

Jean Gebser: Das Integrale Bewusstsein

Jean Gebser: The Integral Consciousness

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Summary

The Swiss-German philosopher Jean Gebser was probably the first to describe an approaching paradigmatic transformation in the general development of consciousness to an integral world view. The foundation of this phylogenetic and ontogenetic development, from archaic to magic, mythic, mental and integral, is Gebser's concept of consciousness structures. These are given to us as the overall view of ourselves and the world around us in relation to all dimensions of human experience and thinking. These basic structures of consciousness emerge through an evolutionary process, building one upon the other in personal and human history. Whenever one basic structure has become incapable of solving the challenges of life, a new structure is generated. All of these structures have their roots in the timeless, divine origin of everything (*Ursprung*).

Very close to the universal consciousness is the *archaic* structure which is difficult to describe as there is barely any distance between them: humans and the world are identical.

The *magic* structure marks the first step toward a waking human consciousness, introducing a difference from its origin. This is still an ego-less obedience characterized almost exclusively by unreflected *vital experience*. In its deficient form, magic consciousness results in serfdom and in collective trance as in military and many esoteric movements.

The *mythic* structure is characterized by *conscious experiencing*: the soul experiences something. Time becomes conscious and we live in a two-dimensional polarity of the surface expanse. Its deficient form is the inflation of symbolism and an addictive use of tales.

In the *mental* phase of consciousness development thinking is goal oriented and the world is conceived as an object. As the capacity to construct a meaning is developed we start thinking in legal categories, explore space, all of which requires *logical reasoning*. The deficient form of this structure is a dissociation from the unity of experiencing and thinking by overemphasizing mental logic.

The *integral* structure that is newly appearing on the horizon of consciousness development only looks transcendent from the commonly held mental view. At the integral stage all structures are integrated - not only in perceiving the exterior world but also in oneself, which is the reason why this structure is not accepted in science. The world is no longer merely an object. Instead, we establish an intimate relationship between ourselves and the world, which by our perception confirms its very existence. The main challenge of this structure is that consciousness transcends the different tenses by *realizing time* and the fact that we live in continuous timely relations. The integral consciousness is multiperspectival and transcends either-or dichotomies: we become aware of the universal whole which is shining through everything.