reflecting on the varieties of "explanation," Basil Willey concluded, "One cannot . . . define 'explanation' absolutely; one can only say that it is a statement which satisfies the demands on a particular time or place."¹ The observation confronts us with the disconcerting truth that, generally satisfactory as our accepted patterns of explanation are to us, they will doubtlessly strike our descendants as quaint and intellectually provincial. Following Willey, one is tempted to offer in riposte to Marx's famous slogan,—"The philosophers have only described the world in various ways, the point, however, is to change it."²—the reply that the world endures, that what changes are the modes of explanation. Indeed, I argue that one may view history as a suc-


cession of various symbolic expressions, each appropriate to its intended audience but differing from one another in their suppositions about reality. Put most generally, my thesis is that history, as lived-experience, can be divided into epochal periods with distinct symbolic representations.

This essay develops this thesis in seven stages. First, I define "rhetorical epoch" and "epochal symbolism" and identify the principal rhetorical strategies that govern their emergence, flourishing, and demise. Second, I argue that humans across time and culture are united by an awareness of what I call "the tension of existence," which is the ground of rhetorical epochs and their symbols. Third, I examine the symbolisms of ancient Egypt, Sumer, and Babylon and contend that they mark humanity's first epochal period, the cosmological epoch. These cultures were selected not only because they are prior in time but also because they embody an apparently universal stage in human consciousness. Fourth, I examine how ethical monotheism and Greek philosophy not only challenged the cosmological symbols and established new rhetorical epochs but also articulated a vision of a truly universal audience. Fifth, I delineate the nature of the universal audience implicit in the Hebraic and Hellenic symbols and show how it affirms a fundamental continuity in human experience as well as manifesting an epochal change. Sixth, I discuss why epochal symbols are subject to early derailment. Finally, I review several contemporary symbols for the universal audience to provide a vantage point from which to distinguish genuine epochal advance from mere variations of the will to power.

One final word of preface may help to place this essay in its scholarly tradition and distinguish its approach from other approaches to the rhetoric of history. I share with Vico, Kenneth Burke, Bernard Lonergan and Eric Voegelin a vision of history as a drama of choice and decision and view the human person as a rhetorically constituted actor who must "[play] a part in the drama of being . . . without knowing what it is." With them and with the philosophic tradition of rhetoric in general, I view rhetoric as a substantive science of personal and social order; thus the advent of epochal symbols, their maintenance in the life of the community, and the later derailment of epochal insight are all rhetorical processes.

Eric Voegelin, Order and History, Vol. 1, Israel and Revelation (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), p. 1. This volume will subsequently be abbre-
I. RHETORICAL EPochS AND EPoCAL SYMBOLISM

By rhetorical epoch I mean an era so marked by a strategic, stylized symbolism that it divides history into a "before" and "after." Rhetorical epochs follow a pattern of eruption, vitality, and demise; they are particular periods of organization and order in the life of humanity. The symbolism featured by such eras I call "epochal." Rhetorical epochs and their representative symbols reflect such a major shift in human self-understanding that their advent constitutes a revolution.

Once an epochal innovation in self interpretation appears there is no hope of reviving the old. Julian the Apostate's attempt (361–363) to revive the old gods, after Christianity had enjoyed quasi-official status for over three decades, was romantic and pointless.* Once a new religion is accepted, the old one is no longer satisfactory because it no longer explains things adequately. Or, for

another example, after Einstein, Newtonian physics becomes a special case. Scientific symbolism, like any other symbolism, becomes epochal when it radically alters people's self-understanding.5

Epochal symbolism belongs to the category of the rhetoric of affirmation.4 As such it is as subversive of what comes before as it is constitutive of what comes after. As epochal symbolism becomes dominant in an era, it determines the terms of expression and meaningfulness for all subsequent discourse. In the last decades of the old religion in Rome, for instance, advocates of the old gods developed prayer books, articles of faith, charities, and began efforts to develop theology with the same sense of system as the Christians.7 Indeed, the necessity to justify oneself in the language of the new reality is one reason why the old loses the contest. The gods of Rome were neither false nor inarticulate—at least not initially. They were, in fact, a clear symbolic representation of the spiritual substance of the state; they commanded the service of able Romans years after they ceased to inspire religious awe. Because the gods embodied the traditions of Rome so well, the gods could not be adapted to the rhetorical situation of the fourth century and after. The new religion addressed a new social reality and its symbolism articulated a new relation between God and humanity, the present life, and the life to come. In its light the old symbolism appeared inadequate—indeed false.6

The advent of epochal symbolism is evident by its subversion of the symbolism that precedes it. Three strategies of subversion are possible: subsumption, contradiction and disregard. Illustrations of these strategies are found in various full-length studies.9 Here I will offer specific examples to clarify each kind of subversion.

9I have found the most sustained insight on this theme in the four volumes of Eric Voegelin's *Order and History*. Indeed, all his works deal with the themes of epoch and the symbols involved in the movement from the compact understanding of myth to differentiated insight. See my review essay, "Eric Voegelin's Order in History," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 68 (February, 1982), pp. 80–91.
For example, prior to its unification, "Egypt" was two separate kingdoms, each with its own gods and king. When the two kingdoms were united through the conquest of the southern king, "Narmer-Menes," he styled his rule as lordship over "The Two Lands." Thenceforth, for three thousand years, the kings of Egypt wore a double crown, the white crown of upper Egypt and the red crown of lower Egypt. On the forehead of the double crown appeared the cobra goddess, protectress of lower Egypt, and the vulure goddess of upper Egypt. The Egyptian style of subsumption is rare. Usually conquerors denigrate the symbolism of the vanquished and strictly subordinate it to their own rather than incorporating it on a basis of equality.

The more usual strategy of subsumption is provided by Egypt's neighbor, Sumer. The victory of the younger over the older gods recounted in the Sumerian Epic of Creation is commonly held to preserve the cultural memory of the victory of an invading population over a related but more settled and civilized people. One standard interpretation of the Epic indicates that the older gods, which were imprisoned in the earth, later became the devils and evil spirits who played such a prominent role in the lives of the peoples of the fertile crescent.

Christianity provides another example of subsumption by denigration. Christianity acknowledged the reality of alien religious symbols by according pagan gods the status of devils—Satan himself bearing a striking resemblance to Pan. Christianity also employed incorporation as a tactic of subsumption. The iconography whereby Isis is transformed into Mary is especially clear.

Greek philosophy, in its struggle to differentiate itself from the ground of myth, employed the strategy of subsumption by "fulfillment." A representative example is the presocratic philosopher Parmenides' (ca.515 B.C.) poem, "The Way of Truth." By presenting his philosophy in the symbolism of a divine revelation, Parmenides makes it appear as the fulfillment of Greek religion.
Fulfillment seems to be the standard strategy of subsumption in the history of religion. Religion (re-ligio, "binding back") is by definition traditional. While Christianity presents a "New Testament," it understands itself as the fulfillment of Judaism. The third century Persian prophet, Mani, begins his ministry with a critique of the regionalism of Pauline Christianity and declares his own message as the fulfillment of all previous religion. Scarcely three hundred years later, Mohammed announces his revelation as the fulfillment of Judaism and Christianity and characterizes himself as the "Seal of the Prophets." The same pattern of binding back the innovation to an original pattern, which is then proclaimed to be fulfilled, can be seen in more recent religions such as Mormonism and Ba'hai. The pattern of binding back can also be seen in "manipulationist" religions, such as Christian Science and Scientology.

Since Voltaire's *Essai sur les moeurs* (1753), the dominant modern strategy of subsumption has been "secularization." Secularization is the process of finding scientistic equivalents for religious categories of proven persuasive efficacy. A full length study of this strategy is provided by Herbert Becker's *The Heavenly City of The Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*. Becker chronicles the process

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12 Following Bryan Wilson, Roy Wallis characterizes these movements as well as the Japanese Soka Gakkai, and Transcendental Meditation as "manipulationist" in that they provide the adherent "... some superior, esoteric means of succeeding within the status quo" rather than offering a means of escape through otherworldly salvation. Roy Wallis, *The Road to Total Freedom: A Sociological Analysis of Scientology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 4. Christian Science is a "binding back" in two senses. It understands itself, as its name implies, as the fulfillment of Christianity and of the spiritual implications of modern science. Scientology is less historically based. While *Science and Health With A Key to the Scriptures* presupposes a still Christianized audience, *Dianetics: the Modern Science of Mental Health* presupposes a secularized audience ripe for respiritualization via scientistic gnosis. The "re-ligio" in Scientology came with its founder's later cosmological ideas concerning the origin and development of the "thetan" and the doctrine of past lives and was not the original impetus of the movement. See Wallis, pp. 124–126.

whereby the age of Enlightenment razed the traditional “Heavenly City” only to reconstruct it out of more up-to-date materials. A contemporary representative of this method is orthodox Marxism, in which class conflict subsumes the warfare between good and evil, the Revolution subsumes the Last Judgment, and the abolition of class distinctions in the worker’s paradise subsumes the Kingdom of god. Martin Buber’s description of Marxism as the socialist secularization of eschatology, captures the essential persuasive appeal of this substantially derivative yet still popular “religion.” Secularization is essentially subsumption by substitution. An up-to-date series of terms is substituted for traditional terms; the resulting novel symbolism is persuasive precisely because it operates upon the old grammar.

