

## Article

# Conceptualizing Psychedelic Pure Consciousness

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## Abstract

Drawing upon a meticulous delineation of pure consciousness's fundamental and necessary features—including unstructuredness, maximal simplicity, selflessness, awareness as such, zero-perspective, and the absence of specific phenomenal qualities—this article asserts that a full-fledged experience of pure consciousness is attainable within the psychedelic state. Critically, this psychedelic manifestation is argued to be phenomenologically indistinguishable in its core properties from pure consciousness accessed via meditative practices. Consequently, this finding not only problematizes, but actually directly refutes Metzinger's thesis, which posits meditation as the sole "best and most natural candidate" for achieving pure consciousness. Moreover, this work champions a soft phenomenological perennialism. This perspective navigates a middle ground between rigid perennialism and radical constructivism, underscoring the identical phenomenological core shared by all pure consciousness experiences, including those induced by psychedelics. This exploration further posits that psychedelic pure consciousness experiences can yield significant epistemic insights into the fundamental nature of consciousness, the self, and reality. Beyond this, a systematic phenomenology of pure consciousness is demonstrated to offer profound contributions to our understanding of certain religious-spiritual concepts such as God. Nonetheless, while acknowledging naturalistic critiques, a significant caveat is issued: extreme caution is warranted regarding religious-spiritual interpretations gleaned from such phenomenologies. Ultimately, the paper underscores the burgeoning importance of a spiritual naturalistic interpretation of pure consciousness.

**Keywords:** pure consciousness; consciousness; phenomenology; religion; pure awareness; spirituality; perennialism; naturalism; neuroscience; metaphysics; reality



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## 1. Introducing the Concept of Pure Consciousness

This article examines the capacity of psychedelic substances to induce states of pure consciousness—a contentless, non-dual awareness characterized by the dissolution of self, time, and phenomenal content. Drawing on contemporary research, we argue that psychedelics can facilitate the full realization of this state, with comparable efficacy to traditional meditative practices, challenging claims that privilege meditation as the optimal pathway. By synthesizing empirical reports and theoretical frameworks, we suggest that psychedelic pure consciousness exhibits the same essential features as those described in mystical and contemplative traditions, supporting a phenomenological soft perennialism—the view that these experiences share an invariant phenomenological core despite contextual and interpretive variations. In addition to mapping the neurophenomenological terrain of psychedelic pure consciousness, we explore its implications for religious and spiritual discourse, particularly its role in shaping metaphysical intuitions and transcultural conceptions of ultimate reality. Finally, we identify critical open questions for future research,

emphasizing the need for refined methodologies to further elucidate the nature of this profound state of awareness.

Pure consciousness can be concisely defined as awareness that lacks particular phenomenal qualities and concrete intentional contents—i.e., awareness as such. Its characterization extends to encompass further aspects: in pure consciousness, there is an absence of sensory perception, conceptuality, spatio-temporality, bodily self-awareness, and the separation of world and ego. Effectively, pure consciousness transcends first-person experience, instead representing a fully decentered, asubjective, and objectless zero perspective. While this form of consciousness can, in principle, be apprehended as the ever-present background of everyday awareness, it also manifests in distinct states of phenomenal purity. Frequently reported across diverse religious–spiritual–mystical traditions, this experience is variably characterized as absolute emptiness or a return to primary reality. The remaining, maximally abstract phenomenal quality of consciousness is also described as luminosity or bliss. Pure consciousness corresponds to concepts such as Dharmakāya in the Buddhist Pāli canon, rigpa in Tibetan Dzogchen, Sākṣin in Advaita Vedanta, and devekut in Kabbalah, among others. Notably, the experience of pure consciousness first garnered scholarly attention and was introduced as a technical term within the research and philosophy of mysticism during the 1960s. This term subsequently gained widespread acceptance, initially popularized by Walter Stace (especially [Stace 1960](#), pp. 85–86, 160–61) and later elaborated by Ninian Smart (who referred to it as “consciousness-purity”, e.g., [Smart 1981](#), pp. 31–38).

