

Eugene Webb, chap 3:

Philosophical Knowing as an Existential Process

," 89 "Philosophy says Voegelin in the most pregnant of his definitions, "is the love of being through the love of divine being as the source of its order" (OH, 1:ix).

love of
ie philosophy; love of wisdom; source of order; divine wisdom,
source of all order

.. in the center of philosophy, he says, stands the experience of existential tension, with its "ordering truth" (Anam. p 136). The exposition of Voegelin's thought will have to take the form of a spiral, returning again and again, as here, to its center in the experienced tension of existence, the existential philia or love for perfection of being, in order to draw out its implications for an understanding of man, philosophy, and history.

90 Philosophy as Voegelin conceives it, is not a subject matter or a collection of propositions, opinions, and arguments, but an existential // event, a Seinsereignis, in which the principle of order is raised into consciousness and freely affirmed (Anam. p 136, German 276). What philosophy becomes, when viewed in this way, is a process in which the philosopher seeks to enter into more adequate and comprehensive participation in the possibilities that existence holds open to him -- to enact, in other words, the love of being and of Being just referred to. But in the case of man this participation takes, in addition to its bodily form, the form of consciousness (p. 163). And this in turn means that philosophy, seeking consciousness, seeks knowledge -- not just any knowledge, however, but the knowledge that is the self-reflective clarity of consciousness itself. "In historical reality," says Voegelin, "a philosopher's truth is the exegesis of his experience".⁴ There is a constant structure, according to Voegelin's way of thinking, to be found universally in human experience as such. This is the structure given ~~in the experience~~ in the experience of existential tension: it is a process of consciousness (either more or less clear and well developed) ordered through its orientation to a supreme pole of perfection (comprising the truth as such, the good, wisdom, and so on) -- the ultimate pole that Voegelin refers to as the divine ground. This is in fact one way in which Voegelin

4 "On Hegel: A Study in Sorcery," Studium Generale 24 1971 344

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defines consciousness, as when he says, "Consciousness is the experience of participation, participation of man in his ground of being," or "we can speak of consciousness as the sensorium of participation" (Anam., pp 175 163). Consciousness as he conceives it is not simple awareness, abstracted from the tensional pull toward the supreme pole in which luminosity, reality, and the ultimate object of love coalesce. To the extent that it is consciousness at all, it has the structure constituted by this pull, even if it may vary in clarity, fullness, as aspects of its structure go unnoticed or be deliberately buried in obscurity.

and

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Thus, although as Voegelin put it in one place, "The range of // human experience is always present in the fullness of its dimensions," its clarity and explicitness, by which it is constituted as conscious experience, may vary considerably depending on the extent to which the implicit fullness of experience always present on the level of immediacy is allowed to unfold its dimensions in the symbolizations that mediate their presence of the level of consciousness (OH 1:6^). According to Voegelin's understanding of man, the tension of existence with its proper structure is always present in immediate experience, and it is this constant presence that constitutes the universality of human nature. But it is not on the level of immediacy that the philosopher, or any person, begins to think. Every human being finds himself first on the mediated level, where he lives amid his ~~amid his~~ interpretations of reality, including that reality that is the immediate experience of existential tension. In the new introductory chapter of the English Anamnesis Voegelin speaks of the "horizon of consciousness" and says that the quality of the horizon will depend on the analyst's willingness to reach out into all the dimensions of reality in which his conscious existence is an event; it will depend on his desire to know (p 4).

5 Cf Anam p 134 and "On Debate and Existence" Intercollegiate Review 3 1967 150

Although Voegelin does not say so there, it will also depend on a few other things, among them the symbols available in a culture, or discoverable through historical memory, that can mediate and thereby help raise into consciousness the fullness of structure already present and "known" preanalytically and

and dimly in the depths of immediate experience.⁵ It may also depend on the intensity of ~~the intensity~~ of the intentional pull. This ^{may} vary in different places and periods depending on cultural factors, and perhaps also for reasons that will remain ultimately mysterious. To speak of "tension to the ⁱⁿdivine ground" is after all to speak of what has for thousands of years been called the love of God, and many generations of thinkers have noticed its variability and have attributed this to divine causality, the "grace of God."