Examples of “contradiction” as a response to rival symbolisms are provided by the monotheism of Israel and the intolerance to other Gods of its off-spring, Christianity. In ancient Greece, Xenophanes insisted that the traditional gods were false, unseemly, and that the true God was one, without human form, and accomplished all things by the power of thought.

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20 Billington’s *Fire In The Minds of Men: Origins of The Revolutionary Faith* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1980) is an especially persuasive demonstration of the power of western religious themes when they are secularized and made the animating center of activist political faiths. Especially in light of our discussion of eschatology, it is instructive to compare the promethean theme Kolokowski finds at the core of the Marxian project with the section on “Prometheanism” in Billington’s earlier, *The Icon And The Axe* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), pp. 478–492.

21Jaeger, p. 45.
Modern examples of contradiction are numerous. Copernicus understood his view of the universe not as complementing Ptolemy's but as replacing it. For Descartes and for his followers, philosophy begins with the *Discourse On Method* and replaces all that comes before it. Similarly, Darwin's *Origin* directly contradicts the theory of special creation popularized in the works of William Paley.22

Finally, symbols "vanish," that is, they cease to be reaffirmed and developed. Given what is known of how cultures develop, it is highly probable that there was a Greek poetic tradition prior to Homer, yet there is no record of it; it simply vanished.23 The gods of the ancient world have also vanished, not in the utter sense of Homer's predecessors but in the sense that, while we hear of Zeus, Jove, and Marduk, no one now carries on their cult. Similarly, the advent of Copernicanism marks the decisive point at which a tradition of cosmological symbolism, stretching from ancient Sumer to medieval Europe, vanishes. As George Steiner poignantly expresses it: Copernicanism "marks the historical moment in which the forms of the cosmos recede from the authority of humanistic judgment. Henceforth, the stars burn out of reach. After Milton... the nearly tangible awareness of a continuity between the rim of private experience and the hub of the great wheel of being—lose their hold over intellectual life."24

Similarly the advent of Darwin marks the decisive end of a tradition in Protestant thought. The last edition of Paley's *Natural Theology* was 1863—the contemporary American "Society For Creation Research" notwithstanding. After Darwin, the "contrivances" of the divine artificer became unforseen adaptations and a style of theological discourse ends.25

Having examined the two chief characteristics of epochal sym-


bolism—that epochal symbolism constitutes a new reality, and that after it appears earlier symbolisms are subsumed, contradicted, or vanish, we can now turn to the relationship of epochal symbolism to tensional field.

II. TENSIONAL FIELD AS THE GROUND OF HISTORY

In all cultures and at all times, human beings have known that they would die. The burden of this knowledge is what I call "the tension of existence." When the awareness of life against death is expressed in "strategic, stylized symbols," history—history, the narrative embodying a people's common experience—is manifest as a shared field of tension. At least implicitly, history is always tied to the tension of existence and thus concerns time, death, and the mystery of eternity. The root of our word "human" is "humanus," of which one variant is "mortal." Thus, while human beings form their response to this tension in many ways: in myth, ritual, poetry, religious discourse, architecture—it is in the positioning and equipping of their dead that we recognize the most dramatic and pervasive expression. Indeed, the first thing we know about humans qua human is their attitudes toward last things. As Lewis Mumford observes:

Soon after one picks up man's train in the earliest campfire or chipped-stone tool one finds evidence of interests that have no animal counterpart; in particular, a ceremonious concern for the dead, manifested in their deliberate burial with growing evidences of pious apprehension and dread. The city of the dead is the forerunner, almost the core, of every living city. Urban life spans the historic space between the earliest burial ground for dawn man and the final cemetery, the Necropolis, in which one civilization after another has met its end.

Rituals of interment are probably the origin of the first genre of public address—epideictic.

In characterizing history as a strategic, stylized symbolism which emerges from a community's experience of life as a tensional...
field, I am saying that both proximately in the here and now, and ultimately when life is seen against death, human consciousness is typified by awareness of exigence and constraints; to be an individual or a part of a group, then, is to understand oneself as a speaker or listener. My formulation shows my indebtedness to Lloyd F. Bitzer's delineation of the rhetorical situation. While I think his view is entirely adequate for the discussion of ordinary discourse, I would modify it in one particular to discuss epochal symbolism.

Bitzer's model is homeostatic and pragmatic. It is homeostatic in that it requires an imbalance to activate it. When an exigence occurs, a prior equilibrium has been overturned and to restore balance one must find a way to mediate reality so that one resolves the problem. The model is pragmatic in that it is concerned with the kinds of address that are capable of restoring the balance upset by the exigence. The example of a funeral illustrates the limits of the Bitzer model and suggests the modification of the model required by the idea of ultimate exigence. While death is an exigence and a funeral is a response, no ceremony and no eulogy ever "rights" the brute fact of loss, especially if we recognize in the individual's funeral the inevitability of our own and everyone's. When, in T. S. Eliot's words, we recognize "we all go with them, into the silent funeral, Nobody's funeral, for there is no one to bury," we confront an exigence beyond the capacity of any symbolism whatever ultimately to assuage. Beyond the pragmatic world of manageable mundane exigences and manageable responses looms mortality itself as the omnipotent exigence energizing the "trail of symbols" which is human history as narratives, as lived experience. Examining the process whereby epochal symbols emerge from the tensional field of life's ultimate exigence and how they are finally transcended or transformed by other symbols is the task of a rhetoric of history.

III. The Cosmological Epoch

Ancient Middle Eastern societies are characterized aptly as "cosmological." For the ancient Egyptian or Sumerian, the astro-

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physical universe was patterned on the analogy of human society, and human society in turn was patterned on the analogy of the astrophysical universe. Reality was a community of beings in which similarity prevailed over difference. The resulting world picture was hierarchical, consubstantial, cyclical, and compact.

Ancient Middle Eastern societies were hierarchical, organized according to a chain of beings stretched above and beneath them. In Egypt, for example, the hierarchy stretched from the supreme god, Re, identified with the sun, through the other gods, to the reigning pharaoh, who was the son of god, through mortals, and down into the underworld presided over by the god Osiris.30

Egyptian kingship symbolism illustrates how ancient Middle Eastern societies interpreted reality as consubstantial, cyclical and compact. Pharaoh's crown, adorned with the heads of the vulture goddess and the cobra goddess, emphasized the shared substance of man and animal. Pharaoh's person manifested the shared substance of god and man. The hyphenated pantheon, over which pharaoh presided, affirmed the consubstantiality of god with god. The lowly god of Crocodopolis, Sobek, shared the glory of the national deity by becoming Sobek-Re. When the ruling house shifted to Thebes, the obscure Amon became the famous Amon-Re of imperial times.31

The cyclical nature of this cosmological world-picture can be seen in the duality of pharaoh's role as individual and type. As an individual, the pharaoh had a name, for example, Ramses I or Ramses II. As King of Egypt, he was "Horus," the divine son. At his death, the individual, Ramses I; was assimilated to his father Osiris, Lord of the underworld, and his successor, Ramses II, became Horus. The classical formula, which originated in Egypt, "the


king is dead, long live the king!,” is a paradigm of the cosmic cycle in which the individual passes and the eternal type remains. Another illustration of the cyclical pattern is the annual New Year’s festival at which pharaoh would return all things to how they had been at the moment of creation, thus giving the cosmic cycle another year.32

The compact nature of the cosmological world picture is evident in the Egyptian fusion of what we would carefully distinguish. To us, there is a contradiction between pharaoh being at once the son of Re and the son of Osiris. That the Egyptians could accept such an idea illustrates how radically an acceptable explanation changes over time. For us, as inheritors of Greek philosophy, an explanation must reduce a multiplicity of aspects to the unity of a single concept. The peoples of the ancient Middle East sought only to surround important aspects of reality with a host of interlocking analogies. Since the pharaoh was the living embodiment of the “beyond” that was below, he was the son of Osiris, god of the underworld. Since he was the living embodiment of the “beyond” that was above, he was the son of Re, the sun.33 The people who engineered the pyramids and pioneered brain surgery and geometry understood the law of contradiction well enough.34 Neither en-

