

## Knowledge as an emotional and intellectual realization of the unconscious.

Gnosiology, Psychedelic Drugs and Prenatal Experiences\*

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### **Abstract**

The use of psychedelic drugs in minute doses as an adjuvant psychotherapeutic means, within the context of Athanassios Kafkalides' autopsychognosia, caused the emotional revival of prenatal and perinatal experiences. This mnemonic process gives rise to a wide range of gnosiological questions such as, inter alia, those regarding the use of psychedelic drugs to stimulate memories and the difference between emotional and intellectual realization in the quest for knowledge. The new findings in this field necessitated profound changes of concepts like *truth, reality, subjectivity, objectivity, unconscious, consciousness, cause and effect, emotions, intellect, quality, quantity, etc.* The study presented here will deal with these issues in the context of gnosiological stands supported by thinkers from Plato to Feyerabend.

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I

The direct emotional experience of reality is a momentous event, which shakes the very foundations of one's world view. Physicists, at the beginning of this century, felt much the same way when the foundations of their worldview were shaken by the new experience of the atomic reality. Psychiatrists, psychologists and other researchers in the field of prenatal investigations with psychedelic substances experienced a similar shock. The new findings in this field necessitated profound changes of concepts like *truth, reality, unconscious, consciousness, cause and effect, emotions, intellect, quality, quantity, etc...* In our present communication, we will try to develop those concepts in the framework of Dr Athanassios Kafkalides' Autopsychognosia. In fact, Autopsychognosia, i.e. deep sessions with psychedelic drugs, is above all, a combined emotional and intellectual knowledge about the content of the unconscious [1].

It is worthwhile to go back into time and see the way ancient Greek philosophers perceived knowledge. Aristotle confronted and studied the organism's psychological forces from a broad biological perspective. All the functions of an organism, such as nutrition, appetite, sensation, movement, perception and knowledge take place for the survival and the salvation of the organism within the complex and hostile external environment (σώζεσθαι εαντόν) [2]. Plato, on the other hand, defined knowledge as *anamnesis* (= *reminiscence, recollection*) [3]. The conclusion of his dialogue *Meno* applies to the nature of knowledge, which is an act of recollection of something perceived before this life [4]. Plato's and Aristotle's stands on knowledge are complementary. Without the functioning of memory, how would it be possible for the organism to survive? Knowledge, thus, is amongst others, a mnemonic process, which serves self-preservation and the existential identity of the human being.

It is extremely important to underline here the fact that, in ancient Greek philosophy, knowledge was perceived as the combination of sensation and intellect. Let's add to this concept the emotional element, which springs up from sensation and intellect and transcends them [5]. An old dictum supports that *In order to "know," one must feel*. In ancient Greek philosophy there is no such thing as pure *Intellectualism*. Intellect is a barrier which must be thrust aside in order to perceive the *being* of things.

However, from the earliest philosophical speculations to the present day, emotion has been often seen as interfering with rationality, as a remnant of our pre-sapient inheritance. Bertrand Russell holds: "*The*

*emotions are what makes life interesting, and what makes us feel important. From this point of view, they are the most valuable element in human existence. But when, as in philosophy, we are trying to understand the world, they appear rather as a hindrance* [6]. That is why, the term "gnosiology" (theory of knowledge or epistemology) is confounded with the term "logic." The latter is often used in a broad sense, to cover the whole field. This confusion doesn't happen by chance, since the quest for "objective" knowledge must not be confounded with emotions because emotions lend subjectivity to judgment.

Thus, on the way to knowledge, the emotional element is rejected. Psychoanalysis, of course, gives great importance to emotions from the very early writings of Breuer and Freud [7]. Psychoanalysis combines therapy (which is the result of applying the acquired knowledge) with the reliving of emotion, which was linked to the recalled event (abreaction). Autopsychognosia on the other hand, considers the emotional revival of past experiences provoked by psychedelic substances, a *sine qua non* condition for acquiring more direct and clearer knowledge. In other words, what Autopsychognosia with psychedelic drugs is aiming at is a deeper intercommunication link and, if possible, an increase of the interconnections between the neocortex and the limbic system. This is achieved to a certain extent, through the emotional-intellectual realization of the unconscious [8]. In contrast to plain *intellectual* realization (which leaves the subject indifferent from an emotional point of view), autopsychognosia uses the term *emotional-intellectual* realization and attempts to give some interpretations to the concepts of the "unconscious" and the "conscious" (consciousness). Certain "partial" definitions, at the theoretical level, are the following. We mention them with great reserve, because the term "define" means "limit" while the above mentioned concepts cannot be limited.

