all but been ignored by the “professional” archeological community. One obvious reason for this, as will be clear in the next section is that for the most part archeologists have in recent years pursued an entirely different interpretative strategy, one more congenial to the materialist and indeed often self-declared atheist assumptions of contemporary evolutionary scholarship.30 Such approaches are highly critical of “speculations” such as those carried out by König but are utterly immune to the irony that their own work is deeply informed by speculative assumptions that never rise into their own consciousness of what they are doing or thinking. About the only exceptions I have been able to discover during the past couple of years of research on this problem are archeologists interested in Paleolithic and Neolithic calendars, such as Alexander Marshack, who was also considered “controversial.”31 König was fully aware of her marginal position. As she told Meixner, “I don’t dig and date; I interpret.”32 There is also, no doubt, a certain disdain for a “layperson” intruding

29 Am Anfang, 238.
32 Auf der Suche, 95.
into the clerical orders of esteemed archeologists at the heads of important institutes, not to forget the importance of old-fashioned sexism.

Voegelin may have entertained some highly traditional notions regarding the sexual division of labour, especially as it applied to academic life, but he did not allow his prejudices to get in the way of his ability to appreciate genuine insights by female scholars. Upon hearing her lecture at the Academic Institute of Rome during the fall of 1968, according the König, Voegelin “came up to me straight away and said: ‘we must work together.’”33 They did, in fact, meet several times at her home in Saarbrucken and, as noted above, she escorted him around the caves and rock shelters at Fontainebleau, and, no doubt partly in return for her help, Voegelin assisted her with the publication of Am Anfang der Kultur. Voegelin even deputed two of his students, Tilo Schabert and Klaus Vondung, to assist her in writing some of the material in the first chapter dealing with archeological methods and assumptions. In short, it was a two-way street. As Schabert said to Meixner: “Frau König was also important to him. He wasn’t interested in her for no reason.”34

In a letter to her dated 14 October, 1968, Voegelin explained her importance to him:

Your essay [on prehistoric symbolism] is of great value to me because it shows that an historical picture can indeed be crystallized out of the most diverse specialized prehistorical archeological sciences that goes back at least to the beginnings of Homo sapiens. You can understand the importance such an account has for me from the fact that the prehistoric symbols are the same as those that are found in the earliest written texts on political symbolism, i.e., in the Egyptian texts of the 3rd millennium B.C. 35 Through comparison of these Egyptian texts with the symbolism as you have presented it, the decisive step becomes possible in separating the remnants of tradition from those symbols specific to an imperial civilization. Up to now I have used the term “cosmological” for the Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilization. This term can still be used, but it is impossible to separate the cosmological from the imperial elements.

33 Meixner, Auf der Suche, 139.
34 Auf der Suche, 141.
Many thanks, too, for the reference to the Handbuch der Vorgeschichte by Hermann Müller-Karpe. I immediately ordered it for the Institute.

I am happy to say that I can already use the insights that I have gained from you in this semester in my lectures on the philosophy of history (CW, 39: 576-7).

In this letter Voegelin was not simply being a courtly Viennese gentleman. He was expressing his genuine gratitude to a fellow scientist. In September, 1970 he wrote Hans Sedlmayr, a respected art historian and colleague at Munich:

In my Order and History I dealt with the symbols of the ancient Oriental societies in the manner in which they are depicted in the sources. However, this method has proved to be inadequate, since most of these symbols have a prehistory reaching back into the Neolithic, if not into the late Paleolithic. The symbols that appear in the ancient Oriental empires are adaptations of older symbols to the new imperial situation. I am now trying to research pre-imperial symbols as far as they can be followed back into prehistory (CW, 30: 664).

Later that year he wrote Manfred Hennigsen about König’s “fantastic collection of photographs” of cave and rock-shelter images and inscriptions. “Once again … we see evidence of the primary experience of the cosmos and its symbolization at least [back] into the Neolithic age, and perhaps even into the Paleolithic” (CW, 30: 675).

Despite having also acquired an impressive collection of photographs himself, Voegelin did not manage to integrate this new material into his later publications. In the course of his lectures, however, he would occasionally mention the cave images and petroglyphs in an offhand way that his audiences found somewhat disconcerting, indeed baffling, a response that he both anticipated and clearly enjoyed. One conclusion seems obvious: like Eric Voegelin, Marie König looked for a constancy of equivalent meanings in the experience and symbolization of reality starting with the earliest possible evidence.

3. Shamanism.

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36 I witnessed one such performance in Montreal in 1970. I had little idea what he was talking about, but neither, so far as I could tell, did anyone else. See CW, 33: 275-6.
A generation ago anthropologists often dismissed shamanism as “a made-up, modern, Western category, an artful reification of disparate practices, snatches of folklore and overarching folklorizations, residues of long-established myths intermingled with the politics of academic departments, curricula, conferences, journal juries and articles, and funding agencies.”\textsuperscript{37} The reason for this severe judgment seems to have been a close association of the term with doctrines of cultural evolution that most anthropologists no longer considered appropriate. On the other hand, a few years later, the study of shamanism underwent a “renaissance” as a result of a new interest in the study of “altered states of consciousness” (ASC), an interest in shamanism as therapy, as well as in assorted New Age experiments in spirituality.

