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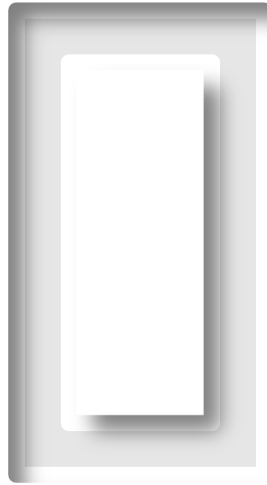
# SPECTRUM OF HUMAN POTENTIAL

## CORE PSI SKILLS

**2022 - Dr Alexander De Foe, PhD**

<http://alexdefoe.com/>

This e-document has been produced specifically for this workshop series; do not distribute.



## Coursework and Modules

Note: while I have drawn on concepts here from my prior books, articles, and iterations of this course, I have written most of the material from scratch in order to best fit with the specific structure and intentions of the workshop series for a 2022 onward student cohort. All material has been written in Australian English. For readability, where grammatical precision conflicts with conversational tone, I have preferred conversational tone. Metric conventions have been applied to numbers.

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## 2-page definitions sheet

- \* Altered state of consciousness (ASC): A different experience of self-awareness to that of one's every-day, ordinary, waking state. Earlier research focused on specific states, such as those induced by hypnosis, substances, or meditation. Modern research centres on the broad spectrum of ASC that can fluctuate mildly throughout one's day/night experience.
- \* Collective unconscious: A concept introduced by Carl Gustav Jung to encapsulate the entire human genetic sequence -- a theory which presupposed those various instincts, drives, and archetypal potentials are carried out through the genome of a specific species. A collective shadow and collective human potential for realisation can also be considered in relation here -- read more on the core archetypes for further elaboration.
- \* Core energetics: An idea related to the 'felt sense' of certain altered-state experiences.
- \* Empathic: Being able to read and/or be affected by other people's emotions and/or physical symptoms.
- \* Entheogen: A substance administered within a therapeutic, healing, or ritualistic context. Often a sacred space is created in which substances may be administered as part of a plant (or brew) based ceremony, which may incorporate transpersonal healing, dance, and/or spiritual rituals for personal growth.
- \* Extra-sensory perception: Perception beyond the five ordinary senses, such as clairvoyance.
- \* Flow: Related to "being in the zone" and correspondent with peak states of consciousness.
- \* Highly sensitive person: A term that relates to higher sensory processing sensitivity found in approximately 15-20% of all species, including human beings. HSP individuals tend to experience heightened psi phenomena, auditory phenomena such as Frisson and ASMR, as well as other covariates such as heightened empathy.
- \* Image stream: Image streaming is a process of guiding imagery from one's unconscious mind by combining light trance induction techniques with journaling/recording.
- \* Parapsychology: The scientific study of paranormal or anomalistic phenomena, such as telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, psychokinesis, and psychic healing.
- \* Peak state: Coined by Abraham Maslow as a discrete state in which one's consciousness appears elevated and fully immersed in the present moment.
- \* Precognition: Foreknowing of an event(s) before it/they occur/s, whether as part of a dream or waking visionary experience.
- \* Relational field: A relational field is defined as the forming of a new psychological experience between two or more people. It tangentially relates to the concept of 'reality distortion fields' coined by Steve Jobs and others and can have profound mind-over-matter effects on everyday human experiences, extending beyond the psychological into the social realm.
- \* Shamanism: Often associated with traditional/indigenous practices involving the use of transcendental techniques to access unique mind-states of consciousness and shamanic 'non-physical worlds'.

- \* Super-conscious mind: Refers to the collective mind, but that component which is in a highly active (i.e., likely indexed by Gamma-bandwidth frequency) and conscious state of awareness. Those who frequent DMT or psilocybin induced consciousness states often report connecting with a broader collective, or super-conscious mind. This concept is antithetical to the collective unconscious, which one is not aware of until sub-facets of it come into awareness.
- \* Synchronicity: Carl Jung wrote that “synchronicity is the coming together of inner and outer events in a way that cannot be explained by cause and effect and that is meaningful to the observer”. Synchronicities extend beyond mere meaningful coincidence and indicate psychodynamics that are relevant to oneself and/or other individuals in a given context.
- \* Telepathic: The psi ability to acquire a thought another person is thinking by non-physical means. Often telepathic communication is marked by the rich quality of transfer in ideas that extends beyond the superficial communication of verbal language.
- \* Trance state: A state frequently induced in clinical hypnosis, in which one becomes more susceptible to suggestion; often marked by an increase in longer-wave brain activity including the preponderance of alpha and theta waves.
- \* Transcendental: Defined as a state in which one experiences transcendence from the temporal constraints of the ego and connects with the immanence of one’s broader or All-Self. Characteristics cited in my first book include: 1) a temporary loss of our mental commentary or life-script, 2) spontaneously having feelings that transcend the regular spectrum of emotions, 3) the suffering associated with previous emotional and physical pain (such as trauma or chronic pain) spontaneously disappears for a moment, and 4) mental definitions and barriers begin to blur, as race, gender, age, religion, politics and other classifications no longer hold a prerequisite for developing a meaningful connection with other human beings.
- \* Transpersonal psychology: A field that explores human experience beyond the traditional boundaries of the rational ego. The term and related concepts have been developed extensively by theorists such as William James, Abraham Maslow, Stanislav Grof, Michael Washburn, Jorge Ferrer, Roberto Assagioli, and other frontiers of the field.

More definitions available via request.

## Lecturer Details

Dr Alexander De Foe is a Melbourne-based researcher with expertise in human consciousness and perception and is a Founding Board Director of the Australian Centre for Consciousness Studies. Dr De Foe has carried out numerous projects on the role of self/body integration in the feature binding problem, as well as the use of modern technology in transforming mind-body perceptions. He has worked extensively on research in altered states of consciousness, including those apparent in the use of mindfulness, meditation, clinical hypnotherapy, entheogens, and induction via modern technologies. He has also lectured on these topics, including teaching expertise in the philosophical antecedents of modern psychology, coordination experience in a VET subject on exceptional human experiences, and a higher-degree subject he created on Eastern models of self and personality. He presently supervises 3 doctoral students, has previously overseen 14 masters/honours dissertations, and has published in leading academic journals such as *Cognitive Neuropsychiatry*, *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy*, and the *Journal of Affective Disorders*.

Recent scholarly works:

1. Bok, J. L., & De Foe, A. (2022/in-press). The Efficacy of HypnOBes in Producing Veridical Psi Experiences: A Replication Study. *Australian Journal of Parapsychology*.
2. McCartney, A., McGovern, H., & De Foe, A. (2022/in-press). Psychedelic Assisted Therapy for Major Depressive Disorder: Recent Work and Clinical Directions. *Journal of Psychedelic Studies*.
3. De Foe, A., & Kalla, M. (2016). Formative impacts of psycho-spiritual experience: A preliminary questionnaire investigation. *Journal of Exceptional Experiences and Psychology*, 4(1), 37-47.
4. De Foe, A. (2014). A state cultivation model. *Journal of Exceptional Experiences and Psychology*, 2(1), 14-21.
5. De Foe, A., Van Doorn, G., & Symmons, M. (2013). Floating sensations prior to sleep and out-of-body experiences. *The Journal of Parapsychology*, 77(2), 271-281.

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# CORE PSI SKILLS – MODULE 1

📌 Core Psi Skills offers a practical six-week workshop series on developing psychical and spiritual acuity. It was developed by parapsychologist and transpersonal therapist, Dr Alexander De Foe, who has spent 15 years as a practitioner, educator, and researcher on these topics.