33 R. T. Rundle Clark, Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978), p. 121; Henri Frankfort, Ancient Egyptian Religion (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), pp. 51–53; Kingship and the Gods, pp. 148–161. Frankfort makes the appropriately cautionary point “. . . it would be an error to put the relation between Pharaoh and Re on a par with that of Pharaoh and Horus.” p. 148. He also adds “Nevertheless, these two shared certain essential attributes; and this consubstantiality found expression in the studied similarities between royal acts and solar events.” I mean my analogy to turn on his second point without falling under the ban of his first. The “consubstantiality” of the two symbols is precisely what marks the Pharaohnic style of symbolism as “compact”—the symbolism emphasizes accidental similarities at the expense of essential differences.
34 For an assessment of Egyptian scientific accomplishments see, Sir James Jeans, The Growth of Physical Science (New York: Fawcett World Library, 1961), pp. 17–19. See also Dampier, pp. 5–7. For a discussion of why much of the thought of the ancient Middle East is likely to strike a modern reader as self-contradictory, see Frankfort, Ancient Egyptian Religion, pp. 3–22, and Frankfort, et. al., The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man, pp. 3–27. Indispensable as Frankfort’s work is, his depiction of the ancients as “mythopoetic” thinkers, confronts the reader with the myth of modernity inherent in his positivist vocabulary. For an account of the peoples of the ancient Middle East which presents them as persons fully as reasonable
engineering nor science in general, but life itself was their root metaphor for ultimate reality. For a world whose ruling vision was the unity of all with all, the pharaoh's office was an appropriate symbol, a mixed metaphor which fused spheres of reality that differentiate in Israel and Hellas.

Three additional points will complete our characterization of cosmological symbolism and prepare us for a critical appraisal of it. The first and most notable feature of cosmological symbolism is its emphasis on the typical over the particular and the unique. Henri Frankfort records the truly surprising fact that pharaohs, whom we know to have been remarkable leaders, were credited not with their own victories in battle, but with those of their predecessors. The same is true of their likenesses. Rarely are we confident that the image we have in statuary is a likeness of the king. Pharaohs were types. The pharaoh was to be victorious in battle and majestic in appearance. Only the heretic king, Akhenaton, stands out, thanks to his naturalistic revolution in imperial art. Second, because ancient speculation never clearly differentiated itself from myth, philosophic concepts, such as the Egyptian "Maat," do not give rise to the systematic exploration of the logos that we find in Heraclitus. Even in China, where philosophic speculation reached a depth unknown in Egypt, Sumer, or Babylon, the insights are muted and do not reach full self-conscious articulation in a symbolism clearly set apart from myth.

as ourselves whose thought was different because of the difference in symbolism, see Eric Voegelin, OH, I, pp. 1-15, and for a discussion of detail pp. 16-110. See also Voegelin's discussion of "Mytho-Speculation," in OH, 4, pp. 60-64. For a different account which also underscores the continuity between "modern" and so called "primitive" or "savage" thinking, see René Girard, Violence and the Sacred (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 289-308; also René Girard, Des Choses Cachées Depuis La Foundation Du Monde (Bernard Grasset, 1978), pp. 189-211.

35Frankfort, Ancient Egyptian Religion, pp. 46-49.
37OH, 4, pp. 284-289. These comments on the way Egyptian philosophic ideas never reached the conceptual clarity we find in Greece are complemented by the parallel observations of Michael V. Fox on the character of Egyptian rhetoric. "Lacking its own procedures for expansion and for internal critique, Egyptian rhetoric could not become an independent discipline. It had to remain a variety of rules scattered among general moral and practical counsels." Michael V. Fox, "Ancient Egyptian Rhetoric," Rhetorica, I, No. 1 (Spring, 1983), p. 21.
Third, the cosmological symbolism is, to date, the most durable on record. Egyptian civilization had a continuous history of over 3,000 years and so did the civilization of the Tigris-Euphrates flood plain. Classical Chinese civilization, which also followed the cosmological pattern, had a continuous history of nearly 4,000 years. When we realize that even a people as learned as the Chinese never broke the cosmological pattern, but that it was shattered by the infusion of western ideas, we are reminded how rare and forceful are the eruptions of rhetorical epochs.38

Structural Weakness of Cosmological Symbolism

In light of the impressive durability of cosmological symbolism, it is remarkable that human self-understanding ever broke free of it. To understand why history no longer moves in the cosmological pattern requires a brief account of the structural weakness in the cosmological world picture. By recognizing this weakness, we will be prepared to examine how realignments in cosmological symbols presage epochal breakthroughs but differ from them.

The inherent difficulty in cosmological symbolism is finding a symbol adequate for the mysterious “ground” from which society and the individual spring and to which they return. The problem is that the “beyond,” the mysterious “ground” of being, is not a thing in the world like other things.39 Under ordinary circumstances,
it may seem plausible that the Egyptian pharaoh, the Sumerian ensi, or the Chinese emperor is the true representative of the "beyond,"—that through the office of this individual, society is anchored in cosmic order. Under extreme conditions, however, it is apparent that the cosmos is one thing and the official mediator is a powerless mortal. For instance, where does one look for justice when the central authority of the state no longer protects the individual against bandits? Where does one look for cosmic order when the ceremonies of renewal have been performed faithfully and the Nile does not rise as it should: or, as in Sumer, when the Euphrates changes its course and the life-giving ditches are empty? Where is one to look for social or cosmic order during the "time of troubles," the period of total disruption and chaos, common to all civilizations? Different societies developed different strategies for protecting conventional answers from these disturbing questions.

Ancient China coped with the "time of troubles" by an elaborate theory of revolution in which the "mandate of heaven" would pass from the ruling house to the challenger. The rhetorical genius of the "mandate of heaven" theory is revealed in the protection it afforded to the Chinese concept of order. By lending tempo-

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41 For a brief account of the mandate of heaven see H. G. Creel, *Chinese Thought from Confucius to Mao-Tse-tung* (New York: Mentor Books, 1953), p. 23. A more particularized account may be found in H. G. Creel, *The Origins of Statecraft in China*, Vol. I., *The Western Chou Empire* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 85–87. For a critique of Creel's treatment of the mandate of heaven see the review by David N. Keightly, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 30 (May, 1971), esp. pp. 658–659. From the standpoint of rhetorical analysis the essential facts are these. The concept first appears when the Chou overthrew the Shang (1049? B.C.). The Chou claimed to be continuing the same rationale as the Shang when they overthrew an earlier dynasty. The new regime substituted its term "God" for the term associated with the old regime. When the Chou were overthrown in 156 B.C., the Ch'in, who unified the country in 220 B.C. did not use the term nor did the Han who assumed power in (ca. 200 B.C.). By the second century, B.C., the idea as a functioning concept of statecraft was dead. Interestingly enough the concept was revived not by the political needs of a new set of pragmatic rulers, but by a philosopher—Confucius. From at least 100 B.C. on, the idea enjoyed the status of official state orthodoxy. In brief then, a concept born of rhetorical convenience in the Chou dynasty and which died in the Ch'in and early Han, was revived as a philosophic principle of statecraft via Confucianism. I wish to thank Professor Jack Dull, Chairman of Asian Studies at the University of Washington, for the preceding information. I bear responsibility for its rhetorical interpretation.
rary sanction to chaos, the Chinese theory of revolution lessened the conflict between lived experience and cosmic symbols. During the “time of troubles,” when society was in chaos, the “obvious” question—whether social and cosmic order were truly one—seems never to have been asked. Apparently the only question was, “Who has the mandate now?”

Although none of the ancient Middle Eastern peoples ever developed the Chinese relief-valve theory of revolution, they too developed characteristic patterns for protecting their cosmological symbols from fresh confrontation with the ultimate rhetorical situation. The Egyptians, Sumerians, Babylonians and Assyrians periodically recast cosmological symbols to accommodate the pressure of events. Their procedures for symbolically managing the tensions of existence are rhetorically interesting for what they reveal of how far the cosmological symbols could be reworked without endangering the cosmological style of interpretation.

To clarify the difference between efforts to buttress convention and genuine epochal breakthroughs, we will examine four instances of variant cosmological symbols: the Memphite theology from the Old Kingdom of Egypt, the epoch of creation common to Sumer, Babylon, and Assyria, the solar monotheism of the heretic pharaoh Akehenaton, and the Sumerian king list.