The last-named sources of the recent revival in shamanistic practices are important for the current understanding of contemporary society in the industrial west in the same way that Zen or Hare Krishna were significant modifications of Buddhist and Hindu religious practices in the middle decades of the last century. The great appeal of this latest alternative to traditional religious and institutionalized Western religions is that, with or without the assistance of chemicals, it achieves quickly results that are deemed by practitioners to be satisfactory. Students of traditional shamanism are by and large skeptical of “urban shamans” on the grounds that the phenomenon says more about contemporary city-dwellers than it does about shamanism.\textsuperscript{38} In any event, our concern is not with this “veritable cottage industry.”\textsuperscript{39}

A variation on the theme of shamanism as a New Age spiritual alternative is the notion that it is therapy. Just as Carlos Castaneda (Don Juan) is said to provide a chemical short-cut to realizing human spiritual potential, so too does the argument that shamans are really psychotherapists provide an intelligible and rational account of shamanic practice – as well as taunting conventional Western psychotherapy much as New Age religiosity taunts traditional Western religions.\textsuperscript{40}

In the more scholarly world of cultural and social anthropology, general theories of shamanism have given way to detailed and particular studies of specific


practices in equally specific cultural context. Here the focus is on small-scale societies and their internal politics, on the impact of colonialism or gender, language, or ritual. The focus of these studies, however fascinating in other respects, is to underline the observation that shamanisms are always embedded in specific but encompassing cultural practices and ways of living. Since our chief concern is with Paleolithic symbolism, most of this material can also be ignored.

Such general theorizing as exists currently deals with consideration of the psychological state of the shaman. The concern is not on what is different among shamanic practices but on recurring likenesses that are to be explained by an analysis of the mental health of shamans. From early in the twentieth century one assumption has been that shamans were mentally unbalanced, or as we say nowadays, they suffered from “mood disorders.” Often on the basis of the same evidence, compelling or at least persuasive arguments have been advanced that shamans were and are entirely sane. Current disputes seem to centre on the proposition that, however unusual shamanic experience may be, it is within the behavioural repertoire of normal, that is, sane humans. It would seem that shamanic consciousness is a matter of “degree” of alteredness.

The key to the current understanding of shamanism as an ASC among both anthropologists and archaeologists was apparently the widespread experimentation with drugs during the 1960s. Anthropologists studying the use of psychedelic drugs particularly among South American shamans saw some obvious parallels (perhaps) with their own youthful experiences. By and large these very modern behavioural scientists were skeptical regarding the experiences of spirit worlds and

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43 David S. Whitley, Cave Paintings and the Human Spirit, 210ff, 257.


46 The connection between mystical visions and intoxicants has along and respectable lineage. William James, for example, remarked “The sway of alcohol over mankind is unquestionably due to its power to stimulate the mystical faculties of human nature…. It brings its votary from the chill periphery of things to the radiant core. It makes him for the moment one with truth.” Varieties of Religious Experience, (London, Longmans Green, 1902), 397. On the other hand, as Zaehner more soberly remarked: “To the average frequenter of cocktail parties this may come as a revelation. That there is a grain of truth in it may be conceded, but to state that by drinking three or four gin-and-tonics the drinker becomes ‘one with truth’ would surprise no one more than the drinker himself.” R.C. Zaehner, Drugs, Mysticism and Make-Believe, (London, Collins, 1972), 48.
sought to explain these ASCs by way of brain physiology and brain chemistry.\textsuperscript{47} Unlike the anthropological prehistorians who have been unable to study Paleolithic and Neolithic shamans, the adherents of the approach that considers shamanism as an ASC can proceed as if the same physiology as today was at work 30K years ago.

We will consider this assumption below. For the present it is enough to observe that it is not universally accepted as valid. Kehoe, for example, simply rejected the notion of “survivals of primordial or Paleolithic, religion among non-Western nations” as being “contrary to evolutionary biology.” As a consequence, “we have no present means of determining states of consciousness of prehistoric humans.”\textsuperscript{48} Whether evolutionary biology is as reductionist as the arguments of those who advocate ASC as a function of brain chemistry, we need not try to determine. It does seem to be true, as Atkinson said, that reductionism of any kind “has been off-putting to sociocultural anthropologists.” Indeed, she likened this approach to “analyzing marriage solely as a function of reproductive biology.”\textsuperscript{49}

An alternative to the highly focused and particularist approach to the study of shamanism as undertaken by social and cultural anthropologists is the hermeneutical and phenomenological approach used by scholars of comparative religion, notably Mircea Eliade.\textsuperscript{50} “Shamanism in the strict sense,” Eliade wrote, “is pre-eminently a religious phenomenon of Siberia and Central Asia.”\textsuperscript{51} He provided linguistic and etymological reasons for accepting this “strict” understanding of the practice but added that a preliminary definition that shamanism is a “technique of ecstasy,” meant that there were many additional locales of shamanistic practice besides Siberia. Indeed, according to Eliade, “it would be more correct to class shamanism among the mysticisms than with what is commonly called a religion.”\textsuperscript{52} Likewise he wrote in the preface to his book that

\textsuperscript{47} Marlene Dobkin de Rios, \textit{Hallucinogens: Cross-Cultural Perspectives}, (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1984).


\textsuperscript{49} Atkinson, “Shamanisms Today,” 311.


\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Shamanism}, 4.

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Shamanism}, 8.
shamanism is “at once mysticism, magic, and ‘religion’ in the broadest sense of the term,” which is precisely what Voegelin meant by a compact symbolism.\(^{53}\)

By starting with the most obvious and widespread instances of shamanism, Eliade was able to criticize a number of reductionist arguments. Early studies of Arctic Siberian shamans attributed their neurophysiological condition to the cold, to long winter nights and attendant sensory deprivation, lack of vitamins and so on. So far as Eliade was concerned, however, from within the horizon of *Homo religiosus* all such “explanations” along with varieties of insanity are simply irrelevant. “The mentally ill patient proves to be an unsuccessful mystic or, better, the caricature of a mystic. His experience is without religious content, even if it appears to resemble a religious experience, just as an act of autoeroticism arrives at the same physiological result as a sexual act properly speaking (seminal emission), yet at the same time it is but a caricature of the latter.” Likewise the use of intoxicants, from hashish to vodka, has been widely reported. “But what does this prove concerning the original shamanic experience? Narcotics are only a vulgar substitute for ‘pure’ trance,” and moreover a recent one that points to “a decadence in shamanic technique.” Such “narcotic intoxication” provides “an imitation of a state that the shaman is no longer capable of attaining otherwise.” Decadence and imitation, the substitution of the “easy way” for the “difficult way” appears in many forms across the world where shamanism is practiced.\(^{54}\)