Each module contains an original reading/coursework, audio lecture(s), and dynamic activities to complete throughout the week. The course is 100% self-paced, but modules are unlocked each week for students based on the topics introduced. You are encouraged to mix-and-match practices as best-accommodated to your routine and goals. Feel free to come back to earlier modules later on to explore and consolidate practices. What you put into the workshops is what you will get out 😊.

Module	Topics covered	Practices
Module	Short description of topics covered	Included practical activities
1. Consciousness States	This module invites students into an experiential exploration of personal consciousness and different states of consciousness that can arise. Understanding altered states is an important component of most parapsychology and transpersonal psychology practice.	Centred mindfulness, altered state journaling, sensory immersion
2. Resonance and Attunement	In many traditions the intuited “felt sense” has been applied to study so-called energy points, chakra systems, and other core energetics (the umbrella label used here). We explore the realm of felt sense and how it extends to ourselves and others.	Felt sense, somatic bliss release, source attunement
3. Intuition	A Jungian approach to intuition and synchronicity is introduced from a critical and applied lens.	4-axis awareness, contact ground, scaffolding intuition
4. Apperception	This module will teach you how to distinguish different sources of mental information that may arise from one’s own mind, from exterior levels, and/or collective frames of awareness.	Shaping tangible constructs & thought-free creativity
5. Active Imagination	Techniques to work with the mind such as image streaming and hypnagogic induction are introduced here.	Gamma-phasing & re-authoring constructs
6. Contemplation	Contemplative meditation, prayer, and mysticism practice is introduced in a secular fashion in this module.	Consciousness games & personal mythology

# Welcome!

## A short history of this series

In 2007 I commenced the Experiencing Psi project, which had the following five core aims: Promote un-biased research into the nature of consciousness, enrich therapeutic modalities and human development with untapped abilities of the mind, provide knowledge that does not align with religious nor organizational affiliation, offer pre-loaded online tools for documenting and investigating human potential, and spread awareness about higher human potential.

### Importance of research

**A**round that time, I was also collecting data about out-of-body experiences (OBEs) to better understand these accounts around the world. Little did I know that I clumsily designed the questionnaire, as I had no real research skills at the time and was just finishing up my first degree in a non-science field. It quickly became apparent to me that much knowledge about altered states hinges on hearsay, without strong evidence to back it up nor experiments that can be evaluated first-hand -- I fairly quickly took an interest in ways to validate the paranormal, so to speak.

### Why/how do I teach parapsychology!?

9 years later (in 2016), after completing my PhD, I ran an online workshop series called Applied Parapsychology covering the origins and historical context of psi research, altered states and meditation, core energetics, chakras, aura sight, the survival question, past lives, OBEs, remote viewing, telekinesis, ESP, stages of consciousness, and spiritual development. Around the same time, I was fortunate enough to gain funding from the Australian Institute of Parapsychological Research, the Society for Psychical Research, and the Parapsychological Association to explore the nature of OBEs in more depth, and to build credible research knowledge of parapsychological phenomena!



In 2020, I re-launched my course titled Psi and Mental Abilities, which covered peak states of consciousness, Charles Tart's 'Big 5' psi abilities, transpersonal eco-mythology, transcendental meditation, and the role of enteogens in psi development.

**N**ow, I launch the third iteration of this course, having learnt a lot, and incorporated much participant feedback. The new course, refining much of the previous two iterations, focuses on tried-and-true practices to cultivate states of consciousness, state change, intuitive capacities, apperception, active imagination, and deeper contemplation. While on first glance, not all topics may appear to relate to the psychical domain of knowledge, these



six topical areas have been foremost critical in my own development as well as that of others who have aimed to work with altered states.

- Dr Alexander De Foe, PhD, MCouns, MACA, Course Lecturer

Credentials: Founding Director, Australian Centre for Consciousness Studies, <http://theaccs.org.au/>; Lecturer in modern psychotherapies at Monash University; Adjunct academic in psychological science at RMIT University; expert consultant at the Australian Institute of Parapsychological Research, active peer-review member for the journal *Psychology of Consciousness: Theory, Research, and Practice*; consulting psychophysicologist at the Integrative Mental Health University, and member of the Emergent Phenomenology Research Consortium.

## What are altered states?

The word 'altered' implies a change from a baseline state. We know in developments from neuroscience that certain brainwave states are characteristic of 'normal' waking consciousness. Yet often people depart from these states. Let alone altered states in sleep, hypnotherapy, substance-induced, or other, there is still little we know about global consciousness to remark that any one single state is normative or all-inclusive. When we wake up in the morning, we take for granted our transition from a somewhat foggy mind state to one that becomes clearer as we meet the world -- for some only fostered with the addition of a coffee or two.

Many definitions of states (of consciousness) have proposed them in dualistic terms -- you're either in hypnosis or not, either asleep or awake. We know that is not the case, and our brains are always producing varied neural coupling and ranges on the Delta-Gamma spectra of brainwaves. Neurolinguistic programming practitioners will tell you that you can be 'slightly entranced' while seemingly still awake. Likewise, you can drive your car with great proficiency 50km across the country yet not recall key landmarks. Further, some of your dreams may seem more conscious/lucid than others. So, the question of altered states of consciousness (ASC) is far from simple, but I hope I can simplify it for you in this course.

## Radical empiricism and psychedelic cartography - from James to Grof

Many credible scientists have examined the role of transcendental states as well as anomalistic experiences reported by people. As Rupert Sheldrake has pointed out, psi-related concepts are generally a taboo within everyday public discussion, as well as when covered by the media, but there is a good deal of science that legitimately considers many of them in broad range and scope. People I introduce myself to are often surprised by how I have managed to publish in the field of parapsychology and often astounded that there are universities and grant funding bodies that support the research. In other contexts, some of the most well-known psi projects have occurred within military research programs, such as the remote viewing studies done by the Central Intelligence Agency in the United States. In those contexts, the research program has attracted millions of dollars in funding, and often great rigour due to the information-sensitive

nature of its application. Still, it's understandable that the range of topics are rather taboo at surface level, because they tend to spark machinations of "high weirdness", to borrow Erik Davis' term.

We also have to understand that psychology as a discipline has gone through refinement within the scientific method -- which explains why only about 1/3 of psychology academics believe in psi-related concepts such as life after death, or mind-over-matter events, while 2/3 of other academics (in general humanities and sciences) are open to these associated beliefs. Yet, that was not always the case in the field of psychology. Certainly, at the dawn of the field, scholars such as William James took a very open perspective on psi, even having attended various seances and mediumship practices, which were a lot more openly regarded in society in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Even amongst the most rigorous sceptics, such as the philosopher Immanuel Kant, we see influences bleed through that show a greater level of open mindedness than we find in modern academics (in this specific case, the influence of Emanuel Swedenborg).

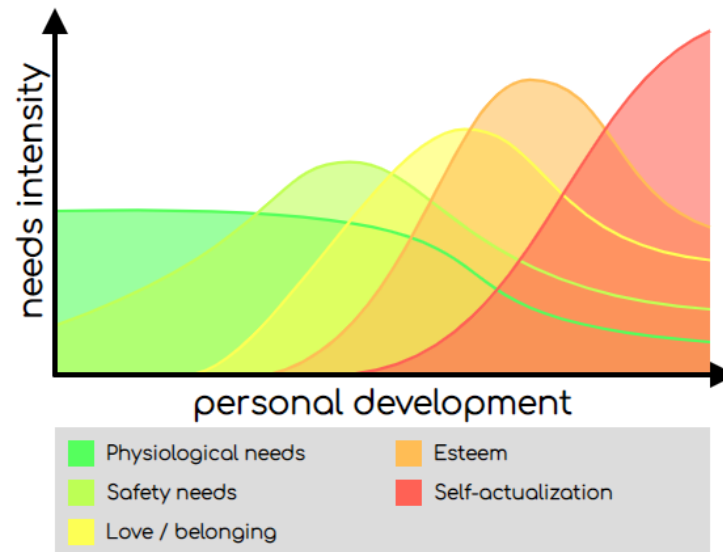
Although many scholars have flirted with the ideas covered in this course, many also outright reject them in the end, such as Susan Blackmore, who had many psychedelic-induced OBEs, but ultimately concluded them to be a hallucination. After all, John Lilly's experiments with psychic dolphins and telepathic aliens, Terrence McKenna's work with psychedelic induced non-physical realms, and Charles Tart's experiments with validation of OBEs, are all a little too far out there for most to consider in the context of academic rigour!

