
Gene’s draft of his Introduction to the book he is presently writing is typical of his work in being exceptionally lucid and coherent even as it advances a number of very complex themes simultaneously. Employing major ideas from Voegelin, William James, Bernard Lonergan, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, the most important theoretical help comes from Voegelin, specifically from Voegelin’s treatment of experience and symbolization; of the distinction between primary and secondary symbolisms, with the latter including symbols that become associated with abstract ideas unconnected with any grounding experience; and of the core of human consciousness as the existential Question, capitalized.

Gene’s concern here is to lay the foundation for an account of the different ways in which Eastern & Western Christian theologies have understand the symbolism of the Trinity and its relation to experience. His point as I take it—even though he doesn’t say it quite this way—is that the Eastern approach to the understanding of the Trinity is based on the assumption that mystical experience is essentially universal, in this sense: that insofar as a person IS, as Voegelin says, the existential Question dynamically oriented toward the transcendent ground of being, then one participates in the movement of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, as it operates in one and as one through the loving seeking of deepening fulfilment with the divine ground. Gene writes: “Could the existential tension Voegelin identifies as universal be considered at least one form in which all human beings experience the inward presence of the Holy Spirit . . .?” And quoting again: “. . . the Holy Spirit, which I am suggesting can be
interpreted as the moving energy underlying the universal, even if not always consciously
realized[,] force of the existential Question.”

So in this view, divine reality is experienced as present in consciousness and human
existence; one is involved in the divine mystery; consciously being the Question is mystical
experience; and understanding the notion of the Trinity partly depends on recognizing the
symbol of the Holy Spirit as a primary symbolism of the experience of divine presence in
consciousness. Grasping this view would aid in understanding the East/West divide about the
symbolization of the Trinity, since Gene presents the Western elaboration of the meaning of the
Trinity as grounded in Augustine’s explication of it in terms of analogical speculation rather
than participated experience—and this elaboration as a reason for what he describes, quite
accurately in my view, as the absence in Western Christianity of a sense of Trinitarian
symbolism as experientially significant, along with the attitude that it’s a doctrine that is
“intellectually complicated, accessible only to specialists, and essentially irrelevant to concrete
religious life.”

There is only one thing in the paper that gives me pause. Gene writes that Augustine’s
eventual belief, as unfolded in his treatise De Trinitate for example, was that “human beings . .
could have no actual experience of divine presence in this life,” so that there could be no
“experiential basis” for trinitarian thinking, but rather only analogical “speculation about
something at a distance.” I fully trust Gene’s assertion that Augustine’s views about theophanies,
and the human relation to the divine, developed and changed between his earlier and later
writings. But the way he describes Augustine’s thought here sounds very onto-theological, as if
Augustine were almost a naïve realist in imagining God to be a spatially distant kind of thing; or,
from the other side, as if there were no element at all of participationalist metaphysics in
Augustine’s thinking about human involvement with the divine. This made me recall a passage in Augustine’s *Confessions*, finished only a year or two before he began *De Trinitate*. There he wrote (Book XIII): “When people see these things with the help of your Spirit, it is you who are seeing in them. When, therefore, they see the things that are good, you are seeing that they are good. Whatever pleases them for your sake is pleasing you in them. The things which by the help of your Spirit delight us are delighting you in us.” [Ch. 31; Chadwick tr., Oxford, 1991 p. 300].

So I do wonder if Gene is making his point just a bit too strongly by stating without qualification that for Augustine there is no actual experience of divine presence in this life. That is: did Augustine really utterly abandon his view that we consciously participate in God and that we experience the Spirit within us—even given his insistence that we have to rely on analogy to explain the relations of the three persons of the Trinity?