Particular attention must be paid to the ongoing debate within mysticism theory between Steven Katz and his contextualist colleagues, who contest the very possibility of pure consciousness (notably [Katz 1978](#)), and the Pure Consciousness Event school, spearheaded by Robert K. Forman and his colleagues ([Forman 1990](#), cf. [Forman 1994](#)). Currently, the concept of pure consciousness (along with its variations and cognates) is a vibrant subject of extensive research, as evidenced by works from numerous scholars (e.g., [Travis and Pearson 2000](#); [Dainton 2002](#); [Fasching 2008](#); [Dunne 2011](#); [Baars 2013](#); [Bachmann 2014](#); [Costines et al. 2021](#); [Meling 2022](#); [Ramm 2023](#); [Jones 2024](#)). This trend culminates significantly in Thomas Metzinger’s substantial 600-page book, *The Elephant and the Blind: The Experience of Pure Consciousness: Philosophy, Science, and 500+ Experiential Reports* ([Metzinger 2024a](#)). This work, Metzinger’s magnum opus, integrates diverse spiritual traditions, insights from empirical sciences (notably neuroscience), and a wealth of philosophical arguments. Metzinger’s research is notably empirical, drawing on usable data from 1403 respondents out of 3500 questionnaire participants on pure consciousness experiences; concurrently, it offers a systematic philosophical—and a particularly fine-grained phenomenological—analysis of this profound experience.

Since Metzinger’s analysis judiciously incorporates earlier research, his recent book serves as a compelling starting point. However, he controversially asserts that meditation is “the best and most natural candidate” ([Metzinger 2024a](#), p. 290, cf. XIX) for achieving minimal phenomenal experience and pure consciousness.<sup>1</sup> A key challenge, especially pertinent when considering psychedelics, lies in Metzinger’s omission of a clear definition for what constitutes the “best and most natural candidate.” Despite this, Metzinger, a scholar and philosopher, has previously given substantial attention to psychedelics, as evidenced by his work on their neuro-ethics and enculturation (e.g., [Metzinger 2024b](#)). Consequently, he also addresses the role of psychedelics within *The Elephant and the Blind*. Intriguingly, one cited report describes a state of pure consciousness as “completely different from psychedelic drug or other mystical experiences” (report no. 1311, [Metzinger 2024a](#), pp. 191–92). Regrettably, neither the report nor Metzinger’s subsequent analysis clarifies the nature of this distinction. Elsewhere in the book, Metzinger references Aldous

Huxley's mescaline-induced experiences and Albert Hofmann's perspectives on the infinite expansion of consciousness, particularly concerning LSD. Within this discussion, he states, "it is now a well-established fact that psychedelic phenomenology contains strong elements of spiritual insight or even religious experience" (Metzinger 2024a, p. 268). He further suggests that psychedelics can help democratize certain religious and spiritual experiences that are otherwise inaccessible or difficult for many to access. Metzinger also cites Chris Letheby's research, which posits that "meditation promotes self-transcendent experiences via decentering and phenomenal opacity, while psychedelics promote decentering and phenomenal opacity via self-transcendent experiences" (Metzinger 2024a, p. 429). Letheby himself, in turn, contends that research into psychedelics and meditation can be mutually reinforcing. An interesting phenomenon observed by Metzinger is that many meditators were formerly psychonauts, but transitioned to the epistemic practice of meditation due to the unsustainability of the effects of psychedelic experience (Metzinger 2024a, p. 430). Notably, Metzinger further considers that "certain psychoactive drugs such as LSD, psilocybin, and 5-MeO-DMT have dramatic effects on self-consciousness and can temporarily suppress any form of self-identification—a phenomenon known in the scientific literature as "drug-induced ego dissolution" (Metzinger 2024a, p. 287). Overall, while Metzinger's comments hold significance, their brevity and limited novelty underscore a pressing need for a more systematic and phenomenologically grounded exploration of the relationship between psychedelics and pure consciousness.

## 2. Mapping the Research on Psychedelic Pure Consciousness

In the context of religious–spiritual experience, a crucial distinction must be drawn between pure consciousness and its related counterparts, such as non-dual awareness or ego dissolution. An experience may indeed transcend personal perspective or subject–object duality without necessarily exhibiting the phenomenal purity characteristic of pure consciousness, whether as an absolute state or an underlying awareness. For instance, even within a non-dual mode, consciousness might retain a rich multiplicity of phenomenal qualities, encompassing vibrant sensory phenomena (like luminous textures or resonant sounds) or a distinct succession of "nows." As Josipovic and Miskovic (2020, p. 5) aptly note, "non-dual awareness is, in a sense, orthogonal to any content." Additionally, (Metzinger 2024a, p. 350) further distinguishes these, contending that while non-dual states are phenomenologically rich and may indeed contain elements of pure awareness, they nonetheless constitute a distinct mode of minimal phenomenal awareness. Consequently, rigorous terminological precision becomes vital when discussing pure consciousness, especially in its relation to psychedelic experiences.