Eliade’s conclusion was straightforward: Arctic shamanism “does not necessarily arise from the nervous instability of peoples living too near the Pole and from epidemics peculiar to the north above a certain latitude.” Nor, more broadly, is a shaman a sick person; “he is, above all, a sick man who has been cured, who has succeeded in curing himself.”\(^{55}\) The great strength of phenomenology is that it —literally—gives an account (logos) of an appearance (phenomenon) and thus aims to avoid all reductionist fallacies. For their part, anthropologists and archeologists concerned more with the rich variety of existing dissimilarities rather than with common or essential meanings, have ignored or dismissed phenomenology as “German idealism” of no use in serious field work.\(^{56}\)

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\(^{53}\) *Shamanism*, xix.

\(^{54}\) *Shamanism*, 24, 401. We will consider the issue of the “difficult way” below. The fraudulence of the “easy way” was confirmed by the Oxford scholar of comparative religion, R.C. Zaehner, many years ago in connection with Aldous Huxley’s famous experiments with mescaline. See Zaehner, *Mysticism Sacred and Profane: An Inquiry into some Varieties of Praeternatural Experience*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1957). Mescaline, he reported, mostly made him laugh and giggle.

\(^{55}\) *Shamanism*, 27. See also Joan Halifax, *Shamanism: The Wounded Healer*, (New York, Crossroad, 1982).

\(^{56}\) See Bruce G. Trigger, *A History of Archeological thought*, 474.
Eliade, however, was not engaged in field work— for which he has naturally been criticized by archeologists and anthropologists. Because he was interested in the essence or meaning of shamanism, he offered as his initial description of shamanism a “technique of ecstasy” or “trance,” or even “possession.” That is surely what it appears to be. But what, then, is ecstasy, trance, or possession? Robert N. Hamayon, for instance, asked “Are ‘Trance’, ‘Ecstasy’ and similar Concepts Appropriate to the Study of Shamanism?” And she answered: “no.” Trance may be a useful and intelligible concept for Western analysts, she said, but shamans describe their experience as being in direct contact with spirits. Do they? Really?

To answer such questions, consider the story told by Lévi-Strauss about a Kwakiutl shaman, Quesalid. It seems that Quesalid did not believe in the power of shamans but he was curious about the tricks they used and decided to expose them. He started hanging out with shamans until one asked him to join the group. He learned how to dissimulate, how to vomit, and how to eavesdrop, all considered essential shamanic skills. He was especially adept at extracting a concealed tuft of down from his mouth after throwing it up covered with blood that came from biting his own tongue. This “bloody worm” would be presented to the patient as being a pathological body he had just sucked out of the sick one, through the skin, for example, but without breaking it. Soon Quesalid had all the evidence he needed for an exposé on a Bernstein and Woodward scale. But then a sick person asked him to cure his sickness, the patient having dreamed that Quesalid was just the man for the job. He cured the patient and became known as a powerful shaman.

Quesalid explained that what happened was that his patient simply believed in him. But then he visited a neighbouring group of Koskimo Indians where, instead of using the trick of the fake bloody worm pathogen, the local shaman simply spat on his hands. Quesalid was skeptical still, especially when the Koskimo spitting technique didn’t work a cure. So he asked permission to try to cure the Koskimo patient using his own Kwakiutl bloody worm (i.e., concealed tuft of down and tongue-biting) technique. He did so and his patient proclaimed herself cured. (Hallelujah!) Quesalid had further adventures, sometimes with unpleasant consequences for fakers other than himself, and Lévi-Strauss drew the only

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57 Kehoe, “Eliade and Hultkrantz,” 269.
59 In Znamenski, ed., *Shamanism*, 243-60.
60 In Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Sorcerer and his Magic,” in *Structural Anthropology*, (New York, Basic Books, 1963), I, 175-85. The original report was provided by Franz Boas in 1930.
sensible conclusion: “Quesalid did not become a great shaman because he cured his patients; he cured his patients because he had become a great shaman.”

In case this example and the commentary on the position of Quesalid are taken as nothing but an expression of the French love of paradox, consider the remarks of Jan Huizinga regarding St. Francis of Assisi:

St. Francis of Assisi revered Poverty, his bride, with holy fervor and pious ecstasy. But if we ask in sober earnest whether St. Francis actually believed in a spiritual and celestial being whose name was Poverty, who really was the idea of poverty, we begin to waver. Put in cold blood like that the question is too blunt; we are forcing the emotional content of the idea. St. Francis’ attitude was one of belief and unbelief mixed. The Church hardly authorized him in an explicit belief of that sort. His conception of Poverty must have vacillated between poetic imagination and dogmatic conviction, although gravitating towards the latter. The most succinct way of putting his state of mind would be to say that St. Francis was playing with the figure of poverty.

Huizinga went on to point out that Francis’ entire life was filled with play-factors and play-figures, “and these are not the least attractive part of him.” Readers of Huizinga’s book will recall that play, even in puppies, is not merely physiological: it is significant; it means something. One need not explicate Huizinga’s account of play to acknowledge that one of its essential aspects is that the player is aware that he or she is playing. There is no reason to think that Quesalid was unaware of the game he was playing, which meant that playing the trickster was not simply to be a fake.