II. Barry Cooper, “‘Politics’ and ‘Religion’ in the Upper Paleolithic”

For this extremely impressive, almost book-length article, Barry has digested a vast amount of material in paleoscience and paleoanthropology involving evolutionary theory, hominid development, Neanderthal capabilities and culture, DNA analysis, early symbol-making, and more. He has done so in support of an overarching argument. “The argument,” he writes, “is that Voegelin provided a methodological approach to the question of ‘politics’ and ‘religion’ in the Upper Paleolithic that is missing from the standard archeological and paleoscientific approach to the materials.” And Barry’s paper aims to begin to supply what is missing, arguing that the data allows us to affirm the existence of, and to some limited degree describe, what may be rightly called a ‘politics’ as well as a ‘religion’ of Upper Paleolithic humans and possibly Neanderthals. The most engaging part of his long paper for me was his energetic argument that violence and
warfare “constituted a major element of politics during the Upper Paleolithic, especially during the . . . ‘replacement’ of Neanderthals by Cro-Magnons,” and his speculative surmise that perhaps long wars between the latter two gave rise to a “sustained creative outburst in technology and art.”

But I am only going to speak to one Voegelinian element of Barry’s paper about which I have reservations. The methodological approach Voegelin provided for engaging in such a study is grounded, as Barry explains clearly, in Voegelin’s philosophy of consciousness, so early on he has a long section explicating it. Most of it is a fine summary providing support for what follows. But I believe there is something slightly awry in his treatment of the participatory aspect of the experience of consciousness, and more specifically about his discussion of what Voegelin calls the “luminosity” of consciousness. It seems to me that here and there Barry has segregated the luminous and the intentional structure of consciousness in a way that Voegelin does not.

Let me give an example. Barry writes: “Consciousness, Voegelin said, is a ‘luminous’ center not an ‘intentional’ one, as for example Husserl argued.” Well, that’s just not true. Voegelin said, at length and repeatedly, that consciousness has always the simultaneous structures of luminosity and intentionality. In other words, there is no experience of participatory consciousness, of consciousness as a “luminous” experience of being a “predicative event” in a comprehending process whose “subject” is reality itself, without a cognitive, or perceptual cognitive, or object-intending cognitive, operative component. Voegelin’s most extensive and most sophisticated explanation of this fact is in Volume 5 of Order and History. But when Barry explains the meaning of the term “luminosity” for Voegelin,” no references to that volume are present. This is clearly by choice, since in the second footnote to his paper, Barry explains that
he is going to ignore Voegelin’s “refinement” of his theory of consciousness in the last two volumes of *Order and History*.

Why would he make such a decision? Perhaps because he didn’t want to introduce to the readership of this paper/book all the complications of theory of consciousness in Volume 5: the paradoxicality of intentionality and luminosity; It-reality and thing-reality; the complex of consciousness-reality-language; and so on. Perhaps it was because Barry himself doesn’t agree that Voegelin’s refinement *is* a true refinement. Or, perhaps he decided it was irrelevant to his analysis.

I would argue that it *is* relevant, since by ignoring those later analyses, Barry slips into the mistake of making such comments as these: “Even though the experienced reality of participation is non-intentional . . .” Well, in fact, for Voegelin *all* experienced reality of participation is intentional and luminous at once—a fact Barry acknowledges later, thus contradicting himself, by quoting elsewhere from Voegelin’s essay “Wisdom and the Magic of the Extreme”—an essay written after Volume 4 of *Order and History* and so manifesting the “refinement” of Voegelin’s philosophy of consciousness that Barry said he would be ignoring.

I would argue that Barry needs to smooth out this part of his paper, and that he would be helped in doing so by drawing on the treatment of luminosity and intentionality in Volume 5 of *Order and History*, which is fully compatible with the discussions of the drama of existence, consubstantiality, the primary experience of the cosmos, and so on, that Barry deftly presents. Admittedly, there is a strong degree of imaginative oblivion among paleoscientists and paleoanthropologists regarding the luminous structure of consciousness; but rectifying that should not tempt one into occasional misrepresentations of Voegelin’s philosophy of consciousness, or indeed early human consciousness.