Given the predominant focus of recent pure consciousness research on mystical and meditative experiences, it is pertinent to examine how this strictly defined category has emerged within psychedelic research, thus revealing richer analytical perspectives. Notably, Walter Pahnke, in his seminal Good Friday Experiment, demonstrated that psychoactive substances could induce mystical experiences at high rates. Crucially, his questionnaire adopted the eight categories of mystical experience established by Stace, who had systematically introduced the concept of pure consciousness in 1960. Consequently, Pahnke and his collaborator Walter A. Richards incorporated not only several key phenomenological criteria for pure consciousness (such as loss of usual identity and transcendence of time and space), but also specifically included the category of "experience of pure Being and pure awareness (beyond the world of sense impressions)" itself (Pahnke and Richard 1966). Roland Griffiths and his colleagues, who subsequently re-demonstrated these results in the 21st century using psilocybin, similarly relied on categories from Stace (and Pahnke), employing terms like "pure awareness" and "pure consciousness" (Griffiths et al. 2006). Fur-

ther significant research includes that by Raphaël Millière, Robin Carhart-Harris, and their colleagues, whose work titled *Psychedelics, Meditation, and Self-Consciousness* also references Stace and offers a definition of pure consciousness as “a state of consciousness described as »objectless« or entirely devoid of phenomenal content. . . . [C]lassical psychedelics might lack at least ordinary phenomenal content” (Millière et al. 2018). Millière and his team notably present anecdotal evidence suggesting that psychedelic experiences can induce states of pure consciousness akin to those found in mystical and contemplative traditions, citing several 5-MeO-DMT-induced reports. They emphasize that while many psychedelic experiences are indeed rich in sensory content, certain experiences can be entirely devoid of sensory phenomenology. This lineage, stemming from Stace (and complemented by Forman’s Pure Consciousness Event concept), is continued by Letheby in his *Philosophy of Psychedelics*, where he discusses experiences “allegedly lacking mental contents altogether” (Letheby 2021, p. 25). Stace’s legacy, therefore, continues to have a powerful impact today.

Psychedelic research, which began to flourish again in the 1990s, often draws attention to the psychedelic version of pure consciousness. For instance, in his book *DMT: The Spirit Molecule*, Rick Strassman recurrently documented experiences characterized by an undifferentiated unity consciousness. He described one report as “it was pure bliss without any particular object” (Strassman 2001, p. 148) and another as “Elena saw love behind the ‘impersonal’ void” (Strassman 2001, p. 273). Notably, Strassman, who otherwise aimed to reconcile psychedelic experience with Buddhist tenets, even quoted an experiencer who reported, “I was pure awareness” (Strassman 2001, p. 146). Furthermore, Benny Shanon, drawing upon Stace’s categories, adopted the concept of “pure consciousness”—with additional references to Forman, Ken Wilber, and Stanislav Grof—in his seminal work, *The Antipodes of Mind*. This book notably analyzes the religious–spiritual dimensions of the ayahuasca experience. Shanon described pure consciousness as lacking intentionality, emphasizing that the psychedelic experience “presents further phenomenological indications to the possibility of there being mental states without content or directedness to an object” (Shanon 2002, p. 204). Of particular significance is Shanon’s analysis of his “type 5” consciousness, which, in his typology, represents pristine, undifferentiated cosmic superconsciousness, transcending the individual self (Shanon 2002, pp. 269–72). Naturally, this list of examples could be significantly expanded to include research that, while not explicitly employing the term “pure consciousness,” nonetheless offers phenomenological analyses of this experiential type.