If a philosopher wishes, as Voegelin has, to pursue the implications of this conception of philosophy, it will follow that he must turn for the experience and its symbols to thinkers who have reflected on this at times that were propitious to the task and whose thought suggests and evokes an appropriate richness of conscious experience. It is to find such experiential fullness and the symbols engendered by it that Voegelin has gravitated toward the study of ancient sources. There he has found, he believes, symbols more closely in touch with the depths of experience, less fossilized and reified, than may easily be found among modern thinkers. This is why so much of Voegelin's discussion of fundamental issues is couched in Greek and Latin terminology. The rediscovery of philosophy for Voegelin must involve the recovery of the kinds of motivating experience represented in such ancient symbols and largely lost in their modern versions. What has become obscured in particular is the fundamental experiential tension, the ^sexistential tension, the existential philia or love in which one both seeks and is drawn toward the light of truth, the good, the divine ground.

Philosophy, as Voegelin conceives it, is not simply an action on the part of the philosopher. It is as much a pathos, to use the Greek term, something that is undergone, as it is an action. The classical symbols for these active and passive aspects of the event of philosophy, says Voegelin, were zetein (to seek after, to inquire) and helkein (to pull or drag). The element of zetesis (seeking) is present already in the experiential core as the directional tendency of the tension, but so also is the pull (helkein) toward the pole that defines the direction of the tension. The two symbols are ways of expressing two aspects of one and the same movement, the tendency itself: "The terms seeking (zetein) and ^drawing (helkein) do not

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do not denote two different movements but symbolize the dynamics in the tension of existence between its human and divine poles. In the one movement there is experienced a seeking from the human, a being drawn from the divine pole" (The Gospel and Culture," 71).⁶

6. Cf. OH 1:10: "The conversion[toward the source of order] is experienced, not as a result of human action, but as a passion, as a response to a revelation of divine being, to an act of grace, to a selection for emphatic partnership with God."

93 The poles it must be remembered, are not entities, and the names that designate them are not the names of "things" but indices used in the explication of the structure of the tension. Depending on which of them is emphasized in discussion, the language used will tend toward the symbolism either of philosophy or of revelation. In either case the basic structure is the same. The seeking is moved throughout by the appeal of the truth that is sought, and it is the presence, in a nonspecific form, of the intended pole that gives direction to the inquiry. The questioning unrest is not a blind thrashing about but a directional movement; it already has a knowledge sufficient to generate the question, though not knowledge of a sort that would answer it. The seeking as Voegelin puts it is both a knowing questioning and a questioning knowledge (Anam., p. 148).⁷

7. Reference to Met. 982b18.

It may help to clarify this point to draw on a terminology other than Voegelin's for a moment. Bernard Lonergan speaks...

94 The fundamental congruence between Voegelin's analysis of the structure and dynamics of consciousness and Lonergan's should be obvious.¹⁰ The questioning unrest of inquiry is
95 stimulated by the // pole toward which it moves and which is simultaneously present and absent, empty of particular content but filled with a dynamism that reaches toward all possible content. Voegelin's language, on the other hand, derives more from ancient sources than from medieval ones and consequently tends more toward mythic than technical vocabulary.

10. A 14-line footnote on common indebtedness of Lonergan and Voegelin to Plato and common admiration for J A Stewart's Plato's Doctrine of Ideas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909).

This is deliberate on Voegelin's part: by keeping as close as possible to the point at which both philosophy and theology branch out from the compact symbolism of mythology, Voegelin is able to retain through its more richly connotative vocabulary a sense of the complexity and mysteriousness of the wonder that engenders all three. Thus he speaks of man being "moved to his search by the divine ground of which he is in search" and of how in this process "the wondering and questioning is sensed as the beginning of a theophanic event that can become fully luminous to itself if it finds the proper response in the psyche of concrete human beings -- as it does in the classic philosophers" (Anam, pp. 95-96).

A term like psyche, for example, has a concrete experiential reference in much of Greek thought that can easily become obscured by the frequent modern tendency to think of the "soul" as something that one has -- a kind of detachable thing. Still difficult to duplicate are the implications of the Greek term nous, which for Plato and Aristotle involved the idea of the pull of a powerfully attractive goal, particularly the light of truth.¹¹ The nearest modern English equivalent, the word "mind", has all sorts of quite different associations -- from the Cartesian "ghost in a machine" through Hume's empty theater to more recent models based on cybernetics.