Others have suggested that the problem lies with a very rigid and narrow scientific framework. Modern researchers such as Dean Radin and Rupert Sheldrake appear to situate their work within a 'broad science', which consolidates personal accounts, qualitative datum, cross-disciplinary explanations/theories of certain phenomena, and generally more cooperation across scientists working in different fields.

## Human development

My own approach has been informed by developmental and evolutionary psychology. I've been curious about what draws people to explore altered states and how such experiences detriment or enrich their development. As the figure below demonstrates, the shift from immediate physiological needs to broader self-understanding and transcendence (needs) occurs throughout the entire developmental lifespan and amplifies in preponderance from midlife (see the work of

Abraham Maslow). Maslow thought that once we meet all of our physical needs, the need for non-physical nourishment and self-transcendence begins to culminate in one's soul.



Likewise, Maslow argued that people begin to develop 'meta grumbles' about their unmet needs. According to his theory of personality, younger adults may have no complaints about their salary or relationships, provided that they have any job and a few close friends. Yet, as one's needs become greater, settling for a casual job or a casual relationship no longer seems sufficient nor satisfying. In the same manner, while existential and psycho-spiritual matters mightn't seem important in early-mid-life (or have very low need thresholds such as attending a yoga class once a month), the critical importance of self-awareness and spiritual growth comes centre stage later in life, or when one's more formative physical and relational needs have been adequately addressed.

Likewise, in the collaborative work of Erik Erikson and his wife Joan Erikson, they find that towards the end of life one is faced with an honest reflection on how they have lived, but also confronted with transcendence and letting go of one's attachment to the physical. E & J Erikson sum this up via a three-stage life sequence consisting with a central focus on (1) first self and others (first few stages of lifespan development), then (2) self and society (mid-stages of lifespan development) and finally (3) transcendence of the individual (later stages of lifespan development).

"Gerotranscendence is the final stage in a natural process moving toward maturation and wisdom. The gerotranscendent individual experiences a new feeling of cosmic communion with the spirit of the universe, a redefinition of time, space, life and death, and a redefinition of self." - Lars Tornstam

Interestingly, the work of Lars Tornstam, who coined the term “gerotranscendence” informed J & E’s understanding of late life. They note that it’s not all ‘doom and gloom’ as we might presuppose, but that transcendental experiences often arise in these stages of development, including a spontaneous loss of the fear of death as a result of viewing it as a natural process. With that realisation often comes a sense of healthy detachment and the ego is no longer seen as the centre of the universe; likewise, their social roles and generational relationships are reviewed from a holistic perspective with the emphasis no longer on the “link” in the chain but on the chain itself (as recounted by one participant in Tornstam’s dataset) ... Curiously, Albert Einstein spoke of similar experiences in old age of perceiving his life as one mere droplet in the collective stream of consciousness.

### Maturity, responsibility, and psi cultivation

When Tornstam did his qualitative research, he spoke with 50 people aged 52-97, around the age-range when we’d most expect a shift away from self-centric to universal-centric awareness. However, he also noticed that in some instances people experience transcendental states and accelerated maturity in this direction when they are confronted with trauma earlier in life (such as diagnosis of a terminal illness in one’s 20s or 30s).

Such cases were of interest to me because they posed the question of what stimulates one to approach these topics with a greater level of seriousness. Other examples we can draw upon are near-death experiences (NDE), in which it is common for development to be accelerated in this manner too. Likewise, as the brain demyelinate with age, it can also be impacted by illness, such as Alzheimer’s disease, as well as spontaneous trauma due to stroke. Curiously, Anthony Peake has observed cases of dementia and other brain impairments that appeared to enhance one’s psi abilities (when we might expect the opposite)! He cites one case of severe memory loss but enhanced precognitive accuracy in one particular individual.

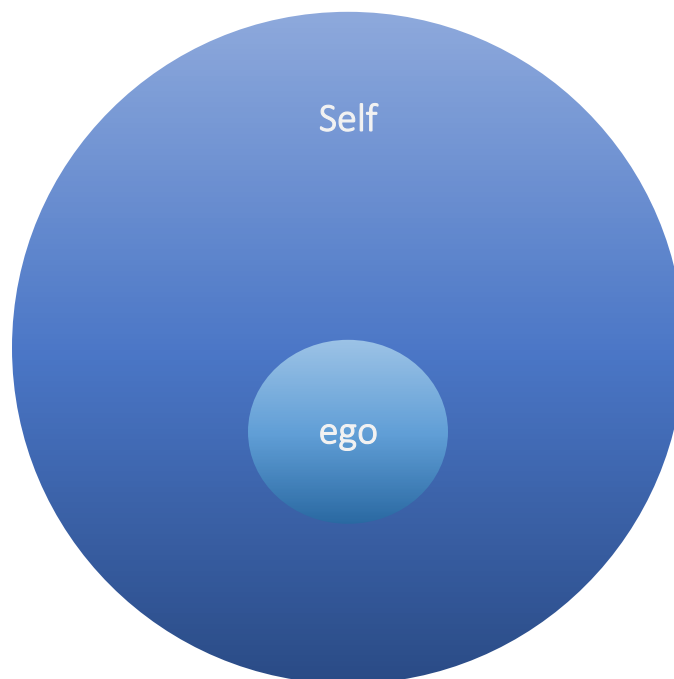


Of course, one may find the tasks of life itself rather shallow, being another reason to take interest in this range of topics earlier in life. Personally, I had no dramatic experiences that awakened my curiosity in psi and the broader potentials of the mind. I simply found my attention gravitated towards these subjects as I was rather bored with the discussion topics and activities of my peers growing up! So, certainly while practices grounded in mystical experience, such as those in the Zen and Vedic traditions are often seen to be reserved for those of a particular age

or level of lifespan development; in fact, anyone, at any age, can engage with them, provided sufficient diligence and maturity of development.

One way I have examined altered states is from the Jungian perspective of ego/Self balance. We can consider the ego the rational part of ourselves, most closely linked to our direct personality - it encompasses our self-image, identity, career, internalised life events, and so forth. Yet, Jung conceptualised that the Broader Self is the all-potentiality of who we are. It could include aspects of our personality repressed, such as unrealised or untapped talents, identities, and ideas about oneself. Yet, according to Jungian scholars, the Self goes even deeper than that, because it encompasses our genome and the DNA of our ancestors that has been passed on to us. So, when we consider the ego/Self dichotomy, we must regard this in terms of the present personality we have built throughout this lifetime, as well as the latter all-potentiality at the genomic level! William James sums up a similar corollary here:

“Just so there is a continuum of cosmic consciousness, against which our individuality builds but accidental fences, and into which our several minds plunge as into a mother-sea or reservoir.” - William James



Another metaphor to think about this is the crystallisation of the ego - and it's subsequent dissolution in some psi states. We start off in early childhood with the ultimate potential of self - within genetic constraints - but decide to crystallise specific aspects of this fluid potential into a more concrete and consistent container for who we call 'ourselves'. Look at that picture below and consider any major traumatic (negative), meaningful (positive), or life-altering (neutral)

events that you have had in your lifetime. See whether you can think of at least a few and how each of those events has influenced who you are today as a person.