How far cosmological symbols can be restructured without endangering the cosmological style of interpretation is seen in the “Memphite theology” from the early centuries of the Egyptian Old Kingdom. The “Memphite theology” is one of the most remarkable documents of ancient man. Composed as a sacred play or “text drama” to be read by a lector priest, its narrative structure appears to mark an important philosophic insight:

Ptah, the very great [or ancient] one, who is the heart and tongue of the Divine Company. In the form of Atum there came into being heart and there came into being tongue. But the supreme god is Ptah, who has endowed all the gods and their Ka’s [that element which makes them divine and eternal] through that heart [of his] which appeared in the form of Thoth, both of which were forms of Ptah.

And in another section of the manuscript the same theme is developed more mundanely.

Now heart and tongue have power over all the limbs, because the former is to be found in every body and the latter is to be found in every
mouth—in all gods, all men, all animals, all worms—in all that lives. The heart thinks what it will and the tongue commands what it will. 42

Beneath the myth, the Memphite theology seems to anticipate the creative word of Genesis, the Platonic principle of the primacy of ideas, and the logos theology of St. John's gospel. A closer look reveals how mistaken this judgment is.

The Memphite theology was composed shortly after Narmer-Menes’ conquest of Northern Egypt. Political expediency occasioned his moving of the capital from Heliopolis to Memphis. That the priests of Heliopolis had a rival cosmogony, giving creative pride of place to Atum, was probably not a serious obstacle to the priests of Memphis claiming the same for their god, Ptah. 43 As noted earlier, keen sensitivity to contradiction was not a distinguishing feature of the Egyptians outside of science. Many temples proclaimed themselves to have been built on the site of the original creation of the earth and more than one deity claimed primacy. Importantly, as Eric Voegelin has observed, the Memphite theology is not a philosophic speculation at all. 44 Rather than offering an expanded vision of the world pointing beyond traditional conceptions, it reworks traditional symbols for thoroughly conservative purposes. Ptah is a cosmic analogue of the conquerer Narmer-Menes whose military victory enabled him to command all things by the power of his speech. However novel it may be, a symbolism whose motive is to buttress established order does not anticipate epochal symbolism, whose aim is to transform conventional understanding in the name of unprecedented alternatives.

It may be something of a shock to realize that the ancients could so completely retool “sacred” symbols to suit their practical political needs. As other examples illustrate, the practice was common.

“The Epic of Creation,” the official sacred story of ancient Babylon, was probably assembled in the form which has come down to us by Hammurabi and the Amorite conquerors. Its materials were assembled from the traditional stories of the Sumerians, whom the Amorites had overthrown. The Sumerians had featured Enlil as the hero god who had slain the older gods and awarded

42Cited in Clark, pp. 61, 62.
43Wilson, p. 58.
44OH, 1, pp. 88–95.
the present gods their places and created the world and humans. Hammurabi's priests assembled an official version of the story and demoted Enlil and filled his role with Marduk, god of Hammurabi's city, Babylon. When Babylon was in turn overrun by Assyria, the new conquerors moved Marduk down to Enlil's level and filled his role by Assur.

Political motives also underlie the solar monotheism of Akhenaton, the celebrated heretic king of the Egyptian New Kingdom. However personally devoted Akhenaton may have been to his sun-disc deity, reasons of state favored his religious innovation. Since the expulsion of the Hyksos invaders, the King of Egypt was the puppet of the priests of Amon. In declaring for one god, in receiving the cult revenues of the rivals, in abolishing their priesthoods, and investing all sacerdotal power in himself, Akhenaton's monotheism was imperial. By simplifying the state cult, he rendered the priesthoods superfluous and thereby sought to return to his office the exclusive dignity it had enjoyed in the age of the pyramids. Under one god or one hundred, pharaoh was supreme in Egypt. Akhenaton merely sought to put theory back into practice.

An even more striking example of how far cosmological symbols could be stretched without threatening cosmological order is the king list of ancient Sumer. If anything is epochal, the discovery of lineal history, as contrasted with the traditional cyclical history of the ancient Middle East, would seem so. Lineal history is usually thought to be a Jewish innovation. This is why the king list of ancient Sumer, which presents the first recorded instance of lineal history, is such a good test of our understanding of what constitutes an epoch. As the Sumerian king list establishes, lineal history was, in fact, invented as a means of buttressing a cosmological empire.

Sumerian cities were never governed by a single dynasty. Rule passed from one house to another, depending on the fortunes of the expanding city-states. The king list, however, tells quite a different story than the archaeologist's spade. According to the Sumerian account, kingship was twice lowered from heaven, each

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time being vested in a single ruling house. The first succession of kings named on the list apparently designates mythical rulers. The second succession, however, names actual historical kings. The latter succession proclaims that, after a deluge destroyed the first dynasty, kingship was lowered from heaven a second time, beginning at the city of Kish. The list, then, provides an accurate chronology of Sumerian rulers, but on the fictive supposition that they all had been members of one ruling dynasty, ending with the present ruling king. All this, it is important to recall, is from a people who annually read the epic of creation at the rite renewing the contract between heaven and earth, whose rulers for the most part are typical rather than individual, and who did not keep historical accounts in the sense that we have them from the Hebrews and the Greeks.

The list, for Voegelin, is an example of "Historiogenesis," a literary construction designed to show that history has but one authoritative point of beginning, leading inevitably to one authoritatively certified end. Despite its breakthrough to lineal history, rather than threatening cosmological order, the list was devised apparently as a support for a threatened cosmological state. In essence, historiogenesis is a stop history device. By showing that an historical course has but one divine sanction, it functions as an intellectual scarecrow, protecting a designated historical field from rival interpretations.\(^a\)

That none of the variations in cosmological symbolism we have examined is epochal should now be clear. That none of these variant symbols presaged an epochal breakthrough does not indicate that these modifications failed in their purpose, but that they succeeded perhaps too well. The conservative function of these variant cosmological symbols illustrates an important principle. The history of discourse is largely the history of political discourse, that is, the history of how to avoid ultimate confrontations, of how to justify the exercise of power, or of how to minimize the impact of its seizure. By contrast, epochal change emerges not from the attempt to preserve conventional symbols but from fresh confrontations with their source—with the ultimate exigence of life against death. From this confrontation, new symbols of personal and social order may eventuate, but not necessarily. As the two-hundred-

\(^a\)OH, 4, pp. 64–67.
\(^b\)Ibid.
year First Intermediate Period of Egypt shows, nothing may emerge at all, even if convention completely breaks down and conditions seem favorable to revolutionary change. The norm of rhetoric in history is for an epochal symbolism to endure once established. Differentiation of consciousness, marking fresh insights and the emergence of new epochal symbols, is the exception.

IV. ISRAELITE AND HELLENIC ORDER

The first revolutionary is Moses. That the Hebrew God is one and not a committee, while important, no more made Israelite order than Akhenaton’s reduction of all the gods to one broke the Egyptian. Moses’ declaration that Israel and not pharaoh was the Son of God, and his leading of the exodus, marks in more than just a physical sense, a fundamental departure from the cosmological view of life. Moses inaugurated a “leap in being,” that is, he radically broke the conventional pattern of social and political life and led his people into a completely unprecedented alternative.

The Israelite exodus, then, is not an event within history; it constitutes history. The exodus divides the flow of time into a “before and after” of meaning and alters the way time itself is experienced. The essential Mosaic insight into a god who calls is not merely an adaptation to special circumstances of an Egyptian symbol. If pharaoh is not the son of god, and Israel is, then the Egyptian gods are at best nonentities and the Egyptian state is without foundation. From Moses’ standpoint, what ultimately is real, is “nothing” in this world but the mysterious call of Yaweh who creates a people whose being is a revolution in personal, social, and historical order.

All of the Egyptian and Sumerian-Babylonian recastings we have examined were designed to support convention. By contrast, nothing about Yaweh will guarantee any social or political convention. Snake tricks and plague symbolism aside, all Moses has to show for Yaweh in principle is his own confidence that He alone is the one who truly is. Indeed, to this day the “I am” of the thorn-bush episode remains a profound anomaly to professional orien-

81OH, 1, pp. 95–101. For a sketch of some of the changes which did occur during this period, see Wilson, pp. 122–124.
82OH, 1, pp. 423, 424. OH, 4, p. 147.
talists. From the perspective of modern historiography, the symbol seems too advanced for its time. How a Hebrew of the fourteenth century B.C., even with the advantage of an Egyptian education, could have come up with a symbol of deity the equivalent of Aristotle’s “Being,” and which an Aquinas could then take as the foundation of a systematic theology 2,600 years later, is puzzling. From a positivist standpoint, there must be another explanation. And here is a limitation in the gradualist assumptions of traditional historiography. An epoch, by definition, marks a radical point of discontinuity. If epochs occur, they can occur at any time. We should no more be surprised by the discontinuity manifest in a Moses in 1300 B.C. than we should be in the discontinuity of a Descartes in 1635 A.D. or by an Einstein in 1905.