The two great roles shamans play are those of healer, such as Quesalid, and psychopomp, a guide or companion to recently deceased souls in the afterlife. The shaman can play these roles, Eliade said, because, in his ecstatic experience, he can “abandon his body and roam at vast distances, can penetrate the underworld and rise to the sky.” Indeed, his ability to pass from one cosmic region to another,

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63 Huizinga, Homo Ludens, 1.
64 Of course, not all archeologists would agree. For Paul G. Bahn, “the shaman is actually a showman.” See his “Save the Last Trance for Me: An Assessment of the Misuse of Shamanism in Rock-Art Studies,” in The Concept of Shamanism: Uses and Abuses, 55 and references.
from earth to heaven or to the underworld is “the pre-eminent shamanic technique.”

This communication among cosmic zones is made possible by the very structure of the universe….the universe in general is conceived as having three levels—sky, earth underworld—connected by a central axis. The symbolism employed to express the interconnection and intercommunication among the three cosmic zones is quite complex, …[b]ut the essential schema is always to be seen, even after the numerous influences to which it has been subjected; there are three great cosmic regions, which can be successively traversed because they are linked together by a central axis. This axis, of course, passes through an “opening,” a “hole”; it is through this hole that the gods descend to earth and the deal to the subterranean regions; it is through the same hole that the soul of the shaman in ecstasy can fly up or down in the course of his celestial of infernal journeys.66

Those familiar with Voegelin’s concept of Metaxy can think of shamans as human beings whose lives are lived emphatically in the Metaxy, in permanent movement along the axis mundi, a concrete image of the Voegelinian philosophical concept of “tension.”

The mystic shamanic communication among the three realms is expressed in architectural structures such as ziggurats, but also in trees and bridges or the smoke-hole (and smoke) of a tipi or yurt. Indeed the notion of a cosmic centre or omphalos, which Marie König found in the patterns and lines and cup-marks in the Fontainebleau rock-shelters, does not end with shamanism and the mystic cosmic flights of shamans but reappears as a millennial constant whatever the degree of compactness and differentiation of experience and symbolization.67 The ability of the shaman to use the axis mundi as a flight-path can easily transform the shaman into a one-person omphalos. For the many, the center of the world, the Delphic omphalos, for example, is a site that permits them to send offerings, prayers, or messages to the gods, whereas for the shamans it is the starting point for flight. “Only for the latter is real communication among the three cosmic zones a possibility.”68 Thus what for the rest of the community remains a cosmological

66 Shamanism, 259.
67 I have discussed this question in connection with the relatively differentiated symbolism of Plato in “‘A Lump bred up in Darknesse,’ Two Tellurian themes in the Republic,” in Zdravko Planinc, ed., Politics, Philosophy, Writing: Plato’s Art of Caring for Souls, (Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 2001), 80–121. The inhabitants of Toronto, where we met in 2009, routinely refer to their city as the centre of the universe. They look upon the axis mundi of the CN Tower as proof—as if proof, in such self-evident matters, were needed!
68 Shamanism, 265. See also E.A.S. Butterworth, The Tree at the Navel of the Earth, (Berlin, de Gruyter, 1970), 172 ff.
ideogram is for the shaman a mystical itinerary. For members of the audience of a shamanic séance, his or her presence would very much seem to be the real presence of a cosmic omphalos.

The three cosmic zones are zones of a whole, which is why, as Åke Hultkrantz observed, shamanic ecstasy or trance is not a mystical union with a cosmic-transcendent divinity that one finds in “the ecstatic experiences of the ‘higher’ forms of religious mysticism.”69 Rather, shamanic ecstasy is intra-cosmic. By traversing the structure of the cosmos, namely its three zones, the shaman reaffirms the unity of the cosmos, what Voegelin called the primary experience of the cosmos. Strictly speaking (and reflecting the problem of equivalences of experience and symbolization) as indicated in section one, shamans cannot be mystics, notwithstanding Eliade’s assertions to the contrary.

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The first interpretation of the images at Lascaux to discuss their shamanic elements was published in 1952.70 Since then such interpretations, along with criticism and counter-criticism, have become a minor archeological industry.

From its origins in the seventeenth century, archeology has been based on modern assumptions and presuppositions. As is true of other social sciences, during the twentieth century archeology has been strongly influenced (or corroded) by positivism. In recent decades, as Trigger pointed out, “archeological theorists have looked to philosophy to provide guidance in matters relating to epistemology or theories of knowledge.”71 Two approaches widely used today, called the functional and the processural, have tried to move beyond the “naive positivism” of an earlier generation. The functionalists try to understand past social and cultural “systems” from the inside by focusing on the routine; processuralists try to do the same thing, but by focusing on discontinuities and irreversible changes.

There are also even newer approaches espoused by postprocessuralists, who seek to “use material culture to investigate past human behavior and human history”72 and “cognitive archeologists.”73 According to Colin Renfrew, cognitive archeology is “the study of past ways of thought as inferred from natural remains.”74 There are, obviously, numerous challenges to gaining such an

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70 Horst Kirchner, “Ein archäologischer Beitrag zur Urgeschichte des Shamanismus,” Anthropos, 47 (1952), 244-86.
71 Trigger, A History of Archeological thought, 303.
73 See Renfrew, Prehistory, 107ff.
ambitious goal, but it does not seem to be, in principle, unattainable. James N. Hill, for example, said: “Although I continue to maintain that we cannot actually know what prehistoric people thought, I now think that it is sometimes possible to make plausible inferences about what they must almost certainly have thought, given very strong circumstantial and analogical evidence.” 75 “Perhaps,” said Renfrew, “the most concise approach [to indicate the scope of cognitive archeology] is to focus explicitly upon the socially human ability to construct and use symbols.” 76

The purpose of such an archeological approach, he added, is not, however, so much to determine the meaning of symbols as to see how they are used, which looks like a prudent first step. Likewise, Richard Bradley observed that a cognitive archeology looks at, say, petroglyphs as “deposits of information” rather than trying to determine what they mean. 77 There is even a “phenomenological archeology.” 78 These more recent schools or approaches, but to different degrees, have also abandoned old fashioned positivism. Because two cognitive archeologists David Lewis-Williams and Jean Clottes in particular, along with David Whitley in the US, have addressed the question of shamanism in connection with Paleolithic cave images and rock-art, we will consider some of their findings in detail.