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5-minute pause - Quick self-reflection

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What formative events have impacted who I am as a person?

Young-age

Mid-age

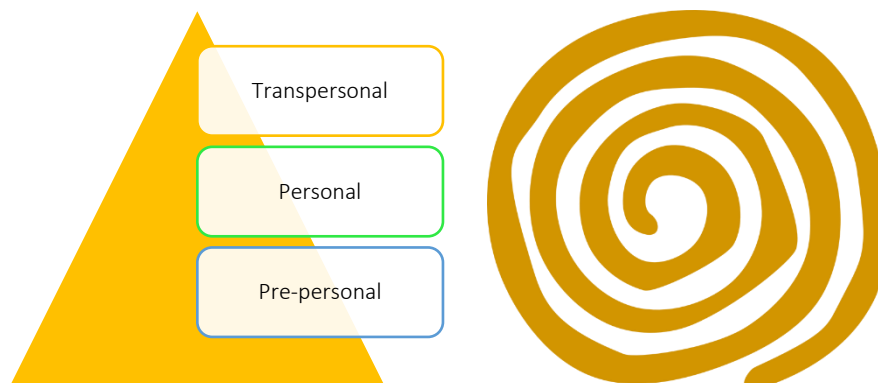
Old-age



## Self-potentials

The transpersonal theorist Ken Wilber proposed that only in higher levels of maturity can people develop more advanced mind and consciousness states. His famous **pre/trans fallacy** is well-known amongst scholars and is often applied to distinguish the infantile states of daydreaming and unrealistic fantasy with ‘genuine’ psi and mental abilities. It is applied as a common logic fallacy and critique of charlatans in the yogic traditions, who try to convince their students of miraculous abilities or ‘siddhis’ but later turn out to be fraudulent.

An alternative model proposed by Michael Washburn (below right v Wilber left) supposes that we are actually always rather returning to our essential self -- the “dynamic ground” as Washburn calls it. This is a common debate: Does higher development arise only with maturity completed at earlier life stages, or is it actually a return to our essential self-pre-development? Another way to think about this is the beginner’s mind of children, full of possibility and not yet shaped by the world.



My viewpoint is that both approaches have merit. Complete regression is not healthy as it can lead to diffusion of the self-boundaries. We need to “hold” some of these psi experiences in the human form, rather than attempting to diffuse entirely into them. Yet, some letting go of the ego - some ebb and flow between Self/ego states is essential for accelerated development. With greater maturity though, and stabilisation of the self, we can “hold” more of the transpersonal, make unique meaning from it, and cultivate the archetypal potential into solid possibilities here on earth.

“When given freedom from external exchanges and transactions, the isolated - constrained ego (or self or personality) has sources of new information from within.” -  
John C Lilly, 1977

### All-Self and holism

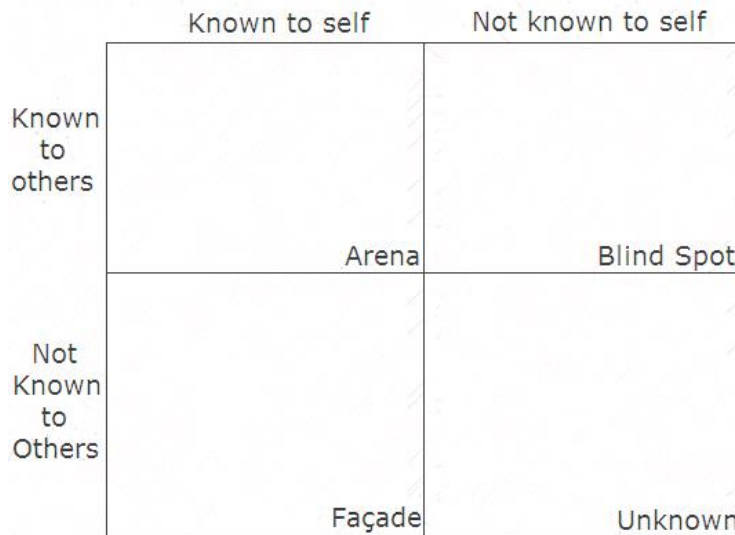
In his clinical work, Carl Jung was well-known for approaching clients from the embrace of the whole mind, or the broader Self, rather than the ego. If you see a therapist who approaches the person from the perspective of the ego only, he/she will likely end up discussing materialistic-type outcomes. On the other hand, Jung posited that if he connected to the ‘all potential’ field, he would inherently give his patients the capacity and permission to tap into all aspects of their unconscious mind and self, rather than fixating on the egoic goals. Take the example of a troubled relationship. A therapist who sees relationships through the egoic lens might try to “fix” the problem, but one who approaches it from the whole self is able to better hold possibilities for growth, change, and new potentialities without the supposition of how those may materialise.



The above ‘Gestalt’ symbolises this process well. We do not need to know the entire mind in order to cultivate our higher potentials. Gestalt theorists work on the supposition of **holons**; that is, all objects perceptually move towards wholeness and balance - or homeostasis if you like. We all know the above represent a circle and a rectangle, even though perceptually they are incomplete. Gestalt psychologists apply the same principles to human beings. In the example

below, you can see the Johari Window, which is a way to understand how we are always striving towards wholeness as humans, but never quite entirely see all facets of our entire self.

### Johari Window




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5-minute pause - Quick self-reflection

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Fill out 3 things in the top-left and bottom-left quadrants ea. Ask one of your family members or friends to fill out 3 things in the top-right quadrant. What qualities do you think may culminate in the bottom-right quadrant later in your life?

### Non-common trajectories

We know based on studies ranging from the Mozart effect, to teaching children from a young age how to write with both hands, to learning multiple languages, that the brain can be shaped in novel and unique ways. Likewise, engaging the neural centres of Gardner's 8/9 facets (Logical-Mathematical Intelligence ... Linguistic Intelligence ... Interpersonal Intelligence ... Intrapersonal Intelligence ... Musical Intelligence ... Visual-Spatial Intelligence ... Bodily-Kinaesthetic Intelligence ... Naturalist Intelligence) causes unique neural combinations.

For example, did you know that by taking certain herbs, you can trigger neuroreceptors in the brain; that via certain visualisations you can impact the endocrine system (e.g., the pineal gland); and certain yoga poses strengthen cross-hemispheric brain communication? Areas of functional and affective neuroscience are still burgeoning, but what fascinates me is that we tend to work with the brain template we are given, via inductive schooling and specific ways of learning that are almost universal around the world. It is only in the last decade or so that we can see researchers engaging the gut-brain axis and understanding how neurons within the brain



interact with the heart and other parts of the body, which were once thought to lack intelligence. How these might shape into earlier development, schooling, and education are exciting questions yet to come. For now, many of them are buried in the realm of the collective unconscious -- our collective right-quadrant of the window.