The Israelite contribution to the differentiation of consciousness from the compactness of myth is decisive. Before Moses, human understanding moved within the symbolism of a community of being so intimate as to be “consubstantial.” The Israelite differentiation of consciousness consists in the distinction between a de-divinized world and a divine “beyond.” Once the insight has occurred, its differentiating work cannot be undone. Nearly one thousand years after the initial event, an Isaiah, struggling to recall the people of Israel to their reason for being can refer to the substantial, massively material gods of Israel’s neighbors as “el’elim”—nothingnesses. For the differentiated consciousness, whether it be of a Moses or an Isaiah or a Parmenides, the reality of the phenomenal world is not all there is to be said of reality. “The Way of Truth” is a way that points beyond the world of compact, intracosmic “things.”

What Moses did was to affirm a new order, or, in Kuhn’s terms, a new paradigm. With the insight that the true order of being is not pharaoh, or even his father Re, and not the cosmological state, but a presence that perpetually calls humanity to transcend every nameable thing, but which itself is never nameable in a final way, the universal audience gains its first positive symbol. With the discovery of the “fatherhood” of the one God, who is also the God of the Egyptians, though they do not recognize him, comes the discovery of the family of man—of the essential community and relatedness of all human beings.56

54 OH, 1, pp. 407–414.
55 Wilson, p. 236.
Achieving insight and making insight practically effective are not the same. Pragmatic politics has a way of deforming epochal symbols. Whether the Jews were to be the people of the Sinai covenant, or whether they were to constitute another pragmatic state like all others, was the tension of the history of ancient Israel. When the Jews chose to have a king, they decided to be a nation like others. Except for the occasional turn-arounds effected by the prophets, the political history of the Israelite state from the kingship on is a reverse exodus. Indeed, the extravagant language of power in so many of the Psalms appears to be parts of an ancient coronation ceremony. In what Voegelin calls "The Imperial Psalms," we find a genuine debt of the chosen people to the people whom they left behind. Pharaoh's political vision finally penetrated where his chariots had bogged down. The king of Israel had become a Jewish cosmocrator. Pragmatic politics transformed, indeed deformed, epochal insight and its order into a symbolism subservient to the will to power.57

Greek philosophy marks the advent of another differentiated insight, that is, it, like any other rhetorical epoch, is a continuation of the past—but with a significant difference so great that it marks an epoch. The Israelite and the Greek insights are parallel and complementary. They are parallel in that they both distinguish a de-divinized world from a divine beyond. They are complementary in that both provide symbols to articulate the two spheres of reality that are distinguished. In the Israelite differentiation, the world is left open for exploration by science and philosophy, although Hebraic thought did not actually move in this direction. As the Greek philosophers actually begin philosophic and scientific investigation of the de-divinized world, their insight is the more articulate of the two.58

For the divine beyond, the Greek philosophers provide symbols such as "cosmos," (well ordered whole), "apeiron," (the unbounded), "epekeina" (the beyond) and "helkein," (the attraction exerted by the beyond on the philosophic seeker). Among the symbols to articulate the meaning of the differentiating events for mundane existence are "episteme," "nous," "theoria," and "zetesis," (the search for that which disturbs one's satisfaction with convention). The very term "philosophy" denotes the epochal discovery

57OH, 1, pp. 282–310.
58OH, 1, pp. 240–242, 496.
of the love of wisdom as the source of order for the individual in quest of transcendent perfection. Plato’s proclamation in the *Laws* of the age of the third god “Nous,” as the culmination of the previous ages of Cronos and Zeus, identifies reason as the ordering center common to individual, society, and the cosmos.\(^3\)

While volumes have been written on the difference between Jerusalem and Athens, an important identity needs emphasis, especially if we are to grasp the significance of epochal insights for an understanding of the universal audience.\(^4\) In its early stages, if Israel succeeded, it was because Yaweh was its God. If the Greek philosopher discovered something, it was because a love of wisdom, manifest in the philosophers’ experience of wondering, disturbed his satisfaction with convention. And if there were to be further discoveries, the philosopher would have to be open to further disturbances. Neither Yaweh nor philosophy thus, are possessions forever, let alone occasions for contentment.\(^5\)

V. RHETORICAL EPOCHS AND THE “UNIVERSAL AUDIENCE”

Thus far I have sketched the cosmological symbols which embodied the experience of rhetorical epoch for the first major civilizations. I have demonstrated, quite apart from any evaluation of the merits of Jewish theological ideas or Greek philosophical “doctrines,” that ethical monotheism and Greek philosophy offer a radical critique of the cosmological style of symbolization and provide

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an equally radical and positive alternative. From a strictly empirical standpoint, the Hebraic and Hellenic symbols mark an epochal before-and-after in meaning which the earlier variations within the cosmological symbols do not. When we consider the variety of peoples whose self-understandings were constituted by cosmological symbols and how this style continued despite military greatness or defeat, despite prosperity or famine for nearly four thousand years in both the ancient Middle East and in China, we are forced to acknowledge its stability and to note how odd and rare are epochal events.

We must now examine more precisely the structural features that unite the symbolisms of Athens and Jerusalem, despite their celebrated differences, and how these features decisively separate them from their cosmological predecessors. As a necessary preface I will first establish the propriety of my use of Perelman's term "universal audience." Following the comparison of the Hebraic and Hellenic symbols of the "universal audience," I will clarify the sense in which the eruption of the novel symbols reaffirms a primordial continuity in human experience as well as inaugurates an epochal change. Then we will be in a position to examine why epochal symbols are subject to derailment almost from the moment of their pragmatic success.

Epochal Symbols And The Propriety of the term "Universal Audience"

Perelman's term "universal audience" is appropriately applied to the epochal symbols of Jerusalem and Athens for two reasons. First, both Israel and Hellas discovered a universal point of reference which encompassed yet transcended particular cultures. In the Hebraic case, Yaweh is understood as being the God of the Egyptians, even though the Egyptians do not recognize Him. In the Hellenic case, Plato's *nous* is understood as the ordering center of all persons though only the philosophers recognize this insight explicitly. Second, both the Hebrew prophets and the Greek philosophers recognize this point of reference is personal (in the sense that an audience is personal) because once it has been discovered, the persons who have made the discovery are bound to this discovery by a bond of trust.

Below is a summary, by no means exhaustive, of the fundamental agreement between the Hebraic and Hellenic symbols concerning the nature and function of the universal audience.
Agreement Between The Hebraic And The Hellenic Insights

Nature of the Universal Audience.

1. The universal audience is one. On this point the Hebrew prophets and the Greek philosophers are adamant. Referring to the principle behind all things Aristotle says "... but the world refuses to be governed badly" and cites approvingly from the Iliad "The rule of many is not good; one ruler let there be." 62

2. The universal audience is a human construction of a supreme reality. Once the distinction between "the world" and the "beyond" is made, the phenomenal world is no longer seen as the supreme reality. Once Parmenides discovered "The Way of Truth," the world of everyday, while no less real, was no longer ultimate and appeared as "The Way of Error." 63

3. The universal audience embodies the basis for authentic human community. The insights that provide the universal audience its positive symbols reveal the core of our specific common humanity as transcendent movement toward a beyond nameable in language but never exhaustible by it. Discovery of the universal "beyond" entails the discovery of one’s fellow humans as partners in its quest. 64

Function of the Universal Audience.

1. The symbolism of a universal audience sets the standard for personal, social, and historical existence. As the exhortations of the Hebrew prophets and the Socrates of the dialogues make clear, personal gain or pleasure, or political expedience, or success, are not the final measure for personal and social existence. Israel and Hellas are alike resolved that peoples in history must suffer a higher judgment. 65

Knowledge of the Universal Audience.

1. The universal audience is known through a manifold of culturally and historically constituted symbols. As transcendent movement to-

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ward the "beyond" can occur under many symbols, the universal audience is never the exclusive property of any historical or linguistic community. Voegelin points out that consciousness moves from the compactness of myth to differentiated insight. His comment is based on Aristotle's observation in the *Metaphysics* that the lovers of myth are also lovers of wisdom. 