As did Marie König, Lewis-Williams and Clottes rejected the opinion that the images were simply decoration, 79 or totemism, 80 or, of course, an aid in practicing sympathetic magic to ensure fertility of a successful hunt. As they pointed out, “the subjectivity of these observations is obvious” and so, too, is its arbitrariness. 81 Lewis-Williams was trained as an anthropologist and did his field work among the San of his native South Africa. He was especially interested in San rock-art and its formal similarities to Paleolithic materials. At the same time, he was aware of the limitations (or fallacies) of “ethnographic analogy,” in this case, the application of San shamanic experience and understanding and its relationship to their rock-art as a means of explaining of interpreting Paleolithic cave images. Some processual archeologists have pointed out an obvious general

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problem of comparing cave art to shamanism: “What must be explained is … the artist’s conviction that the art must be created fearsomely deep within the dark, slippery, clammy earth. It’s not the same as a Siberian shaman drumming, dancing and then divining in a tent or cabin filled with the people of the community. Darkness inside a dwelling doesn’t equal darkness through a mile of twisting rock.”

To this general objection there is added the issue of comparing the sunny open air and rock-shelter venues of San rock-art with the subterranean location of Paleolithic images.

Starting in the 1980s, Lewis-Williams argued that a non-arbitrary but universally valid model that could apply equally to San and Cro-Magnon human beings that by-passed the problem of “diffusion” or continuity can be found in the structure of the human brain. Because, as he and Clottes put it, the humans living in the Upper Paleolithic “had the same nervous system as all people today,” or at least “we may confidently assume” they did, “we have a better access to the religious experiences of Upper Paleolithic people than to many other aspects of their lives.”

Over the years Lewis-Williams’ confidence has grown: what began as assumptions became facts. In 2005, for example, “the neurological functioning of the brain, like the structure and functioning of other parts of the body is a human universal.”

By 2010, “modern research on the ways in which the human brain functions to produce the complex experiences we call consciousness provides a foundation for an understanding of religion that unites its social, psychological and aetiological elements.” Various “mental states,” he said, are both physiological and neurological and “as integral to the human body as, say, the digestive system.” Indeed, these “mental states” are simply “the product of the human brain.”

Lewis-Williams also argued, on the basis of brain physiology, in favour of what he called a “spectrum” of human consciousness, consciousness being “a notion or sensation, created by electro-chemical activity in the ‘wiring’ of the

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82 Kehoe, Shamans and Religion, 78.

83 In any event, it is not self evident that the Central Asian or North America shamanic practices are related to the San experiences. According to Francfort, for instance, “from a basic methodological point of view, it is odd to compare the art of the San, which is narrative and anecdotic, with the European cave art, which is naturalistic and descriptive. The founding principles of these two art are essentially different.” Specifically the San art depicts alleged shamanic actions and ceremonies; the Paleolithic allegedly depicts beings obtained from shamanic visions. Henri-Paul Francfort, “Art, Archeology, and the Prehistory of Shamanism in Inner Asia,” in Francfort, et al., eds., The Concept of Shamanism, 248.


87 Lewis-Williams, Conceiving God, 158. See also 161, 209-10.
This “spectrum” extended from “alert consciousness” to ASC hallucination. “Alert consciousness is the condition in which people are fully aware of their surroundings and are able to react rationally to those surroundings.” It is not, however, easily definable because people tend towards “inward” states as well, which Lewis-Williams calls “reflective.” Beyond reflection on this “spectrum,” lies daydreaming, dreaming and deep trances. “In these states people believe that they are perceiving things that are, in fact, not really there; in other words, they hallucinate.”

There is a rough-and-ready or commonsensical meaning to what Lewis-Williams (and Clottes) argued, but no one would begin to claim it was a philosophically sophisticated account of human consciousness. Nor does it accord with all the anthropological and archeological evidence. Indeed, Alison Wylie raised the obvious Popperian objection: “what would count as disconfirmation of the model?” Likewise Bahn argued that there was no evidence for a “multi-stage” spectrum nor any reason to connect cave imagery to hallucination, neither as recollected in lucidity and certainly not as a condition for painting the images. Nor is there a universal connection between rock-art and trance. Such empirical objections aside, one can agree that there is a distinction to be made between alertness and being in a trance, but consider the assumption (apart from the notion that such a “spectrum” is in the first place, real): perception is lucid because it is of real things in the world; the mark of reality of such things is that they can be dealt with “rationally.” Everything else, from reflection—or thinking—to hallucination is progressively irrational and unreal. Readers of Voegelin, to say nothing of other philosophical anthropologists, will have learned that not all consciousness is perceptual and not all experiences of non-perceptual realities are irrational.

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91 Bahn, “Save the Last Trance for Me,” 55.
93 This is a large problem and one alluded to above. We cannot examine it on this occasion. Evidence of Voegelin’s concern with consciousness began with his earliest writings; the question of intentional and perceptual consciousness, to be contrasted with non-perceptual or “luminous” and participatory consciousness, was central
Accordingly, a more adequate philosophical anthropology is needed in order to
distinguish perceptual and usually practical and alert consciousness of the world,
and equally alert and rational analyses or explorations of the ground of the world
and human participation in the search for its meaning.