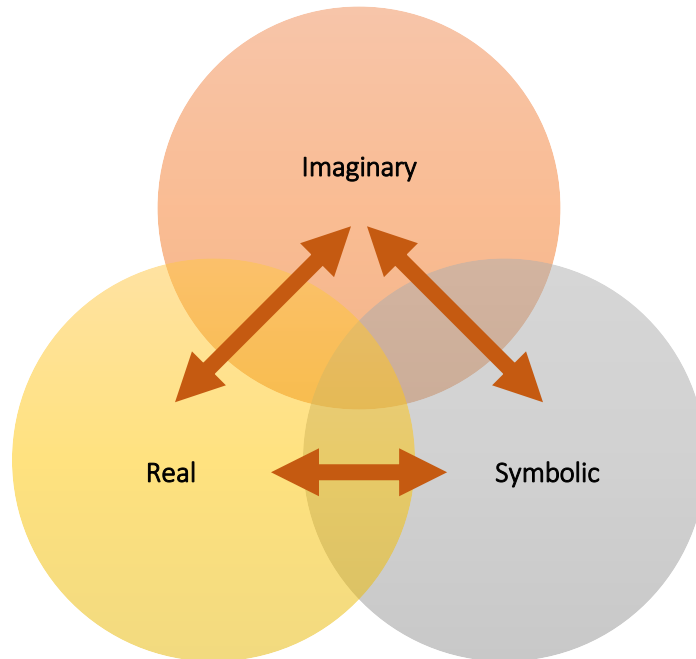
## Spiritual development and the real

“When a person chooses to funnel all her energy into form and doing, whatever the degree of moral industriousness, she is putting off the lightning strike of her own unfoldment for another day” - Neil Kramer, 2012

Children are usually more willing to entertain the imaginal realm of possibility, through play, imaginary friends, and even unique altered states they may forget about experiencing when they grow up. As we get older, we're less likely to stretch out mental potentials to fit outside of our given reality, and more likely to try to accommodate any experience with our past beliefs and expectations. The psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan noted that when a person experiences a significant trauma, it can create a tear in their cognitive models and break through to the nature of the “real” for a moment. Anyone who has experienced severe physical or emotional trauma will recollect this state. Often the ‘real’ experience is so terrifying that one might dissociate or experience it from a detached perspective. Yet, while trauma creates an uncomfortable and sudden shift out of one’s home-base of reality; through more progressive meditation, mindfulness, and other techniques, it is possible to connect with more of the ‘real’ outside of ourselves, rather than experiencing reality through the very finite filters of our mind.

Working with transcendental meditation, psychedelics, and light-base therapies are just some of the transpersonal techniques I have applied to explore these potentialities. With the latter, some of you may have come across Michael Persinger’s invention ‘The God Helmet’, which has convinced even some of the most well-known sceptics as to the benefits of working with altered states.

In fact, one of Persinger’s students, Todd Murphy, hypothesised that comparable neural changes that come about from such therapeutics might’ve occurred spontaneously in those spiritual teachers of times past. He offers the example of the Buddha and how the stark contrast between a life of solitude and happiness with that of the suffering of the ‘real world’ caused a permanent neurological change that ultimately culminated in Gautama Buddha’s enlightenment -- the contrast between a seemingly ‘fake’ world of privilege that was at once shattered brought on a permanent shift in consciousness. These hypotheses certainly challenge the idea that we need to meditate daily for hours, weeks, and years to develop greater mental clarity and insights, and hint at the possibility of a much simpler approach. Based on my learning in developmental and evolutionary psychology - especially on the macro specialisation and micro myelination of the brain, I am convinced that there is merit to entertaining this idea via novel practices.



## Science of altered states

The tension between rational thought and mystical emanation has run through the veins of human history and is much more archaic than a modern-day debate. In the Age of Reason this dichotomy played out as a divide between the Catholic Church and the mechanistic approach to conceptualising the universe - best mediated by Descartes' soul/body dichotomy, which tried to accommodate both views whilst discarding neither. The debate transveres the industrial, modern, and information revolutions.

Plato's rationalism and Aristotle's empiricism echo through natural philosophy, with Francis Bacon's publication on the inductive method in 1620, which showed two distinct methods of interacting with the world: through the lens of ideas and through the application of matter. With the innovations of Karl Popper (falsification and no idea is perfect) and Thomas Kuhn (science is never free from human subjectivity) we can see the debate proliferate even towards 2000, and indeed to 2022 and beyond, with the resurgence of a new replication crisis in medicine and other scientific fields.

Most researchers of altered states likewise pursue one of two directions: the focus on (1) an objective, data-driven world, which suggests that if psychic abilities exist, they should be observable, replicable, and subjected to randomised controlled trials, and (2) the subjective, inner-world, and mystical experience of the individual, which instead suggests that no two people are equal and thus an objective reductionism is senseless. Broadly, one of these two streams of knowledge tend to appeal to people, but seldom both.

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## 5-minute pause - Quick self-reflection

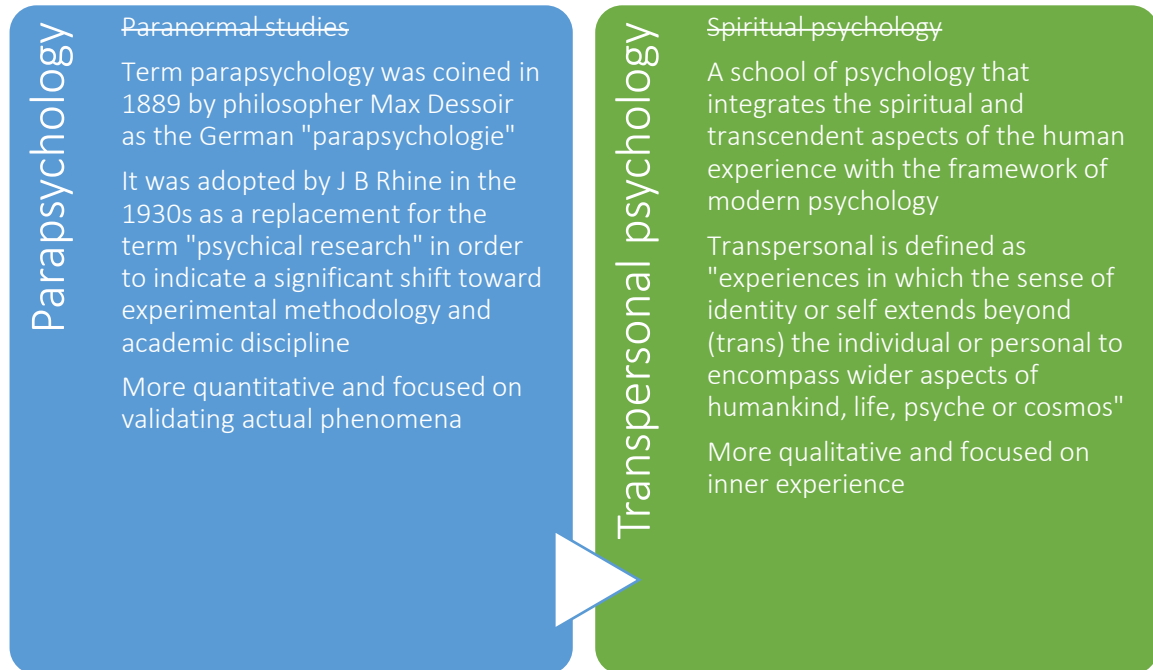
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### Plotline for your orientation: I prefer...:



Not surprisingly, each of these approaches have branched off into their own specialisations in psychology -- and that's true also of ASC research. Parapsychology, which focuses on observable data and measurements, tries to establish unequivocal proof of psychical phenomena. Transpersonal psychology, which focuses on meaning-making and mystical experiences, emphasises the subjective nature and impact of experiences (i.e., how they impacted one's life qualitatively).

A parapsychologist usually has to train in a 4-year undergraduate psychology degree, followed by a PhD (usually 4 years) supervised by a world-leading parapsychologist at one of the peak institutes (e.g., Rhine Centre in the US; Koestler unit in Scotland). Transpersonal psychology is a therapy-oriented stream of study. There are many bachelors and master's level programs in transpersonal psychology - sometimes termed holistic or spiritual psychology instead - around the world. Normally, practitioners still have to meet the minimal accreditation requirements to practise as a counsellor - in Australia that is usually an 8-year study sequence in total, which includes an undergraduate degree, 4<sup>th</sup> year honours program, a 2-year master's degree, and a registrar internship of 2 years in duration. Much like the higher-level specialisation of parapsychology, training in transpersonal counselling techniques is often incorporated later in those studies (specifically in the final four years of a master's and mentorship program).