Crucially, however, the interpretation of psychedelic experiences as pure or minimal consciousness has not received a universally positive evaluation. Patrick Lundborg’s *Psychedelia* serves as a key example. This work, while extensively exploring the religious–spiritual dimensions of psychedelics, also critically examines the application of Eastern teachings to psychedelic experience, thereby questioning the over-appreciation of non-duality. Lundborg explicitly references Stace’s mysticism theory, which he contends has become a mere protocol (Lundborg 2012, pp. 370–71). He, however, resists such minimalistic phenomenologies, asserting that “the astral planes” of profound psychedelic states “are not void realms of empty form to be transcended with a mental leap into non-dualism” (Lundborg 2012, p. 367). He contrasts minimal phenomenal experiences with the “high informational density” of the psychedelic state (Lundborg 2012, p. 373), further arguing that “the end-states of moksha and nirvana might appear nihilistic from the hedonist-pantheist mindset common in Psychedelia” (Lundborg 2012, p. 380). Lundborg also challenges the overestimation of ego-death, emphasizing the experiences with the help of which it is possible “to have a rippling effect across the whole spectrum of one’s personality, almost always in a favorable way” (Lundborg 2012, p. 381). Overall, his position serves as a crucial corrective against views that reductively prioritize only the minimizing or

emptying aspects of psychedelic experiences as descriptively or normatively significant. Nevertheless, Lundborg himself commits the inverse error by one-sidedly emphasizing experiences characterized by high informational density. As will be demonstrated, a state of consciousness devoid of concrete empirical qualities and specific intentional objects is indeed achievable within a psychedelic framework.

### 3. Contributing to the Phenomenology of Psychedelic Pure Consciousness

It may be surprising, but reports of pure consciousness, even when manifested in its phenomenal purity, i.e., as completely free of ordinary contents and maximally simple, are diverse and sometimes very rich. Indeed, post-experiential accounts frequently employ varied metaphors and emphasize distinct aspects. Consistent with this observation, Metzinger, for instance, speaks of an “extremely subtle phenomenology of pure consciousness itself” (Metzinger 2024a, p. XXI), organizing his analysis of reports based on the metaphors employed. Accounts of the psychedelic experience of pure consciousness exhibit similar diversity. However, this diversity does not solely stem from external factors. Rather, for pure consciousness, Metzinger argues that “there is no really good argument for the existence of some intrinsic phenomenological essence persisting across all possible contexts.” Instead, he suggests, “there is a prototypical region in the space of experience, a cluster of phenomenal properties that »hang together« with high probability” (Metzinger 2024a, p. XXIV). Naturally, phenomenological analysis is further complicated by the pervasive use of metaphors, particularly when their precise translation into conceptual language proves challenging or impossible.<sup>2</sup> Metaphors should also be used with caution, because they can be misleading, as in the case of metaphors involving visual light or similar expressions, as we read in an account of an LSD-induced experience: “it is luminous clarity: dreamless awokeness—pure consciousness without content other than its own uncreated bliss” (#115273 from Erowid.org)<sup>3</sup>. In such cases, it is important to bear in mind that this is in fact a “nonperceptual phenomenology” that refers to the “unobstructed epistemic space” (Metzinger 2024a, pp. 191, 199), and it is thus not a description of a concrete sensory quality. This explains how light can easily become synonymous with darkness: “the next 18 h consist of an Infinite Void of nothingness and everything-Timeless-Eternal. Pure darkness and Light. Just awareness. I knew who I was, but yet had forgotten who I was. I was nowhere, yet somewhere. I can’t explain it. Pure awareness” (#66049)<sup>4</sup>. It is also worth noting the difficulty that some psychedelic accounts emphasize that the positive components of the experience seem indescribable, e.g., “the reality around me disintegrated into nothing. I fell into a void I can’t even describe” (#23487)<sup>5</sup>. It is worth recalling here that although, especially since William James, ineffability has been considered an important feature of mystical experience, mystical accounts are in fact often linguistically very rich, and they also often make completely clear knowledge claims and positive characterizations of the experienced realities (see, for example, Jones 2016, pp. 203–33; Knepper 2017; Diperna 2018, p. 204). In such cases, it is worth paying attention to both negative and positive formulations. Just as, for example, Pseudo-Dionysius’ “negative theology” is supplemented by a number of cataphatic aspects, so too at least certain positive descriptions lie even beneath the psychedelic accounts that emphasize ineffability.