Lewis-Williams and his colleagues are unaware of this problem apparently
because they share a fairly common misunderstanding, namely that “science” is a
matter of method. Since this assumption is held by their critics as well, the
collective discussions remain inconclusive and not very meaningful because they
do not, properly speaking, penetrate to an analysis of the relevant principles. In any
event, the corollary drawn by Lewis-Williams is that, “although there are many
diverse cultures in the world, there is today only one kind of science.” Indeed, “for
the material world in which we live, there is only science.” Accordingly, “we must
look to the material world for evidence that there is a spirit realm.” As a
consequence, only “religion” can impinge upon “science” since there is, for
science, nothing strictly speaking to impinge upon with respect to religion—save
fantasy and other ASCs. The final conclusion is entirely predictable: “Science does
not attempt to answer questions about the meaning of life…. In fact, the questions
are meaningless.”

This assertion by Lewis-Williams is not quite as vulgar and unscientific (in
Voegelin’s sense) as it sounds. Let us agree, for purposes of extracting what we
can from an interesting but philosophically and methodologically weak account,
that “science”—in this case, neuroscience—deals only with method. Content, what
fills up consciousness, whether alert or ASC, is provided by “culture” much as
food fills up the digestive system with which Lewis-Williams compared the
neurobiology of the brain. And “culture,” it seems, is as variable as food. On these
grounds, Lewis-Williams and his colleagues claim they are not “determinists.”

Just as other parts of human bodies are the same as they were during the
Neolithic, so too is the general structure of the human brain and its electro-
chemical functioning. Lest this statement seem simplistic and deterministic,

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94 Lewis-Williams, The Mind in the Cave, 7-8.
95 Lewis-Williams, Conceiving God, 23, 27, 117, 131. Lewis-Williams’ colleague, David Whitley, shared this
understanding of science. Religious beliefs, he announced, are “unverifiable propositions.” Cave Paintings and the
Human Spirit, 198. Such an understanding of “science” and “religion” to a political scientist familiar with Voegelin’s
writings on this question is simply parochial nonsense and little more than a symptom, in all likelihood, of the
recent origins of archeology and social anthropology. Two succinct formulations of the objection to this
understanding of “science” can be found in CW, 5:90-7; and 6: 341-5. Such summary references will have to suffice
on this occasion. See, however, Cooper, Eric Voegelin and the Foundations of Modern Political Science, (Columbia,
University of Missouri Press, 1999), ch.3.
we make explicit a key caveat. We distinguish between the fundamental functioning of the nervous system and the cultural milieu that supply much of its specific content.  

Apart from remarks regarding the meaningless of questions regarding the meaning of life or the notion that “religion” is simply a question of ASC and thus of fantasy, there are additional internal reasons to indicate the limitation to this argument about scientific “form” and cultural “content.” First, we recall from Eliade’s discussion of shamanism his mentioning of the “perilous passage” to the underworld and his provision of several examples from shamanistic practice. He noted that the symbolism is linked

on the one hand, with the myth of a bridge (or tree, vine, etc.) that once connected earth and heaven and by means of which human beings effortlessly communicated with the gods; on the other hand, it is related to the initiatory symbolism of the “strait gate” or of a “paradoxical passage.”

Eliade elaborated this symbolism in light of a myth of origins, which is one way of discussing the meaning of life.

By crossing, in ecstasy, the “dangerous” bridge that connects the two worlds and that only the dead can attempt, the shaman proves that he is spirit, is no longer a human being, and at the same time attempts to restore the “communicability” that existed in illo tempore between this world and heaven. For what the shaman can do today in ecstasy could, at the dawn of time, be done by all human beings in concreto; they went up to heaven and came down again without recourse to trance. Temporarily and for a limited number of persons –the shamans—ecstasy re-establishes the primordial condition of all mankind. In this respect, the mystical experience of the “primitives” is a return to origins, a reversion to the mystical age of the lost paradise. For the shaman in ecstasy, the bridge or the tree, the vine, the cord, and so on –which in illo tempore connected earth with heaven—once again, for the space of an instant, becomes a present reality.

For Lewis-Williams, however, the rich symbolism of the passage with ladders and trees and so on is reduced to the single image of a “vortex.” The vortex is what “draws” the shaman into the underworld and so into the depth of the trance. The vortex experience may be accompanied by sensations of darkness,

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96 Lewis-Williams and Pearce, Inside the Neolithic Mind, 40. See also Pearson, Shamanism in the Ancient World, 78-90; Whitley, Cave Paintings and the Human Spirit, 39-40, 50.
97 Eliade, Shamanism, 482.
98 Eliade, Shamanism, 485-6.
constriction, difficulty in breathing and so on. Entry into a cave is a physical enactment of the vortex experience. It may be accompanied by “social isolation, sensory deprivation, and cold” that assist the shaman in entering into a trance. 99

Why a vortex instead of a bridge, a ladder or even a beanstalk? Because the experience of a vortex is one of the stations that appear on the notional “spectrum” of consciousness between lucidity and hallucination. 100 Moreover, understanding the vortex experience as neurologically induced allows for a seamless discussion of shamanism in terms of hallucinogenic chemicals. 101 At one point Whitley compared the shamanic vortex to having “drunk too much, laid [sic] down in bed, and felt the room spin around.” 102 Even William James did not go so far as this.

A similar argument disposed of the incisions, grids and dots that were central to Marie König’s interpretation of space and time—surely products of the most lucid of mental events. For Lewis-Williams, they were simply “entopic,” like seeing stars when you press your palms into your eye-sockets with your eyes closed. 103 These “entopics,” besides stars, included grids, spirals, dots and of course the vortex. Of the remaining forms, the “claviform,” is shaped like a paddle and the “techtiform” is shaped like a chevron. Because, apparently, there were no corresponding entopic images, they became “the most mysterious figures in cave art.” 104 In sum, for the neurophysically inclined prehistorians, Eliade’s distinction between shamanic spirituality and its degenerate counterfeit is non-existent. When the focus is on brain chemistry, despite the gesture in the direction of culturally variable content, it could hardly be otherwise. In other words, if a decontextualized ecstasy or ASC alone, rather than its purpose or goal, is all that is of concern to an investigator, then the account of the experience is incomplete. Again Bahn made the obvious comment: entopics “merely establish the not-terribly-illuminating fact that the [Paleolithic] artists had the same nervous system as ourselves,” 105 which, of course, is where we began. 106

There is not much to be gained in belabouring the methodologically induced limitations of neurophysical accounts of Neolithic or Upper Paleolithic shamanism.