In the diagram above you can see both of these fields move away from the more generalised language prominent in the late 1800s, such as “paranormal study” and “spiritual psychology” into the more technical and discipline specific wording to demonstrate the beginnings of a scientific field: Parapsychology and Transpersonal psychology, respectively. As mentioned earlier, based on your world-orientation, developmental trajectory, and personal values, you will likely gravitate towards one field or another. Interestingly, people also tend to label one field as more “legitimate/rigorous” than the other, because of their quantitative/qualitative research preference. I was in an unusual position of finding both fields of interest, which is how this workshop series emerged as a somewhat synthesis of key ideas.

## Examples of studies

### Examples of popular parapsychological studies

Bem, D. J. (2011). Feeling the future: experimental evidence for anomalous retroactive influences on cognition and affect. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 100(3), 407.

Sheldrake, R. (2005). The sense of being stared at--part 1: Is it real or illusory. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 12(6), 10-31.

Parnia, S., & Fenwick, P. (2002). Near death experiences in cardiac arrest: visions of a dying brain or visions of a new science of consciousness. *Resuscitation*, 52(1), 5-11.

### Examples of popular transpersonal studies

Grof, C., & Grof, S. (2017). Spiritual emergency: The understanding and treatment of transpersonal crises. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*.

Fach, W. (2011). Phenomenological aspects of complementarity and entanglement in exceptional human experiences (ExE). *Axiomathes*, 21(2), 233-247.

Rodger, J. (2018). Understanding the healing potential of ibogaine through a comparative and interpretive phenomenology of the visionary experience. *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 29(1), 77-119.

## Evidence and proof

In 2014, Etzel Cardeña published a call for open and informed investigation into “all aspects of consciousness” in the journal, *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*; the call was undersigned by dozens of distinguished professors and scholars who have specialised in parapsychological work in one form or another. As part of the call, Cardeña noted that Carl Sagan’s famous quote “extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence” is somewhat unclear in its requisite, as evidence ‘is’ evidence, no matter how strange or ‘extraordinary’ we may deem a certain phenomenon. Other scholars have interpreted Sagan’s claim to imply that the magnitude of an assertion must be matched with a comparable weight and degree of evidence. This is not necessarily true, but I am sympathetic to the spirit of the notion. For example, when physicists discover a new particle at the CERN collider, they do not need to amass mountains of evidence before the finding can be legitimised and the particle called real. Its observation one time is sufficient evidence in and of itself, despite how radical or extraordinary the claim to new knowledge.

For natural philosophers, the sensory evidence of phenomena is often weighted highly as a form of evidentiary proof, akin to ‘exhibits’ that might be presented in a courtroom to convince a panel of jurors. The veridical apprehensions via Newton’s apple and Galileo’s telescope attest to a rich tradition of evidentiary claims. Yet with the turn of formalised and mechanised scientific method, and endeavours such as those of Sir Francis Bacon, we noted clearer stipulations of inductive and deductive rationale. Unless flat-earthers be vindicated about their hard-headed subjective accounts, it is evident that pure empiricism and pure rationalism hold clear limits on imagination and perception, as theorists such as Popper and Kuhn have said. Note: Modern research considers Aggregate effects by conducting meta-analyses rather than singular analyses, therefore the research question at front of scientists’ minds is not whether certain abilities have stronger/weaker evidence but rather whether together they explain psi or not, when considered as part of a broader aggregative analysis and overarching theoretical model. Hence, it’s superficial to make the argument that out-of-body states may be legitimate yet remote viewing not - we have to consider all interrelated claims as part of a broader Psi factor.

### **Psi wars**

The ‘psi wars’ - journalistically covered by the blog ‘the Weiler psi’, is an extensive theoretical and statistical debate about the existence of psi, which was published in a series of meta-analyses in the world’s leading psychology journal, ‘*Psychological Bulletin*’. Researchers showed

broad-level evidence of psi effects across numerous studies; however, sceptics in turn critiqued the methodology in the original data captured and statistical analyses applied -- the debate descended into squabbles over the use of frequentist rather than Bayesian assumptions in statistical testing and each author's prior assumptions. As observed by the editorial team, the argument was not clearly resolved in the end. Interestingly, proponents often cite the statistical conclusions relevant to their specific and exclusive point of view, whilst sceptics do the same; such dialogue appears more a point of social contention than that of true scientific disagreement.

As a hobbyist scholar of the sociology of science, I've found we can broach some of these "big debates" in psi using epistemic tools about what we deem true or not (coherence, correspondence, pragmatism - like Don Hoffman's approach, or performative truth), as well as social power dynamics such as group discourse centred on positivism v panpsychism, group politics (as we've seen with suppression of meta-analytic data in some of the world's most prestigious scientific outlets around an unnamed virus of unknown origin), constructivism of discourse, as well as broader social structures that are sceptical about one aetiology (e.g., immunotherapy) than another (e.g., autoimmunology theory) -- all of which are potentially mediated via by-products of the inherently emotional nature of debate.

Then there's rudimentary basics of empiricism or rationalism - like I've had many people recount to me with 100% truth (allegedly) that an alien exists because they "saw it with their own eyes", despite the fact that >90% of our perceptions are re-constructed via temporal and sensorial networks across multiple brain regions. Conversely, "I believe it and you can't convince me otherwise", which I guess is true!

### An example of poor communication - ESP is fake?

One utmost stunning example related to psi research can be noted in the mass misrepresentation of Howe and Webb's study on change perception, which was published in the Public Library of Science in 2014. Change blindness is a common occurrence in which participants are naïve to certain stimuli in cognitive science experiments. The authors in their sequence of experiments found that participants could identify a minor (almost undetectable to the human eye) change in visual stimuli but were not able to spot the nature or location of the change. The disparity between the participants being sure there was a change, but not being able to identify it, was of interest to the research team. Any other cognitive scientist that could have been asked to interpret their dataset would clearly suggest that unconscious processes had a role in participant's recognising slight changes in their visual perspective.

Remarkably, although these authors did not use the terms 'psi', 'ESP', 'sixth sense', or related vernacular in the study in any capacity, on January 21, 2014 (8 days after the research was published), National Geographic Daily News printed an article entitled 'ESP Is Put to the Test—

Can You Foretell the Results? It's just hokum, say researchers, who offer a new experiment as proof'. A barrage of other media outlets published similar interpretations echoing that same sentiment within a week of the results being published (including The Guardian and the Huffington Post). The original data had no relation to psi research in any scope whatsoever, yet media outlets used the results to allegedly prove there exists a lack of evidence for clairvoyance. It is clear to any scientist or science reader that the experiment was a test of perception, not ESP in the slightest, even by the muddiest inference. Yet, this incident remains just one spotlight example amongst many on how media outlets grasp at straws to dissuade public discourse on a given range of topics from the outset.

The issue of bias also extends to social media fora. Claims of clairvoyance, telepathic communication, or afterlife studies are often underpromoted on social feeds, tagged with misinformation guidance and fact-checking tabs, or sometimes even outright censored, as we can note in the cases of Rupert Sheldrake and that of Russell Targ, both of whom have encountered extensive censorship via platforms such as Wikipedia and YouTube. Sheldrake's TED Talk was broadcast on February 13th, 2013. In his discussion, Sheldrake pointed out some of the limitations in scientific discourse that stifle debate about positive psi effects in mainstream literature. The program was later removed and censored from further media dissemination after a scientific panel deemed Sheldrake's work unscientific and not suitable for a public media platform (note, this occurred approx. 1 month after the talk was broadcast and accessible to the public via the TED platform).