11. ... According to Douglas Frame the term nous derived from the Indo-European nes-, the root of neomai ("to return home"), which had an early sacred meaning, to return to light and life from darkness and death. [Douglas Frame, The Myth of Return in Early Greek Epic, Yale U. P., 1978.]

Psyche and nous, according to Voegelin's analysis, were symbols developed by Greek philosophers to explicate the central experience // of the ordered, directional quality of the tension of existence as known from within with varying degrees of clarity.¹² Psyche in this analysis, is not a "thing" that a human being has but a symbol of a process of conscious existence; it represents that area of experience in which the pull toward the pole of transcendence is sensed and begins to emerge into consciousness: "the psyche... is found as a new

12. [V. derives his interpretation from Werner Jaeger and Bruno Snell

center in man at which he experiences himself as open toward transcendental reality" (The New Science of Politics, p. 67). This is not, says Voegelin, the discovery of an object that had always existed; rather the psyche is constituted by the experiential process in which it is discovered. The tension is always present, of course, on the level of immediacy, but it may remain unnoticed, merely implicit. When it begins to emerge in conscious presence then that, according to Voegelin, is psyche.

Consciousness, however, has degrees of clarity and articulateness. The symbol, psyche, in Greek use, referred to an experiential continuum from a maximum of self-reflective clarity to obscure depths in which the intentional pull only barely begins to emerge from the darkness of pure immediacy.. The symbol nous, says Voegelin, was developed to refer to the upper range of this continuum, though nous may also involve degrees of reflectiveness and explicitness of articulation.

97 In the Greek conception, nous is never, as the modern conception of "mind" would have it, a detached, neutral component or a // dispassionate calculative process. Another modern scholar, David Starr, in a study that relates Aristotle's nous to Heidegger's Dasein, lends support to Voegelin's analysis on this point. Referring to the use of the term nous on the part of Homer, Hesiod, and some other early Greek thinkers, Starr says: "Such instances and examples, whether applied to gods or men, make it perfectly clear that nous was generally understood and accepted as a function, perhaps the most important function of personal care, residing ⁱⁿ the heart or the body, grasping the import of things, and responding heedfully with plans, words, deeds.¹³ He also points out the significance of the fact that both Parmenides and Heraclitus used forms of the word phroneo rather than noeo to describe the activity of nous (p. 239). Phroneo (to think, ponder, deliberate) is formed from the word phren (diaphragm), which is virtually equivalent to the term "heart" when used to refer to one's center of

13. David E. Starr, Entity and Existence: An Ontological Investigation of Aristotle and Heidegger (N. Y.: Burt Franklin and Co., 1975) p. 86.

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deepest concern. As Voegelin stated the principle in "What is Political Reality?" noesis, the activity of nous, is a struggle to illuminate a movement of the soul in which one is passionately caught up: "The noetic exegesis lifts the logos [the intelligible structure] of participation into the light of consciousness by interpreting the noetic experience of participation. Noetic knowledge is not abstract knowledge obtained by gathering particular cases of participation and examining them for general characteristics. Rather it is concrete knowledge of participation in which a man's desire for knowledge is experienced as a movement [^] toward the ground that is being moved by the ground" (Anam., p. 183).

It is easy to see that from this point of view nous, as a symbol, is virtually equivalent to "philosophy" as Voegelin considers its Greek originators to have understood it. Both symbols were born of and represent the same experienced grounded process in which reflective consciousness emerges from the womb of mythic thought. What philosophy is, need not be ascertained by talking about philosophy discursively; it can, // and must, be determined by entering into the speculative process in which the thinker explicates his experience of order. The philosophers' conscious break with the form of the myth occurred about 500 B. C. The individual steps taken toward a differentiated experience of the psyche, during the two centuries after Hesiod, had the cumulative result of letting the self-conscious soul emerge as the tentative source of order in competition with the myth, as well as with the aristocratic culture of the archaic polis (OH, 2:170).