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100 See Lewis-Williams and Pearce, Inside the Neolithic Mind, 51-3, 218-23; Lewis-Williams, Conceiving God, 165-8.
102 Whitley, Cave Paintings, 47.
103 Lewis-Williams, The Mind in the Cave, 151-4; Lewis-Williams, Conceiving God, 144-48.
105 Bahn, “Save the last Trance for Me,” 77.
106 See note 84 above.
What is of interest to political science is that these accounts also contain some useful and helpful descriptions that can be reinterpreted phenomenologically.

To begin with, the physical structure of some of the caves, Lascaux, for example, or Chauvet, suggests that large halls near the entrance, like the nave of a medieval cathedral, were suitable for community purposes. The acoustic properties of these spaces made them attractive for playing flutes and drums as well. In contrast, further inside, sometimes after having to negotiate (literally) a difficult or narrow passage, there were smaller “side-chapels” (to continue the medieval image) or “sanctuaries” where only a few or sometimes only a single person could penetrate at one time. Since many of these “halls,” “sanctuaries,” or “shrines” are located hundreds of metres from the fresh air and sunlight, penetrating the darkness with the kinds of illumination available to Paleolithic humans was not lightly undertaken and certainly not by the claustrophobic and faint of heart.  

A second obvious observation, endorsed by Eliade as well, is that caves mediate the everyday world and the underworld. This means that the making of images in a subterranean locale must have been the extension of a pre-existing cosmology. That is, one would not venture into a deep cave for no purpose, no more than one would go to the effort of scratching the sides, roof, or floor of a rock-shelter simply to leave doodles or Stone-Age graffiti. In short, the artists experienced “a suite of subterranean spirit animals and beings before they started to make images of them in caves.” Despite our present proclivity to admire the accuracy of selected aspects of the animals represented, the images are not naturalistic: there is no grass or trees, no mountains, rivers or ponds, not even the sun and the stars; there are no humans and no representations of human artifacts such as fire, huts, tools, weapons—and no dogs or even wolves. This does not mean that such external phenomena are not present in an “abstract” fashion, but it does strongly suggest that the animals were spirit-animals, not everyday ones.

A third obvious characteristic of cave or “parietal” art is that it does not move. Hence the importance of the use of walls, choice of panels, placement of figures and local topography. It matters not just what was painted but where. The question of where the images of aurochs and bison or deer and horses were placed led to considerable discussion when, following a decade of research, in 1968 André Leroi-Gourhan, building on the previous work of Annette Laming-

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107 Lewis-Williams, *The Mind in the Cave*, 228 ff.
Emperaire, published *The Art of Prehistoric Man in Western Europe*.\textsuperscript{111} Leroi-Gourhan argued on the basis of the structuralism developed by Lévi-Strauss in favour of the existence of a complex structure among the images. The groupings, he said, constituted a “mythogram” of considerable complexity. The basic elements were male and female or rather, maleness and femaleness. The cave itself was the expression of a meaning.

Paleolithic people represented in the caves the two great categories of living creatures, the corresponding male and female symbols, and the symbols of death on which the hunters fed. In the central area of the cave, the system is expressed by groups of male symbols placed around the main female figures, whereas in the other parts of the sanctuary we find exclusively male representations, the complements, it seems, to the underground cavity itself.\textsuperscript{112}

In short, Leroi-Gourhan argued that the placement of the images expressed Paleolithic ideas of the supernatural organization of the natural world.

The achievement should in no way be minimized even if it has largely been abandoned by prehistorians. The reason, which is commonly directed against structuralist interpretation by critics, as Lewis-Williams put it, it that the interpretation “was built on friable empirical foundations. The mythogram was too good, too neat, to be true.”\textsuperscript{113} Maybe so, but Lewis-Williams agreed that Leroi-Gourhan and Laming-Emperaire were likely correct “in their beliefs that the caves are indeed patterned.”\textsuperscript{114} The great problem is to establish, first, what the patterns are and, despite the tentative injunctions of the cognitive archeologists, to answer the more important question: what do they mean?

In the continued absence of a persuasive general account however, Lewis-Williams and his colleagues were content to observe that, contrary to the presupposition of a structuralist interpretation of the presence of an apriori structure or schema in the mind of the artist prior to painting the images, the artists often made used of the already given contours of the walls. That is, they adapted their painting to the three-dimensional walls of the cave in order, one might plausibly argue, to enhance their significance.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{111} London, Thames and Hudson.
\textsuperscript{112} Leroi-Gourhan, *Art of Prehistoric Man*, 174.
\textsuperscript{113} *The Mind in the Cave*, 64.
\textsuperscript{114} *The Mind in the Cave*, 65.
\textsuperscript{115} *The Mind in the Cave*, 240.
Two other aspects of Lewis-Williams’ discussion of cave walls are significant. The first, which he initially discovered in connection with San rock-art, is that the rock face should be considered a veil or membrane on the other side of which lay the spirit world, the true cosmic underground. This interpretation reinforced the connection between the cave as a physical space that is literally under ground and the cave as a cosmic liminal space that provides access to the lowest tier of the cosmos. The context of the images, as noted above, was inherently meaningful. It was not just an out-of-the-way place to draw things or doodle.