Within the previous decade, TED Talks had broadcast programs which have broadly spanned ideas from speakers such as Edward Snowden, to innovators such as Steve Jobs, for instance, thus TED is not a scientific discussion platform as such -- it represents the public banner of 'Ideas worth spreading', TED's slogan. Yet, it is curious that claims relevant to parapsychology are often outright banned from such platforms, no matter how well-substantiated by science. Conversely, talks that apply poor science and questionable methodologies (e.g., from power poses to linguistic persuasion) are seldom put into scientific question on such platforms and even upvoted and promoted in the social domain.

### **Are we biased towards scientific monism?**

Despite that, if we put the social debate aside, is there an actual substance to psi claims or not? Here, it appears that Koestler's ghost continues to haunt Descartes' substance problem: how do we account for consciousness in a world of matter and forms? Many scientists argue that the hidden parts of human experience (soul, consciousness, God, etc.) will eventually be negated or explained in materialistic terms, in accordance with substance monism. Some scholars are sceptical about whether properties of consciousness can be reduced to neuronal populations at all, whilst others demand it.

The idealist material view that affirms we eventually will map cognition perfectly to neuronal activity, like hand-in-glove, continues to exact exorbitant funding tethered to the tall promise of higher-and-higher resolution brain-scanners. In a related fashion, positivist monism has appropriated traditions of times past. We can see clear examples from mesmerism to the practice of various virtues in traditional Buddhism, for instance. What are known in 2022ce as clinical hypnotherapy and short-term mindfulness intervention appear to have all-but divorced from their traditional esoteric roots and antecedent funds of knowledge. Our sanitised vernacular of gold-standard evidence-based practice has in turn kept such traditions locked out of broader deserving conversation.

When Olaf Blanke electro-stimulated the left temporoparietal junction (LTPJ) of participants in his laboratory, he appeared to trigger a 'shadowy person' illusion otherwise commonly reported in sleep paralysis. We could claim too -- "crikey, look at that, the demon who blocks you from the spirit realms is a mere artefact of neuroelectric vestibular interruptions". As we fall asleep our body schema become more fluid and our sense of balance can be slightly off due to breakdowns in multisensory processing. Yet again here we see a sharp divorce between the demands on empirical truth, and a mythic and archetypal meaning to an individual, the soul and heart of an experience.

David Chalmers posited that the quality of consciousness presents a 'hard problem' in science: how do we explain the phenomenal experience of being in the first place? Mark Solms has elaborated on Chalmers' contention, by highlighting that quale appears not just a happy accident of creatures big and small but are actually a deeply emotional and affective experience of living one's life. We do not have consciousness (as a property) in that sense; we are conscious (and conscious too of our self-consciousness). Whilst sceptics such as Blackmore and Dennett are swift to dispose of such intuitions, we can empirically observe the nature of consciousness in meditation practices, and too in the normative waking state of all animals. The 'I am' presence has been heralded as the centre of experience, from mystics of ages to avid scholars-turn-spiritualists such as ex-Harvard academic Baba Ram Dass.

"We cannot get behind consciousness. Everything that we talk about, everything that we regard as existing, postulates consciousness" - Max Plank

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5-minute pause - Quick self-reflection

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Ask yourself the question "Who am I?", but instead of trying to answer the question intellectually, try to elicit a body response - what do you feel, and where do you feel it, somatically (in the body) when you pose that question to yourself?



## Practicum - Working with altered states

To begin working with ACS we commence with a calibration exercise to understand the present state of consciousness we are experiencing. We can extend the above somatic practice with a thought experiment: **ponder on who you would be if you took away each of your five sensory systems one by one**. At first it can appear a strange question, and daunting to some, but the imaginary experiment allows us to really hone, in on that sense of presence/consciousness without sensory input. You may even like to close your eyes to help facilitate this experience of 'being' without sensory contents. If you spend a couple of minutes with this awareness, you will find there is a quality or experience of 'I' not contingent on the sensory awareness of sight, sound, touch, smell, taste, or even the stream of thoughts we have in our mind.

Importance of soft gazing: Next, consider the role of splitting your attention. Look at something in your room, but also pay subtle attention to the objects nearby. Can you shift your awareness to those objects yet not quite entirely? A good rule of thumb with soft gaze is 70/30.

If you had to place it, where was your attention in the previous practice? Many people say in the middle of their forehead or may struggle to pinpoint it in one spatial location. With peripheral awareness we can actually move our awareness in a subtle but meaningful manner.

In this workshop series, many practices involve a specific focus on an object or meaningful point of concentration, whilst others call for splitting attention and leveraging our peripheral awareness. Reflect on when you might've used both modes of attending to your sensory world in the past -- have you done this consciously? What would happen if you tried to meaningfully direct your attention either by being 'entirely focused' or via a 70/30 soft-gaze? Can you guess any potential benefits of one approach or the other?

### Personal space

Interestingly, William James thought that the 'physical/material self' extends not only to our body but also our surroundings. So, when you arrive home, there is some sense that your house is an extension of you -- if a stranger walked into your home the entire feeling of connection to that place as a part of them would be missing. Of course, in their own home they would feel such a sense. The same principle can be applied to our phone or car, for instance. Of course, we know that we don't have the same agency over our phone or car as we do over our personal body (i.e., we cannot get our car to reverse out of the driveway like we will our right hand to wave to someone). However, the emergence of embodied cognition as a field of scientific study has illustrated interesting ways that technology has blurred those boundaries between "me" and "my external space".

At the interpersonal level, we know that we feel uncomfortable if someone 'invades' our personal space. The scientific term used for the space within our immediate reach is

‘peripersonal space’ -- it extends about 30cm around our body. If someone goes into that space, we usually feel pretty uncomfortable! Unless it is an intimate encounter such as a handshake or a hug, in which case we expect those boundaries between us and the other to blur. Extra-personal space extends from around 30cm further outwards (usually a couple of meters or so), and usually this is what we mean by someone impinging (or not) on our ‘personal space’, depending on how close to us they stand as well as the context.

Yet, in transcendental experiences, people often report their sense of personal space encompassing a broader range of perception and sensation. For instance, in tantric sexual practices, making love is not merely the experience of reducing the boundaries of our personal space, but often the report of a merging with the other -- it genuinely becomes difficult to discern where one partner begins and the other ends, and this is sometimes colloquially/romantically referred to as ‘becoming one’.

More fantastical accounts of adept meditators often speak about becoming one with the universe. Again, this is not a conceptual pontification. These individuals often report a sense of perceptual immersion with the world around them, and a deep empathic connection with all things and people in that collective field - it is a felt-sense experience, not an intellectual exercise...

## Felt sense

We can get some conceptual sense of this, and potentially experiential sense (especially for those students who have prior experience in meditation) by focusing all of your awareness on the Felt Sense of what it is like to sit in your room right now. You can then extend this sense to what it is like to be situated in this house -- in this street -- in this neighbourhood. Continue to expand your awareness outwards. What is it like to feel situated within this part of the world, and this country, and this earth? Can you notice differences in “felt sense” of what it is “like” to be/experience moments at each proximity of reality? Have you ever lived in a different country/society and noticed a unique “felt sense” to that context?