Voegelin's most concise treatment of the historical process in which this emergence took place may be found in his essay of 1974, "Reason: The Classic Experience." There he describes it as proceeding from what at first is only "man's existence in a state of unrest" due to his "experience of his life in precarious existence within the limits of birth and death," the awareness that he is not a divine causa sui, not the source of his own being (Anam., p. 92). This experience of unrest, the most primitive form in which the tension of existence expresses itself, becomes a questioning unrest as it gives rise to the wondering question about the ultimate ground, the aitia [cause] or prote arche [first beginning]

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of all reality and specifically his own." "The question," says Voegelin, "is inherent in the experience from which it rises": the experience of precarious existence without an explanation is virtually a living question mark to the person who undergoes it.¹⁴ The questioning unrest can take various forms in actual expression. Philosophy is born of wonder, but so is myth, and it is the same wonder, for it is always the same existential mystery that gives rise to it: "Though this questioning is inherent in man's experience of himself at all times, the adequate symbolization and articulation of the questioning consciousness as the constituent of humanity is... the epochal feat of the philosophers.... Everyone's existence is potentially disturbed by the thaumazein, but some express their wondering in the more compact medium of myth, others through philosophy. By the side of the philosophos stands the philomythos and the philomythos is in a sense a philosophos (Met.982b18ss.). When Homer and Hesiod // trace the origin of the gods and all things back to Ouranos, Gaia, and Okeanos, they express themselves in the medium of theogonic speculation, but they are engaged in the same search of the ground as Aristotle himself (Met. 983b28ss). The place on the scale of compactness and differentiation does not affect the fundamental identity of structure in man's humanity" (p. 93).

The initial experience of wonder is, as Voegelin puts it, "the infrastructure for the noetic insights proper" (p. 94). The noetic insights in turn are constituted by the self-reflective apperception and symbolization of the process of questioning consciousness as it notices, for example, what has been spoken of already as psyche and as it notices also the features that become symbolized in the language of "divine-human encounter": "In the Platonic-Aristotelian experience, the questioning unrest carries the assuaging answer within itself inasmuch as man is moved to his search of the ground by the divine ground of which he is in search. The ground is not a spatially distant thing but a divine presence that becomes manifest in the experience of unrest and the desire to know. The wondering and questioning is sensed as the beginning of a theophanic event that can become fully luminous to itself if it finds the proper response in the psyche of concrete human beings -- as it does in the classic philosophers" (pp. 95-96).

14. Cf. Heidegger, Being and Time, p. 174.

Voegelin goes on to explain that this implies, as these philosophers realized, that philosophy is not a body of ideas or opinions, "but a man's responsive pursuit of his questioning unrest to the divine source that has aroused it." This takes place as a process of experience and symbolization that together constitute the characteristic activity of nous and its mode of knowing, episteme. "This pursuit...." says Voegelin, "if it is to be responsive indeed to the divine mover, requires the effort of articulating the experience through appropriate language symbols."

The process by which these language symbols themselves develop is a continuous one running through the process of meditative exegesis or self-discovery, through the mythic phases as well as the philosophic ones. Paul Ricoeur, in his discussion of the // various levels of language used to describe "sin" or self-loss. "the experience of being oneself but alienated from oneself," has made basically the same observation: "the consciousness of self seems so to constitute itself at its lowest level by means of symbolism and to work out an abstract language only subsequently, by means of spontaneous hermeneutics of its primary symbols" (Symbolism of Evil, pp. 8-9). Ricoeur's terminology here ("symbolism" versus "abstract language") might make it seem as if two different languages are involved, but actually for both Ricoeur and Voegelin there is a gradual process, a continuum of symbolization, by which one renders increasingly articulate and explicit a meaning already compactly present as a whole on the earliest, most compactly suggestive level of symbolism. It is precisely for this reason that both consider it possible and important to trace back through the layers of symbolization to the basic experiences that engender the whole series of layers.

This principle carries with it the corollary, which may be unwelcome to some who seek perfect definiteness of reference, that there is no sharp line that separates mythic from noetic symbols. At a certain point one begins to recognize that thought has become explicit and critically reflective and one indicates this by the use of the term "noetic". In so far as nous is an expression, however, of the same tensional pull, the same "homing instinct," one might call it that characterizes

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human experience on all its levels of differentiation or compactness, it remains within the experiential continuum that is the psyche as a whole.

Webb's diagram: remainder of p. 100 and most of page 101.