A second insight built on the appearances of the rock face as a membrane: the paint of the images “dissolved” the membrane to allow the otherwise invisible spirits on the other side to slip through and appear. That is, “the images were not so much painted onto rock walls as released from, or coaxed through, the living membrane … that existed between the image maker and the spirit world.” Such a description, I submit, is phenomenologically astute. Moreover, because it requires the active and imaginative participation of the conscious, even meditative spectator, it is essentially compatible with Voegelin’s philosophy of consciousness.

Finally, Lewis-Williams noted, the use of cracks, nodules, ledges, hollows, and bulges, which were often incorporated into the images, had the effect of giving them more of a 3-D appearance. And given the poor light thrown by Paleolithic lamps, one can easily imaging a chiaroscuro effect: move the light one way, the image disappears; move it another and it emerges through the membrane from the cosmic underworld. And yet, there is a big difference between a cave wall and a wall in the open air simply in terms of accessibility. Moreover, if the images are indicative of a membrane, what are we to make of antlers, or bone and other so-called mobilary (i.e., portable) art, that carried the same images? In other words, Lewis-Williams’ notion of a membrane at the cave wall, while highly suggestive, is quite incomplete.

However that may be, the appearance of the walls as membranes on the other side of which lay the spirit world made sense of the otherwise enigmatic hand prints that “decorate” many of the walls. These were made either by pressing the paint-laden hand onto the wall (called a “positive” print) so that the paint

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117 Lewis-Williams and Pearce, *Inside the Neolithic Mind*, 120.
118 Lewis-Williams, *The Mind in the Cave*, 199.
119 Bahn, “Save the last Trance for Me,” 75.
mediated the human hand and the membrane, or they were “negative,” which is to say, stencils, likely made by blowing or spitting paint onto the wall and hand so that an outline of the hand appeared—or, if you prefer, the hand disappeared behind a layer of paint propelled by breath, sealing it into the rock membrane. These lines of interpretation or reinterpretation add additional dimensions to the meaning-focused interpretation of Marie König and so suggest a spiritual experience of considerable complexity.

Before drawing a few summary conclusions, I would note that Lewis-Williams and his colleagues made a number of other observations in passing that suggest additional avenues of research. For example, large caves with extensive decorations likely served as cult centres that, in turn, would likely have had a political side to them. Obviously the actual painting of the images, hundreds of metres from the cave entrance and far higher on the wall than an individual can reach from the floor, required considerable organization—for provisioning of artists, scaffold construction, lighting, and so on.

They also noted that the degree of social organization and political power required to build Neolithic structures such as Newgrange was orders of magnitude greater. This problem of what might be called pragmatic prehistoric politics, so far as I know, has hardly been examined, let alone connected to shamanism or equivalent spiritual practices. In this connection one would wish to explore the connections among cave images, rock-art and paleoastronomy, which clearly was of importance during the Neolithic period.

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What conclusions can be drawn from this rather extensive but far from complete discussion of archeological literature that might be useful for political science? Let us start from the most obvious: despite the philosophical limitations of the archeologists whose remarks in the area of philosophical anthropology or of philosophy of consciousness are so poorly argued as to appear more like personal idiosyncrasies than serious methodological flaws, if you ask: why did Paleological humans crawl into long, dirty, pitch black, muddy, dangerous, cold caves with poor lighting that might easily be extinguished to guide them on their way in order to

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120 Lewis-Williams, The Mind in the Cave, 216ff.
121 Lewis-Williams and Pearce, Inside the Neolithic Mind, 84-6.
draw aurochs or hand prints, grids, dots and spirals, shamanism and associated communal rituals provide an intelligible answer. The cave painters actualized the tiered cosmos by placing their images on the membrane that separated and thus connected materiality and spirituality.

With respect to shamanism, because shamanic experiences are associated with hunting rather than agriculture, as Hultkrantz said, “there is therefore good reason to expect that shamanism once was represented among Paleolithic hunters.” At the same time, “it is impossible to say whether shamanism belongs to the very old ingredients of the once universal hunting and gathering cultures.” 124 Zaehner’s response to mescalin can be generalized in the sense that there may be no single meaning to trance or hallucination, which varies across cultures. 125 Likewise, as Bahn pointed out, the problem is not that the Paleolithic symbolisms have no meaning but “that they have many, doubtless extremely complex meanings” so that simple and reductionist explanations are the first thing to be avoided. After all, who is so bold as to claim to know the meaning of the Mona Lisa or even of the Wreck of the Medusa? 126 In short, the search for universal explanations of parietal art may be a wild goose chase—or to sound more like a scholar, it is perhaps premature to look for universal explanations or universal meanings --at least if we reject the claims by Lewis-Williams and his colleagues regarding ASCs (and we do). 127

We are not however simply raising another cry for “more research.” In terms of Voegelin’s “search for volume zero,” 128 the discovery of an ordered cosmos expressed in Paleolithic symbolism verified his remark to König that the cosmological aspects of the symbolism of the Ancient Near East can, in fact, be distinguished from the imperial ones. At the end of 500 pages of analysis and presentation of evidence, Eliade came to the same conclusion: “there is no solution of continuity in the history of mysticism.” 129 To use Voegelin’s language, a phenomenology of mystic experiences brings to light equivalences of experience and symbolization, not a continuous time-line of “mystic ideas.” Of course, we may expect to find a guide to pre-literate mystic symbolizations in later narratives, but our presupposition is not one of historical continuity. Accordingly, so far as the present paper is concerned, whether one describes the Paleolithic “religion” as

125 Francfort, “Art, Archeology, and the Prehistory of Shamanism in Inner Asia,” 249.
126 Bahn, “Save the Last Trance for Me,” 81.
129 Eliade, Shamanism, 507.
shamanism or not, and whether one described shamans as mystics or not, seems to me to be a secondary issue.