2. The universal audience is known through surrender to the wonder which prompts radical questioning and trust in the order which the questions articulate. In *Theatetus* Socrates observes "wonder is the mark of the philosopher. Philosophy indeed has no other origin." Aristotle begins the *Metaphysics* "All men by nature desire to know." Support for this statement also comes from the paradox of Socrates being wisest of the Greeks yet having only a knowledge of ignorance. A parallel observation is the Hebraic insight "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." 

Given the foregoing characteristics of the universal audience as differentiated in the Hebrew and Greek rhetorical epochs, one may wonder what is particularly new about it. Indeed, would it not be more accurate to regard the universal audience as simply the latest in a series of ultimate symbols, common to all peoples? In what sense is the universal audience *universal*? What is its relation to the symbols of human self-understanding which preceded it?

**Distinction Between Ultimate And Universal Audience**

All cultures have an image of an ultimate audience, but not all ultimate audiences are universal. Akhenaton's "Aten," for example, is as close to a truly universal symbol as Ancient Egypt ever came. Yet, as I have argued, the "Aten" was a symbol of imperial kingship. The "Aten" is separated from Moses' Yaweh, not by a quantitative, but by an immense qualitative difference. While Yaweh is clearly "ultimate" for the Jews, in the same sense as one particular tribal deity might be ultimate for a people, he is also recognized by them as truly universal irrespective of whether Israel is victorious in battle or not. Now the universal aspect of Yaweh is new. Indeed the universality of Yaweh marks a break with cosmological order and that is perhaps even more truly epoch-making for human self-

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67 *Theatetus*, 155d.
68 *Metaphysics*, 980b.
69 *OH*, 4, p. 52.
understanding than Newton’s discovery of the laws of celestial mechanics. “Universal audience” then is a term I use in an empirical and historical sense. By the term I mean that a mode of symbolization embodying a universal standpoint actually emerged in history. I am making no metaphysical claim about an “audience” that “exists” as an entity apart from the symbols which articulate it. That claim belongs to theology and as such is beyond the proper scope of a rhetoric of history. My claim is merely that awareness of a universal audience occurred twice in human history, in two separate cultures, the Hebraic and the Hellenic, with no apparent interconnection between the two occurrences. The theoretical and normative implications of the discovery of the universal audience for subsequent human understanding and my differences with Perelman on the interpretation of the universal audience will be examined in due course.

The Universal Audience And The Continuity of Lived Experience as “In-Between”

While in one sense the universal audience abolishes the ultimate audience of the tribe, in another sense it explicates it more fully. Before the advent of the epoch making awareness of the one beyond and the one humanity, humankind understood reality as “in-between,” that is as a middle condition, an island of consciousness, between the mystery of the beginning and the mystery of the beyond. When, for example, Augustine’s missionaries presented Christianity to the Anglo-Saxons, the reply of King Edwin of Deira’s alderman, during the subsequent deliberations in the tribal council over whether to accept it, beautifully captured the universal prehistoric insight into the human condition. The speech has come down to us entitled “On The Flight of A Sparrow And The Life of Man.”

The present life of man on this earth, oh king, in comparison to that existence which is not revealed to us, appears to me like the very swift flight of a sparrow, which for a moment flies through the room in which you, your leaders, and ministers on a wintry day are seated at supper around a warm fire, while out of doors rage the whirling storms of wintry rains and snows; the bird entering through one door quickly passes out through the other. For the moment it is within the room, it is safe from the wintry blast, but after a moment of calm from the storm, it quickly returns from winter to winter, and slips away
from sight. So, for such a little time, seems this present life of man. But what has gone before, and what comes after, we know not. Therefore if this new doctrine can dispel the mystery, there seems to be merit in following it.\textsuperscript{70}

The advent of awareness of life as a partnership with a universally opposed to a tribal audience, does not change “the world” in the sense of our earlier citation from Marx, but it does change human consciousness and herein, and herein alone lies its epochal significance. “The world,” that is the structure of human existence as an “in-between,” what Plato termed the “metaxy,” remains unaltered. What changes over time through the epochal events is human understanding. When, for instance, Edwin’s people accepted Christianity, they did not merely gain the dubious benefit of a new set of opinions. They had opinions before. What they gained was maximum clarification of the structure of existence and of their place in it. With their acceptance of the symbolism which carried and continued the Hebraic and Hellenic insights, Edwin’s people could begin to live out their story with an awareness of its place in the one story of the one humanity. As for the mystery of the beginning and the end, it continued as before. Neither for Edwin’s people nor for any people at any time or place is the leap in being a leap out of being.

Once we appreciate the nature of the reality which changes (the reality of human consciousness) and distinguish it from the reality which remains constant (the in-between structure of existence) we shall be able to grasp the sense in which the universal audience, as constituted by the Hebraic and Hellenic epochal symbols, is an empirical datum in the history of human consciousness; it is not to be dismissed as a theological-metaphysical construct, mystification or reification.

Voegelin has distinguished between what he calls transcendent and immanent “poles” of human experience. A “pole” is simply a region of experience and does not answer to an entity which exists apart from the experience of which it is the symbol. Transcendent pole refers to symbols of the “beyond,” immanent pole refers to symbols of the “here and now.” The merit of Voegelin’s distinction is that it enables one to understand a people’s symbols not as fic-

tions but as primary data in the history of consciousness, that is, as culturally appropriate explications of lived experience. From the standpoint of the distinction between transcendent and immanent poles one can see that the older cosmological symbols so easily blended into one another that clearly separating the transcendent from the immanent regions of experience was impossible within the intellectual horizon of the cosmological epoch. "Yaweh," "epekeina," and "nous," however, clearly separated the transcendent pole from the immanent one. In the wake of the eruption of the Israelite and Hellenic rhetorical epoch, particular individuals and communities, not through historical "necessity" but merely in point of fact, underwent a differentiation of consciousness and emerged from the cosmological world of gods and demi-gods to enact a new drama of self-understanding on the stage of history.\(^7\)

Discovery of symbols for the universal transcendence and discovery of symbols for a universal humanity are thus different faces of the same event. Without the symbolism of a universal grounding, transcendence is limited to culture-specific gods. Without the symbolism of a universal humankind, mundane reality is limited to separate cosmological states, each of which regards itself as coincident with humanity. In the wake of the differentiation between the transcendent and immanent poles of experience and their manifestation in language symbols, two radical mysteries now articulately confront one another in human consciousness: the mystery of the beyond and the mystery of the within. Or, one might say the within now understands itself as real only as it moves beyond itself toward the mystery of the beyond. In any event out of the experienced tension of the meeting of the within and the beyond comes the awareness of life as a drama played before a universal audience.

In brief, discovery of the symbolism for universal transcendence constitutes the historical epoch proper, for only with this discovery can there be a universal humanity which can be an historical subject. Discovery of the common humanity coincident with discovery of the common beyond, thus marks an epochal before-and-after of meaning, an eschatological quickening of human hope, a "leap in being."\(^8\)

\(^7\)Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, pp. 91–97, 124–127.

\(^8\)OH, 1, pp. 10, 14, 50ff., 116, 123, 235, 355, 368f.; OH, 2, p. 336; OH, 3, pp. 1–24; *Anamnesis*, pp. 32, 91–97, 124–127; Campbell, p. 82.
VI. THE "UNIVERSAL AUDIENCE" AND DERAILMENT OF EPOCHAL INSIGHT

Three additional points deserve our attention to avoid misunderstanding the advance entailed by discovery of the universal audience and to appreciate why the advance is so easily derailed.

First, the appearance of the universal audience marks a new rhetorical epoch, not the consummation of history. The ultimate rhetorical situation of life against death remains what it always was since the early human discovery of ways to symbolize experience—a mystery. What has changed is human articulateness.

Second, while the universal audience marks an epoch in the lives of those who discover it, a full disclosure of the universal audience never occurs in human experience. Nor in principle can it. History can only move within its constitutive symbols and the symbols which constitute it reveal it to be an in-between. As a story can only be told from the standpoint of its end, for anyone to attempt to tell the story of history from its beginning to its end is to abandon history and return to myth for no mortal in principle has the knowledge to tell such a tale. Within history, the end can only be more or less adequately symbolized and more or less fully sought. This is why the author of Ecclesiastes is only partially correct. There are new things under the sun. What happens in history are increments in human understanding. To the extent that the peoples constituted by the new symbols seek further transformation, the initial experience of differentiation of consciousness will generate further explanatory symbols. In both Israel and Hellas, for example, the initial discovery of the universal audience entailed the accompanying insight of the necessity to turn away from the unreconstructed world. Israel’s response to this further insight was the flight from Egypt, the wandering in the desert, and the precipitation of that paradigmatic symbol of liberation—exodus. In Greece, the philosopher’s response to the same insight is an inner exodus, a personal periagoge, and the contribution to humanity of

73 OH, 1, pp. 10–11.
75 OH, 2, pp. 4–6, 12–13.
that ever virile, ever fecund symbol—the examined life. But Ecclesiastes' untiring refrain, "there is no new thing under the sun," also grasps one of the permanent features of human experience, which is our third point, the process by which truth is transformed into a lie.