The *Unconscious* comprises memory traces that the various stimuli which have acted upon the nervous system during its evolution have left upon the neurons and the human cells. We have memory traces of experiences after expulsion birth, of experiences of expulsion birth, of intrauterine life, and memory traces of experiences from the lives of one's ancestors on the zoological scale. To these we can add memory traces "beyond the boundaries of the womb, i.e. memory traces of experiences from the initial phases of the creation of matter-mass-energy after Zero Hour. All these memory traces constitute the unconscious. The *Consciousness*: The subjective understanding, on an emotional and intellec-

tual level, of the content of the unconscious. Thus, we can give one more “partial” definition of knowledge: *knowledge is the emotional-intellectual realization of the unconscious.*

This process however, is a personal, endless and continuous quest because the unconscious is infinite. Autopsychognosia, so to speak, is a process of *Aletheia* (= Truth). We use the word “*Aletheia*” in the linguistic sense given by Heidegger [9]. *Aletheia* = a (prevalative prefix) + lithe (oblivion) = *non oblivion, unconcealment* [10] (the unconscious becomes conscious). In this process we do not consider emotions as a hindrance to knowledge but as an essential attribute to it.

## II

The findings of prenatal researches led, amongst other things, to the following conclusions: *The fear of rejection and the serenity of acceptance—specially the intrauterine rejection or acceptance of the fetus by the mother—shape man’s mental health, his capability of perception and knowledge, and his emotional-intellectual motives of behaviour* [11]. If the above conclusions are valid, we are facing a severe gnosiological overthrow of Aristotle’s and Lock’s conception regarding the soul before birth as a *white paper void of all characters.*

The problem we are facing with prenatal experiences is that the revival of any period of the past is a subjective state for the individual experiencing it; this cannot be perceived by any observer. The individual, for example, who feels that he/she has returned to the womb, is referring to a situation which is real for him (her) alone and which is due to his/her nervous system retaining the “memory traces” of stimuli which had acted upon it during fetal life. When these memory traces are reactivated by psychedelic substances (or in some other way [12] i.e. concentration, meditation, hyperventilation etc.) the conditions of fetal life are relived. The psychedelic experience which leads to the revival of the near and distant past as well as to states of altered consciousness, occurs within a different *space-time continuum* than the observer’s. Scientists, however, insist on substantiating the most important attributes of knowledge, *i.e. necessity and universal validity.* If the western scientist cannot quantitatively prove the “truth” of the above propositions, he is obliged to discredit their content.

However, to be able to envisage propositions such as the aforementioned, one must undergo a change in his traditional belief concerning the “objectivity” of truth. So we ask ourselves: do the prenatal experiences and realizations, such as described under

autopsychognosia sessions with psychedelic substances, correspond to “truth”? But what is it for something to be true or false? Intuitively truth is a relation—between the thing that is true, and the thing that makes it so. But both terms of the relation are in dispute, as is the relation itself. Philosophers differ as to whether the truth bearer is a sentence, a proposition, a thought, a statement, a belief, or some other entity, whether linguistic or mental. They differ too as to what truth consists in. Some speak of correspondence—but with what? Others replace correspondence with some other relation: coherence, for example. Others still reject the whole idea of truth as a relation, regarding it instead as an intrinsic property of whatever possesses it. There are even those who argue that truth is neither a property nor a relation, and that the concept is merely redundant [13]. What we see here is a total subjective state of things. There are as many definitions of “truth” as philosophers. We cannot actually define with absolute objectivity such concepts as *truth, knowledge, reality.*

If, however, we ask the subjects who relived and described their prenatal and transcendental experiences, during sessions, whether those were real and true, they would answer by the affirmative. For them, what they have experienced was the truth, “their truth” and the acquired knowledge “their knowledge.” So, knowledge as an emotional-intellectual realization of the unconscious is a subjective process.