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Between S (lens) and R (object under scrutiny) there is a constant interplay: the immediacy of experience stimulates the wondering question that seeks knowledge, and it also engenders the symbols that make possible that knowledge. It is only by way of the symbolic representation that one can attend to the experiential field, and only those features of it may consciously discerned that are articulated in the symbol.

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Experience, however, always contains the full range of features that call for attention, and these exert a constant pressure on consciousness//seeking adequate symbolization. It is paradoxical, perhaps, that we can notice only what we can symbolize, while we are called by the reality in which we are involved to develop symbols for all of what is available to be noticed. This is what it means, however, to be human: paradoxically both to involved immediately in reality on the most basic level of experience and to know that immediate reality consciously only through the mediating process of symbolic articulation.. What makes for paradox is our attempt to find an adequate symbol that can do full justice to all the dimensions of human existence on its levels of both immediacy and mediation. What resolves the paradox for us in practice is our experience itself of experience as a continuum of varying degrees of relative consciousness and obscurity. We are not perfectly luminous Cartesian egos whose existence must be fully expressible with logical precision. Rather we are participants, Voegelin would say, in what the Greeks called psyche.

... The symbol psyche refers to the entire process of participation in reality, its symbolization, and the tension that moves and guides the process.

... Nous, as Voegelin interprets it, is not a part of the psyche; it is psyche raised to self-reflective clarity. This clarity in which the nature of the mediating process of articulation becomes conscious to itself opens up the possibility

of conscious and deliberate critical reflection on the adequacy of symbols. It also makes possible the realization of their irreducibly analogical character when they attempt to give expression to what is inherently mysterious: the soul in its depths, the mystery of existence, the eminent reality of the gods, and so on. It makes both careful knowing possible and the limits of human knowing visible.

The classical term, as was mentioned above, for the characteristic mode of knowing of nous is episteme, and Voegelin has made this a central term of his own analysis of philosophical knowing as an existential process. This is not, of course, the only way to conceive the nature of knowing, nor is it much regarded in the modern //setting. There is also the type of knowledge now usually referred to as "scientific" but which could perhaps be more accurately described as "hypothetical," since the term "science," derived as it is from the medieval Latin scientia, itself a translation of the Greek episteme, is a name that could as reasonably be claimed on historical grounds for Voegelin's noesis as for modern science's investigations into external nature (cf. Anam., p. 177). This history of terminology is worth mentioning, because it indicates the fundamental confusion that has developed regarding what constitutes knowledge as such and what type of knowledge can best lay claim to the name -- the question of which, in terms of the preceding chapter's discussion, is the controlling sense of the word, through analogy to which other uses derive their meaningfulness.

An underlying problem is that one may speak of knowledge in at least two fundamentally different ways: knowledge of existence from within and knowledge of existence from without. In the classical setting these two ways were sometimes designated by such terms as episteme, aletheia, and theoria, on the one hand -- all of them terms for the experientially rooted mode of knowing of nous -- and the term doxa (opinion) on the other. Much of Voegelin's treatment of the basic issue is to be found in his his historical studies of the use of these terms. The historical approach is complicated, however, by the fact that the terms were used in different ways over time by different philosophers -- in ways that also reflected the same conceptual confusion as does the the modern term "science."¹⁵

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Note 15 runover to p. 104: it is discussion of terminology with references to a number of scholars.

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The question of the distinction and relations between episteme, doxa, gnosis is of central importance for Voegelin, but unfortunately his treatment of it is not one of the clearer aspects of his thought....

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The present discussion can be ^{can}simplified by concentrating first on the basic issue: existence be known from within in a way that is the explication or symbolic articulation of the concrete experience of the existing knower, or it can be known as the external reality of a hypothetical entity other than the knower himself. Voegelin used just this terminology in his 1943 essay, "On the Theory of Consciousness," in which he said: "The

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thing-in-itself is a symbol // through which Kant sought to grasp the correctly seen fact that our experience of nature is an experience from without, while the within of matter remains inaccessible to us: our experience of natural being is, strictly speaking, phenomenal. Kant, furthermore, has seen correctly that consciousness under the title Vernunft, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~
~~xx~~ is a special case, inasmuch as in consciousness we have experience of a process from 'within'" (Anam., p. 32).