Epochal symbols are turned from their original function to perform an opposite and incompatible one through derailment, which has two forms. The first and most usual form is a reversion to a less differentiated symbolism. When Israel's renunciation of Egyptian order, enforced by subsistence in the desert made "I Am's" otherness evident, the golden calf episode marked the depth of Israel's desire for a destiny it could make and control. Similarly, in the Hellenic case, when Socrates made it clear that philosophy was not a mental training ground but a way of life dedicated to raising unsettling questions, his execution was a politic way to restore conventional certainties. A second kind of derailment is formal acceptance of the new symbols but denial of their substance. In the Hebraic case, we see against the untiring resistance of the prophets a living faith ossify into a dead letter.\(^76\) In the Hellenic case, we see what began as a life-transforming love of wisdom degenerate into a forensic debate about propositions.\(^77\)

The reason for derailment is not far to seek. Because human beings desire to live according to stories they make and can control they resist surrendering their stories to the transforming power of epochal symbols and repeatedly find ways to exchange the new truth for the old lie. Hence the radically ambiguous role of rhetoric in the order of humanity. An appropriate example is the Biblical Aaron. From the first, Aaron was Yaweh's concession to public speaking. Yet the man who found golden words to engrave consciousness of the unseen Yaweh in the minds of the people became architect of the golden calf, the discoverer of the nearly unbeatable allure of the world-immanent divine.\(^78\)

Since the differentiating events that made human existence historical, history has continued, and fresh insights and fresh derailments have continued with it.

\(^{76}\) OH, 4, pp. 185-186.  
^{77}\) OH, 3, pp. 82-93; OH, pp. 176-178. 
If the Hebrew and Greek conceptions of the universal audience have dissipated over time, what is an adequate contemporary symbol of the universal audience? Though the following can be no more than a sketch, it may at least indicate that the universal audience is a topic moderns continue to wrestle with and that the initial symbols still provide touchstones for distinguishing advance from decline.

Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* is clearly one of the epochal symbols of our time and marks a decisive advance in biological thought. Social Darwinism, however, became a fashionable symbol in which a scientifically revised universal audience sanctioned the aggressive designs of the strong and the haves against the weak and the poor.79

The works of Hegel and Marx are central symbolisms of the modern epoch. In that they encourage human beings to think historically and to consider the whole of history as an object of thought, both representations embody an advance in understanding over earlier philosophers. In that both Hegelianism and Marxism have identified the meaning of history with the success of favored groups, the immanence of both systems functions to stop history rather than fully illuminate it. Even in Hegel's own time, his identification of the fullness of reason in history with Prussia was grotesque. Nor was the universal audience any less grotesque when in 1848 it was allegedly turned right side up by being identified with the “later on” of the revolution.80 As the history of the twentieth century has portrayed in vivid characters, Marxism has a penchant for declaring the “later on” to have happened and to establish police states to enforce the point.81
A Rhetorical Interpretation of History

One of the most promising contemporary symbols for the universal audience is Jurgen Habermas’ “ideal speech situation.” For Habermas, the ideal speech situation is a circumstance in which individuals would be able to see through personal biases and special viewpoints and meet strictly on the basis of a shared rational interest. The “transcendent pole” of the traditional symbols is represented here in the form of an open-ended “rational interest” which unfolds through the discourse of those capable of participating in it. The “immanent pole” of the traditional symbols is the historical, social, and personal particularities of the dialogue partners. Habermas’ symbol is promising for several reasons. First, in defining the conditions of an ideal speech situation, he provides a reflective restatement of the enlightenment hope that human beings can rise above their limitations. Second, he corrects the Marxist tradition by locating the engine of historical change in discourse rather than in labor. Third, he incorporates the Freudian tradition by setting aside mechanistic determinism and highlighting reason and choice as the transforming center of the therapeutic encounter. Fourth, he provides a suggestive analysis of the possibilities of and checks upon rational discourse in our time.

The strength of Habermas’ symbolization and its limitation are one and the same. Habermas’ ideal speech situation is suspended from the world it would seemingly transform. Indeed, Habermas’ ideal speech situation looms above practical politics like a philosopher’s dirigible, neither highly transcendent nor yet on the

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(New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1977), “the classless society is not only an optimistic and messianic fantasy, unrealizable and inaccessible like all political dreams; but that, on the contrary, it exists, it is another name for the Terror, another name for the destruction of the kulaks, the very real outcome of the unparalleled project of tearing a people from its moorings, its lineage, and its geography. That the Gulag is not a blunder or an accident, not a simple wound or after effect of Stalinism; but the necessary corollary of a socialism which can only actualize homogeneity by driving the forces of heterogeneity back to its fringes. . . . No camps without Marxism, said Glucksman. We have to add: No socialism without camps, no classless society without its terrorist truth.” pp. 157–158; see also Kolakowski, Vol. 1, pp. 416–420., Vol. 3, pp. 1–5, 105–116, 528–530.

ground. Herein rests an important part of its suggestiveness. Had Habermas tied his ideal speech situation to a particular political program, he would have but repeated the apocalyptic tradition in Marxism by providing another motif for the will to power, rather than making an important step beyond it. The social analysis underlying Habermas’ symbol is a profound contribution to our understanding of the dissolution of reason in contemporary civilization. If, as Habermas argues, there is no public on the contemporary scene, or but a series of evanescent publics, then how is one to imagine fundamental social change?* 

The preceding analysis of the symbols of rhetorical epochs indicates that the rational interest of a potential public is articulate already in the manifold of humanity’s cultural symbols.* That is to say, reason is already present in history even if one cannot point to one particular group of people and say “There, this particular group of ideallly qualified persons represents the ultimate forum.” The truly “ideal speech situations,” those from which epochal insights have emerged, were not the fruit of coordinated efforts by people possessed of qualifications one could specify in advance. Yet it was from unplanned epochal insights that new forms of social and personal order emerged and thereby constituted history. In light of the symbols of rhetorical epochs one could imagine real speech with ordinary people whose outcome can be, and sometimes is, real transcendence. The universal folk symbols of the “wise fool” and of truth being accepted by the simple and rejected by the learned, underscore the point that no one knows in advance who will and who will not be open to the possibility of more fully differentiated insight and its epochal implications for personal and social order. Indeed, though this may be far from Habermas’ intent, the acts of special communities which unite folk wisdom and differentiated insight (e.g. the movements led by Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Lech Walesa) can be of enormous paradigmatic and even programmatic value to the manifold speech communities in which humanity’s rational interest is already incarnate.

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*Clifford Geertz’ study of native Balinese religion underscores Voegelin’s point that reason is already manifest in the symbols of myth. Geertz points out how an apparently full differentiation of consciousness may take place without ever breaking the envelope of traditional symbols; Geertz, pp. 186–189.
Another obvious contribution is that of Chaim Perelman, the philosopher who coined the term universal audience. For him, the universal audience is each particular speaker's view of the most qualified forum to hear and judge his or her appeal. In making the speaker's implied audience the criterion for assessing the quality of a message, his conception offers the moral counterweight necessary to balance rhetoric's traditional pragmatic standard. I do, however, have two reservations about Professor Perelman's view.

While I agree with Perelman that conceptions of the universal audience vary with time and place, I think the universal audience is singular in at least one key respect. Perelman's universal audience is a plurality of idealized audiences held by particular figures. He notes: "We could easily show that this so-called 'universal audience' varies with the epoch and with the person: each creates its own idea of the 'universal audience.'" This is correct in that the initial differentiating insights which gave us such symbols as "I Am," or "epekeina" were supplied by concrete individuals from different cultures at different times and places. However, each of these symbols is grounded on an intense encounter of life against death, an experience that is universal and timeless. The intense encounter between life and death is the common feature uniting the different symbols of the universal audience. What changes from one rhetorical epoch to another is a symbolism that either reflects a confrontation with this tension or not: if the tension of existence is articulately addressed, the result is a differentiated expression and understanding. There is no plurality of the ultimate rhetorical situation; it is identical for all human beings.