In 1966, at the International congress of Psychiatry in Madrid, Dr Athanassios Kafkalides presented his first case who had relived his intrauterine life. In the 4th session with LSD-25 he regressed to the womb and fully re-experienced his birth and the very earliest days of his life [14]. When some of his colleagues reacted by saying that this was a hallucination and a fantasy unrelated to reality, Kafkalides answered as a pure pragmatist: Proof that the patient’s feelings and recollections while under LSD correspond to reality, is his cure; a radical change of character, behavior and mental productive work took place after LSD treatment, *so how could hallucinations possibly heal?* But this was a pragmatist’s view [15]. Nevertheless this feeble argument was the first step which led Kafkalides to stand away from the Cartesian methodology without rejecting its deductive—inductive technique. This turning point in his methodological approach has to be envisaged within the wider differentiation which took place in the framework of modern western thought.

During the first decades of the 20th century, the physicists Bohr, Heisenberg and Paoli were obliged, due to the latest data in the subatomic world,

to change their methodological conception. In the 1942 manuscript [16], Heisenberg makes a stand against the vulgar distinction “subjective reality”—“objective reality.” In order to understand the 20th century physics, he believes that the Cartesian dualism between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* must be abandoned [17].

European languages have two words to designate reality, the etymology of which is different; the first one is “reality” (from latin, *res = thing*) and the second one is “effectiveness” (*agere = to do*). In German, those two words are reproduced by the words *Realität* and *Wirklichkeit*. The more abstract concept which derives from *agere* or *wirken* is closer to the one used in science. For Heisenberg, reality is an *active experience*. Subjectivity thus plays an important role in the whole process of knowledge. Many philosophers of this era, in particular, those who knew and conversed with Heisenberg, such as Husserl, Heidegger, Cassirer insist on the necessity to object to the Cartesian division, “subject-object.” In the following years, the above mentioned physicist’s ideas had an important influence on many other thinkers such as Fritjof Kapra and Paul Feyerabend [18]. The latter through his major work *Against Method*, criticized Rationalism’s exaggerations.

The world is not only macrocosmic, solid and objective but also microcosmic, different and subjective. The deeper we go into inanimate and animate matter the more difficult is for reason to function within its traditional frame. The world of the *becoming* gets closer and closer to an Heraclitian concept while the Anaximandrian concept of the *being* (the “*ἄπειρον*”, the infinite substratum which is “beside the elements,” not identifiable with any one of them), accepted by Heisenberg [19], remains inaccessible to human brain. The principles of Autopsychognosia which follows must be considered within the above gnosiological context:

- ⊗ *Acceptance of the principle of cause and effect, but also the Ancient Greek prediction that seeking the first cause of the nature of material entities leads to a regressum ad infinitum, that is, it leads human intelligence to an impasse.*
- ⊗ *The claim that the subject and its external environment are very closely related to one another and that they constitute an integral existing whole. The subject belongs to both worlds at the same time, because for itself it is its subjective world, and for all the rest of the subjects (secondary entities) it is a part, however small it may be, of their objective world. This dual character precludes the absolute separation between objective*

and subjective reality for every observer. In other words, objective reality exists but its meaning is limited and not absolute.

- ⊗ *Acceptance and respect of the subject and the individual nature of its psychic world on a conscious level, that is, acceptance (of the concept) that the subjective world of each human being is completely personal.*
- ⊗ *The claim that the human mind has a limited capacity to perceive and thus is able to interpret some but not all natural phenomena with mathematical formulas and quantitative measurements [20].*

### III

At this point, we must underline that following the LSD discovery, in 1943, by Dr Albert Hoffman, serious research was undertaken in the psychotherapeutic field with the use of psychedelic substances. There is a direct relation between the use of psychedelic substances and the revival of prenatal experiences and realizations. It’s not due to pure chance that great prenatal and perinatal findings came to light through the work of scientists who used such substances, in minute doses, as an adjuvant psychotherapeutic mean. Allow me to mention amongst others Kafkalides’, [21] Grof’s [22] and Lake’s clinical results [23]. It is striking to realize that in the same period of time, in three different countries, the patients of the above mentioned psychiatrists relived the same experiences and reached more or less the same conclusions and realizations which constitute the basis of the theoretical work of the above-mentioned scientists.