“I do my thing and you do your thing. I am not in this world to live up to your expectations, and you are not in this world to live up to mine. You are you, and I am I, and if by chance we find each other, it's beautiful. If not, it can't be helped.” - Gestalt prayer

While for some people this feeling of expanding-out can be a little disorienting, I have personally found it an incredibly calming and grounding activity. As we expand our awareness outwards, we become more attuned to the billions of people doing unique things all around the world right now, to all of the animals moving in seasonal cycles, and to the geological movements around the planet. We can even meditate on the solar system and its synchrony and movements -- there

is a certain ordering and tranquillity amid the chaos, that despite all of the uncertainty of the world, our billions of personal narratives come together into a meaningful collective life experience from dusk to dawn, from beginning to end.

## Working with brainwave states

Another way we can regard our state of consciousness is by looking at various biorhythms such as our heartrate, nervous system response, as well as our brainwave states. Brainwave entrainment CDs have long been used to produce deeper meditation states by ‘tricking’ the brain into producing slower brainwaves; this in turn mimics a state similar to falling asleep and can be used for meditation practice in certain contexts.

Parapsychologists are often interested in how various technologies, such as the use of magnetism can influence brainwaves. Likewise, it is common to find psi research conducted using the Ganzfeld procedure or sensory flotation tanks, both of which block sensory input and allow a ‘clearer’ cultivation of psi.

Consider some of the common activities associated with these brainwave states:

- Delta: Deep sleep
- Theta: Deep relaxation, free-flow mental imagery, deeper meditation, body distortions such as sleep paralysis / out-of-body states
- Alpha: Mild relaxation which may include some hypnogogic imagery (in one’s mind’s eye)
- Beta: Normal awaking state
- Gamma: High-level focus and/or peak/flow state of consciousness

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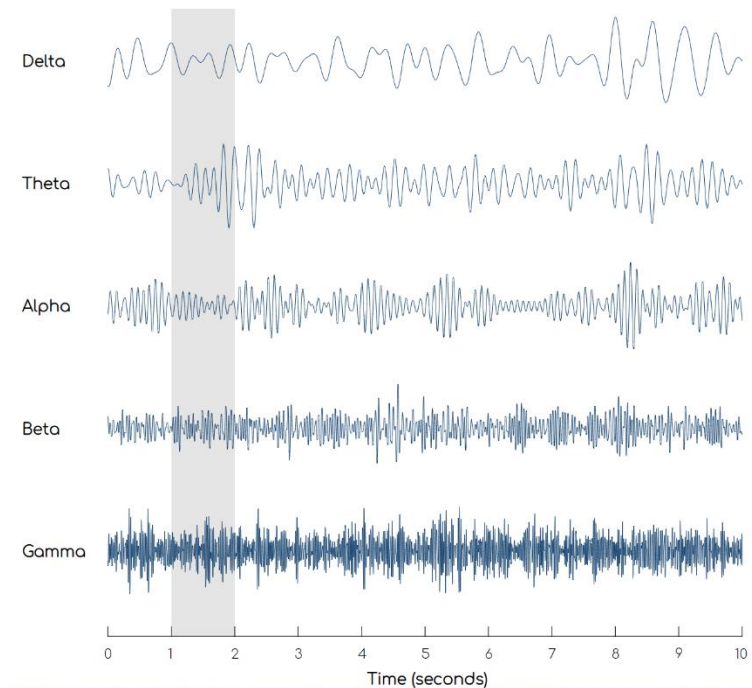
### 5-minute pause - Quick self-reflection

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Think about how your brainwaves fluctuate throughout the day. Although you cannot identify specific brainwave patterns without specialised equipment, you can probably get an intuitive sense of when your energy levels, thinking, and emotions are more highly charged and active as opposed to more relaxed and free flowing.

While we are never ‘in’ just one state or another, the preponderance of brainwaves at a given state can offer an indication and be useful as a means of navigating consciousness. For example, if I am somewhat drowsy but not very sleepy, I may estimate that my brain is producing alpha and theta waves, and I would need to relax further in order to fall into a deep sleep (theta & delta). Likewise, we can direct our efforts to deepen various personal development and meditation practices. For instance, you may have wondered why it is so difficult to return to a meditative state after a distraction such as a loud noise, as external factors can influence our

brainwave state and general state of consciousness. Likewise, you might be curious about why you remember your dreams more often when you are relaxed (alpha).



## Conclusion

### Reflections

The lecture and activities components of this module centre on getting comfortable with the idea of altered states. That begins with an awareness of our current state of consciousness, as well as starting to think about other states of human awareness. Here are some reflection questions you may like to ponder on for this module:

- How would you define consciousness?
- How would you define an altered state?
- What are you most interested in learning about in the following five weeks?
- Is there a theorist/theory in parapsychology or transpersonal psychology discussed in these notes you are curious to read more about? Would you consider looking into their books or research?
- Do you think parapsychology will ever become a mainstream science?
- Is psi development linked to maturity level and personal growth? Why / why not?
- How would you define 'Self'? Has your definition changed after completing this module?
- Do you think you ever had a peak state of consciousness in which your brain was likely producing high-frequency upper-Gamma range waves?

Feel free to share your reflections in the comment section of Module 1 - Lesson 4 online or tell a friend.



## Common questions

### **How do I know which state I am in?**

Everyone has a baseline state of consciousness that we can loosely term ‘everyday wakefulness’. Although there are slight differences in how each person experiences this baseline state, because our brain and nervous system structures are fairly comparable, we can get a good sense of “consensus reality” and how people are most inclined to perceive certain aspects of reality. A good reflective question to ask yourself is whether you are at baseline or in an altered state and to feel into the quality of each respective experience. If you do so consciously, you will likely notice subtle changes away from baseline. Contrast this with a transpersonal experience of a spontaneous positive change in awareness, or one brought on negatively via substances or psychosis -- these are intended as just mere examples (in which indeed even one’s baseline may change!).

Further notes from my 2014 paper, ‘A State Cultivation Model’, published in Vol 2 (issue 1) of the Journal of Exceptional Experiences and Psychology: “a degree of integration into one’s personal frame of reference must occur in order for an individual to recognize these states as encounters with a broader Self-experience” (p. 3). Remember that an ‘altered’ state is not something outside of yourself, although it can feel foreign!

### **How do I know if I have changed states of consciousness?**

In my 2016 anthology ‘Consciousness Beyond the Body’ (self-published) the author of ‘Chapter 10: A Practical Progression from Lucid Dream to Out-of-Body States’, Robert Waggoner, proposed a ‘shifting state hypothesis’: “I ask the reader to think about moving from one state of consciousness to another in general. When moving from waking to sleeping, do you shift states of consciousness? When moving from a lucid dream to the waking state, do you shift states of consciousness? When awake and undergoing deep hypnosis, do you shift states of consciousness?” (p. 145).

Going by Waggoner’s hypothesis, I argue that while in some instances knowing exactly which state we are in is useful, due to the fluid nature of consciousness it is often more beneficial to aim at an intuitive feeling/read on one’s present experience. Consciousness is not a ‘solid state’ but rather fluctuates between different experiences attainable within our self-reference. Therefore, paying attention to these subtle shifts in our awareness is important!

## How can I formally study parapsychology?

As a research pathway, you will find numerous parapsychologists listed on the Australian Institute of Parapsychological Research registrar, who can be contacted about supervising a 4<sup>th</sup> year psychology honours dissertation or a PhD project in parapsychology.

For practitioners and clinicians, you will find some organisations around Australia that offer Bachelor or Master level courses in transpersonal psychology -- for example, see Ikon Institute in Melbourne, Victoria, and Meta Vision Institute in Sydney, New South Wales.

## Further readings

- (1) Prometheus and Atlas By: Jason Reza Jorjani (2016: Arktos Media) - winner of the Parapsychological Association best book in parapsychology award
- (2) The Holotropic Mind By: Stanislav Grof (1993: HarperCollins)
- (3) Cosmic Consciousness A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind By: Richard Maurice Bucke (Editor) (2011: Cambridge University Press)