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(It is worth noting that the experiential reality referred to here as vernunft, usually translated "reason," is not essentially different from that referred to in the classical setting as nous, in spite of changes in emphasis deriving from their historical contexts.)

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He also used this way of speaking more recently in "What is Political Reality?" where he says that "noetic knowledge... is not the type of knowledge of the natural sciences, observing things from without, but the experience of a relation from within" (p. 175).

Another way to put the distinction between the two modes of knowledge would be to speak of epistemic mode or that from within as "existential knowing" and of the doxic mode or that from without as "hypothetical knowing." Voegelin does not use this terminology, but Jaspers, dealing with the same problem, comes close to it when he speaks of "existential elucidation" (Existenzerhellung) as the illumination of Existenz from within and contrasts this with the investigation of

"empirical existence" in the natural sciences (cf. e. g. Philosophy, 2:3-46).

(There follows a non-scientific illustration: What's that? Is it a chair? It is a chair.)....

Epistemic or existential knowledge, on the other hand, which for Voegelin is the proper sphere of philosophy. ^{the} is/knowledge in which the tension of existence, the love of the divine ground, becomes // conscious to itself and commits itself to live in fidelity to its love; for this kind of knowledge is not a matter of mere observation of fact but of clarifying, opening up, and rendering conscious and available the possibilities implicit in existence in its fullness.

As should be clear already, the term "existence" is used in two different though analogous ways in connection with the two kinds of knowledge. In epistemic, existential knowledge it refers to an experience in which is wholly involved. From this point of view, existence has fullness, density, texture; it is a life of drama, a wager in which the stake is life itself, and in which the possible prize is heightened or eminent life. From the doxic point of view, in contrast, existence is narrowed to what in experiential terms is absolutely minimal: the bare opposite of nonbeing. It is a kind of logical counter used to indicate no more than the truth of a logical proposition -- not the lived truth of aletheia, or true being in its luminous self-disclosure. "In fact," says Voegelin in his commentary in The World of the Polis on Parmenides's discussion of aletheia ("Truth") and doxa ("Delusion"), "the Delusion is quite as true as the Truth, if by truth we mean an adequate and consistent articulation of an experience.... Being and Delusion are not different worlds; they are two aspects of one world that is given in two kinds of cognitive experience of the same human being" (OH 2:216-17). Both are knowledge in the sense that they are ways of construing reality; the distinction is between levels or degrees of reality; "Truth is the philosophy of the realissimum that we experience if we follow the way of immortalization in the soul; // Delusion is the philosophy of the reality that we experience as men who live and die in a world that itself is distended in time with a beginning and an end. The characterization of this philosophy of reality as a Delusion

der ves its justification from the experience of a superior reality, of an immortal ground of a mortal world (p. 216). There is a mundane reality, the reality of finite objects in the world, and there is eminent reality, the reality known in the experience of transcendence that reaches beyond the world.

Episteme and theoria were the terms used by certain classical philosophers, as discussed by Voegelin, for the reflective illumination of this experienced movement of transcendence. [What follows on page 108 develops a terminological problem]

The possibility of confusion comes from the fact that even Voegelin, writing as he does in modern languages, is forced to use the term (theoria) in both doxic or hypothetical and epistemic or existential senses. Whenever Voegelin makes "theory" as such an explicit theme for discussion, however, he is concerned with the epistemic sense, as in The New Science of Politics, where he defines it as "an attempt at formulating the meaning of existence by explicating the content of a definite class of experiences," which he specifies as "the differentiating experiences of transcendence."

Theory as Voegelin primarily uses the term, refers to knowledge that is the conscious expression of immediate experience and that has become explicit through adequate symbolization. The mediating symbols, of course, function analogically, and fully developed theoretical understanding involves recognition of this. Also precisely because theory involves mediation by means of symbols, it casts in an objectifying mold an experience that in itself does not have the structure of division into subject and object; but again that is recognized, or at least it is when theoretical reflection attains maximum lucidity. It is not the use of interpretative models that differentiates theory in Voegelin's sense from doxa, since all reflective understanding of the level of articulate consciousness takes place in the medium of symbolizations.²⁰ Rather the difference lies in the relation of the model to experience.

20. Reference to Aristotle, De anima 413a14-20, 432a7-8 with comments.