The general opinion concerning psychedelics is that they are hallucinative producing drugs. But what does hallucination mean? Cartesian psychiatry states that “a hallucination is a vivid sensory impression occurring without external stimulus.” The Greek word for “hallucination” is “pseudoaesthesia” (*ψευδαίσθησις*) from “pseudo” (false) and “aesthesia” (perception), an etymology which leaves the scholar of traditional thought with no doubt that a “pseudoaesthesia” is something false, unreal and morbid and that “pseudoaesthesiogenic” drugs—as psychedelic drugs are known in Greek—cause false and morbid experiences. But just how unsuccessful the term “hallucination” is can be shown by the following example: If at this very moment, here in Cagliari, I recall the details of an adventure I had in Athens a year ago and feel I am reliving it vividly, then according to the aforementioned definition I am suffering from hallu-

cinations, since extremely vivid sensory impressions were created in my mind without external stimulus. If we try to understand how I could recall details of my adventure in Athens, we shall have to accept that those details left memory traces which were reactivated, resulting in my reliving my experience without my actually being in Athens. Something similar to this occurs in my mind when during a Session with psychedelic drugs I relive intra-uterine or any other experiences. In giving this example, we are not suggesting that morbid hallucinations do not exist; we simply want to show that the term “hallucination” is an erroneous one requiring clarification. We believe that the “pseudo” (false) element in “pseudoaestheses” (hallucinations) caused by the latter regard only the observer. For the individual, his subjective hallucinatory state is real and we are obliged to respect this.

#### IV

Max Plank, in his lecture on November 1941, given at the Scientific Society Kaiser Wilhelm in Berlin, stated the following: “A new scientific truth can't establish itself by the mere fact of being accepted by its opponents who claim to have been convinced and enlightened, but furthermore, by the fact that, in the course of time, its opponents die and the new generation grows familiar, from the beginning with truth.” [24] Williams James, on the other hand, in one of his Bostonian lectures in 1906, poses the question very clearly by saying: “First, a new theory is attacked as absurd; then it is admitted to be true, but obvious and insignificant; finally it is seen to be so important that its adversaries claim that they, themselves, discovered it.” [25]

We think that the above propositions apply also to the prenatal findings and it doesn't surprise us that prenatal theories still remain marginal in a world where the principle of *tabula rasa* prevails and the subjective-emotional state of the individual is considered as a hindrance to knowledge.

In relation to the aforementioned I would like to quote a passage from Paul Feyerabend's major work *Against Method*, where he asserts that: “The idea that science can, and should, be run according to fixed and universal rules, is both unrealistic and pernicious. It is unrealistic, for it takes too simple a view of the talents of man and of the circumstances which encourage, or cause, their development. And it is pernicious, for the attempt to enforce the rules is bound to increase our professional qualifications at the expences of our humanity. In addition, the idea is detrimental to science, for it neglects the complex physical and historical conditions which influence scien-

tific change. It makes our science less adaptable and more dogmatic: every methodological rule is associated with cosmological assumptions, so that using the rule we take it for granted that the assumptions are correct. Naïve falsificationism takes it for granted that the laws of nature are manifested and not hidden beneath disturbances of considerable magnitude. Empiricism takes it for granted that sense experience is a better mirror for the world than pure thought. Praise of argument takes it for granted that the artifices of Reason give better results than the unchecked play of our emotions. Such assumptions may be perfectly plausible and even true. Still, one should occasionally put them to a test. Putting them to a test means that we stop using the methodology associated with them, start doing science in a different way and see what happens.”

We believe that in the future to come, what we presently characterize as prenatal research, will become “la voie royale” of a new ontology. But great gnosiological changes were never simple and easy. So, allow me, by conclusion to mention Plato's words in his Republic: “Great deeds are always precarious,” to which I will add Heidegger's words: “great deeds always take place in the middle of a storm.”

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- 2 In that sense, we can assume that Aristotle was a supporter of the theory of functionalism (i.e. the view that behaviour and mental phenomena can be explained as an organism's strategies for adapting to its biological or social environment).
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