My second reservation is that a plurality of universal audiences removes the normative status of rhetorical epochs. To say that there are many universal audiences is, so it seems to me, to reverse the historical discovery of the one point of reference common to the plurality of cultures. If the universal audience is to be conceived as "so called," then the same must be done with the notion of a "universal humanity," for as the preceding analysis has shown, the two historical discoveries are different facets of the same event. If one affirms, as I presume Perelman would, that human beings...
are rhetorically constituted—i.e. constituted by a tradition of symbols and a capacity to respond to them, and that each culture develops its own “universal audience” out of these symbols—and left it at that, one could not have a truly universal audience, for one would not have a universal humanity. What one would have is a plurality of humankinds, each self-enclosed within its particular symbols. This is in fact the situation as it once actually existed in the cosmological empires before the differentiating events of Israel and Hellas. As the rhetoric of history reveals, the situation which once actually existed, exists no more. What has intervened are the differentiating events and their accompanying symbols of before and after. Epochal symbols affirm that humanity is one despite its manifest pluralities. Indeed the symbols of Israel and Greece are epochal because through them the unity of humanity was discovered, thereby making articulate what was denied by, or inarticulate in, the plural symbols of the various peoples.86

While each individual will have some view of the universal audience, the universal audience is neither plural nor does it necessarily correspond to what a particular individual may happen to think it is. The universal audience is what the epochal symbols precipitated by its discovery reveal it to be. Thus, whenever one speaks of “history” or “humanity,” one’s discourse reaffirms, indeed, presupposes, the norms of the universal standpoint that the epochal symbols made available.

Finally, one of the most articulate contemporary symbols of the universal audience is Bernard Lonergan’s “cosmopolis.” Among the salient features of cosmopolis are these: Cosmopolis is

. . . a dimension of human consciousness, a heightened grasp of historical origins, a discovery of historical responsibilities. It is the higher synthesis of the liberal thesis and the Marxist antithesis. It comes to minds prepared for it by these earlier views, for they have taught man to think historically. It comes at a time when the totalitarian fact and threat have refuted the liberals and discredited the Marxists.87

Cosmopolis is an effort to acknowledge the sanity of ordinary common sense and point out the blindness of persons, classes, and interests:

86OH, 4, pp. 2–6.
87Lonergan, p. 241.
It is not a dissemination of sweetness and light, where sweetness means sweet to me, and light means light to me. Were that so, cosmopolis would be superfluous. Every scotosis puts forth a plausible, ingenious, adaptive untiring resistance. The general bias of common sense is no exception. It is by moving with that bias rather than against it, by differing from it slightly rather than opposing it thoroughly, that one has the best prospect of selling books and newspapers, entertainment and education.

Cosmopolis, then, is an effort to enlist the inherent movement of the mind toward insight to correct the blindness of ordinary thought: "the Babel of our day is the cumulative product of a series of refusals to understand; and dialectical analysis can discover and expose both the series of past refusals and the tactics of contemporary resistance to enlightenment." Though Lonergan's cosmopolis preceded Habermas' "ideal speech situation" by over a decade, cosmopolis may be at least epigrammatically summarized as what the "ideal speech situation" would be were Habermas' symbol rhetorically modified along the lines suggested by the remarks made earlier in this essay.

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89Ibid. p. 242.
Our examination of contemporary symbols for the universal audience leads to three conclusions. First, the Israelite and Greek epochal symbols supply benchmarks against which to measure the adequacy of more recent insights; second, the question of the adequate symbol for the universal audience remains an open question which we, no less than our ancient forebears, ask; and third, the on-going dialectic between changing human occasions and changing symbolic responses may provide even more adequate symbols or fresh defections from insight.

The final section of this essay cannot await history’s larger summation. The relation between epochal symbols and human motives will provide focus for our concluding observations on the rhetoric of history.

**Rhetorical Epochs and the Will to Power**

While all rhetorical epochs illuminate the history of the human spirit, not every epoch adds equally to our understanding of its freedom. Epochal symbolism can only be as profound as the motives which engender it. When the motive is victory, epochal symbolism fails truth. When the will to power informs epochal symbols, or governs their use, then discourse resembles a prison house monologue of isolated power selves, locked in the unbreachable cubicles of unpersuadable wills.

Albert Camus’ interpretation of the interview between the Grand Inquisitor and Christ in Dostoyevski’s *The Brothers Karamazov* illustrates how rhetoric becomes a precision instrument for personal or mass coercion when symbols are dominated by the will to power.

The Grand Inquisitor is old and tired, for the knowledge he possesses is bitter. He knows that men are lazy rather than cowardly and that they prefer peace and death to the liberty of discerning between good and evil. He has pity, a cold pity, for the silent prisoner whom history endlessly deceives. He urges him to speak, to recognize his misdeeds, and in one sense, to approve the actions of the inquisitors and the Cesars. But the prisoner does not speak. The enterprise will continue, therefore, without him; he will be killed. Legitimacy will come at the end of time, when the kingdom of men is assured. The affair has only just begun, it is far from being terminated, and the world has many
things to suffer, but we shall achieve our aim, we shall be Cesar, and then we shall begin to think about universal happiness."

In his egoism and lust for power, the Grand Inquisitor seeks to substitute for the universal audience and its creative tension, a world-immanent forum subservient to his will. Disillusioned by the inefficiency and disorder of a world in which persons are free to choose good or evil, the Grand Inquisitor seeks an up-to-date method for hurrying history to what he thinks is its appointed end. Under the direction of history's Grand Inquisitors, the unity of the world not achieved by the informing vision of the universal audience will henceforth be attempted in defiance of it.

**Conclusion**

This essay has argued for a rhetorical interpretation of history based upon epochal periods each with its own distinctive symbolism. This perspective presents the student of history and of human communication with documents and non-verbal expressions that not only have shaped communication within particular periods in history but have constituted successive chapters in human self-understanding. The examination of the epochal symbols of the ancient Middle Eastern cultures demonstrates the utility of this mode of interpretation by explicating the once universal vision of a community of being in which humans, animals and gods all cooperated in sustaining the cosmos against encroaching chaos. The extension of the analysis to the Hebraic and Hellenic symbols revealed the advent of a truly universal audience which relativized

"pp. 60–61. The whole of Camus' discussion in "Historical Rebellion" is relevant to this point. Those rhetoricians who find persuasive speech best illuminated by historical materialism might especially find of interest Camus' question concerning the sort of universe this standpoint has, in fact, historically fostered. "Every revolution, particularly revolution which claims to be materialist, is only a limitless metaphysical crusade. But can totality claim to be unity?" p. 108. Part of Camus' answer is as follows: "Totality is not unity. The principles that men give to themselves end by overwhelming their noblest intentions. By dint of ex-communications, persecutions conducted and suffered, the universal city of free and fraternal men is slowly diverted and gives way to the only universe in which history and expediency can in fact be elevated to the position of supreme judges: the universe of the trial" p. 20.

the formal epochal symbols by its unyielding distinction between immanence and transcendence. After Moses and Parmenides, this world and the beyond were irrevocably sundered. Change and continuity have thus provided the inescapable themes of our analysis. The continuity in history is the tension of existence, the universal and timeless human experience of life lived in the face of death. The changes in history are the leaps in being, the advent of new epochal symbols which give humankind deepened awareness of its place between the beginning and the end. The approach followed in this essay thus leads to a clear perception of those symbolic expressions that constrain, shape, and determine communication in any given epoch and invites deeper study of their form, why they function as they do and why some symbolisms are accepted and why others are rejected.

There is a moral to our story. The choices confronting human beings in all epochs and in every symbolism remain remarkably similar. Within every historical horizon the choice which defines the character of an epoch is the choice between symbols which confirm and justify the will to domination and symbols which widen the community of trust. While the will to power is omnipresent in human experience, it is not the focus of humanity’s decisive rhetorical epoch; the will to power never did break the cosmological symbols nor produce the epochal leap into historical consciousness. Not domination, but a particular kind of hope and trust seems to be the source of the decisive insights that mark the lasting advances in human self-understanding. The enduring legacy of the Hebraic and Hellenic symbols can thus be seen in two ways: ethically and eschatologically. Ethically, they establish the criterion by which one may distinguish the will to truth from the will to domination; namely, that when a communicator, rather than controlling the message, stands under its judgment along with the immediate audience so that when the universal audience is recognized as the ultimate judge, the conditions for transcending the will to power are present. Eschatologically, the possibility of a universal human community, first made manifest in the symbols of Israel and Hellas, continues to nourish human hope and provide fresh motive for ever more articulate penetration of the ultimate mystery of life against death.