Not all accounts explicitly refer to pure consciousness or pure awareness (and some even employ a loosely defined concept of pure consciousness); rather, inference from their phenomenology is often required to identify this likely state of experience. Such inferences are particularly pertinent for reports emphasizing maximal experiential simplicity, the absence of concrete phenomenal qualities, or encounters with emptiness, nothingness, or the void. For example, “my brain was not conveying anything meaningful from what my senses were receiving; I was completely unaware of my body, experiencing profound

stillness" (report #99920 from Erowid.org)<sup>6</sup>; "The void my consciousness encompassed was just that. A void of absolute nothing. A strange indescribable dark void that was everything and one" (#113995)<sup>7</sup>; "I experienced pure consciousness in an infinite void" (#16020)<sup>8</sup>; "my thoughts ceased to exist, and my senses shut off completely. I could not hear, see, smell, taste or feel anything" (#37301). While these descriptions of low complexity strongly suggest an experience of pure consciousness, it is crucial to note that the "stillness" or "silence" often reported in such accounts is rarely a nihilistic nothingness. Instead, as (Metzinger 2024a, p. 22) points out, "it can have a subtle, dynamic quality," a notion reinforced by the term "profound" used in the aforementioned psychedelic account. Furthermore, the phenomenology of pure consciousness, despite its maximal simplicity, can sometimes be imbued with a powerful affective dimension, as exemplified by the following 5-MeO-DMT-induced account: "I felt reborn. I felt incredibly purified, cleansed, and fresh. I was full of extreme joy, euphoria, and love. So pure. So light. So clear. No ego. Just pure awareness" (#11708)<sup>9</sup>; "All of a sudden my mind stops, no more thoughts in my head. I wouldn't exactly call this headspace as everything was clear, they were absolutely no thoughts, just pure consciousness. . . . I am in complete joy. This lasts for about 9 s, the most joyous 9 s of my life" (#99956)<sup>10</sup>. This phenomenon holds particular relevance from the perspective of contemporary theories of affectivity. For operational utility, it is pertinent here to distinguish between the following: 1. Passions, being directed at a particular object and driven by a desire to alter one's relationship to it. 2. Emotions, being targeting a worldly context or, more precisely, changes within that context. 3. Moods, which are often pervasive, even all-encompassing, in their orientation towards the entire world (for these distinctions, see Sass 2004). Beyond these established affective dimensions, however, lies a further affective state that can entirely lack worldly phenomenality. As (Metzinger 2024a, p. 43) describes it, this state is "not quite 'of this world' yet," despite often exhibiting extraordinary intensity. Reports detailing this affective dimension of pure consciousness thus lend support to the theory that experience is fundamentally affective—a perspective advanced by various authors from differing persuasions (e.g., Henry 2019, pp. 17, 25, 104; Solms 2019, p. 12; Solms and Friston 2018, p. 17).

The necessary, albeit insufficient, criteria for pure consciousness—namely, timelessness, spacelessness, ego death, and disembodiment—are frequently observed in psychedelic pure consciousness reports. Crucially, these reports also often exhibit properties meeting the most stringent criteria of pure consciousness—such as unstructuredness, maximal simplicity, awareness as such, and the absence of specific phenomenal qualities—which serve to distinguish it from experiences like non-dual awareness or ego dissolution. Furthermore, particular attention should be directed towards accounts capable of capturing the exceptionally subtle layers of this experience. For instance, reports highlighting the unique potentiality of pure consciousness include the following: "Reality is no special state at all; no special condition. Reality is the IS of all possible states, their origin and unqualified basis, perfectly open and unbounded; pure capacity" (#115273)<sup>11</sup>; "pure potential, silence, void" (#115846)<sup>12</sup>. This is the highly abstract and global phenomenal quality of epistemic openness to the world, which Metzinger describes as "self-knowing empty cognizance, the inner nature of appearance itself" (Metzinger 2024a, p. XVI), "the knowing knowing itself" (Metzinger 2024a, p. 394), "the potential itself" (Metzinger 2024a, p. 264). This represents the pure epistemic nature of potential intentionality—the inherent possibility of being directed at any external object. Crucially, this is not a nihilistic, cold expanse, but rather a profound, simple experience of "I can"—a pure repertoire, simple availability, an intrinsic orientation readiness. Within accounts of psychedelic pure consciousness, one also encounters what Metzinger describes as an experience transcending the dualistic overlay of "existence" and "nonexistence" (Metzinger 2024a, pp. 14, 86). This is exemplified in a

ketamine- and DMT-induced report: “I hit the target spot on, suspended between polarities at the line between existence and non-existence. This is where the bliss of freedom lives, pure awareness” (#1961)<sup>13</sup>. Collectively, the phenomenal qualities of pure consciousness, systematically identified by Metzinger’s research primarily from meditative accounts, are consistently mirrored in reports of psychedelic pure consciousness. This striking congruence, however, further underscores the problematic nature of Metzinger’s assertion that meditation is the “best and most natural candidate” for minimal phenomenal experience or pure consciousness. Particularly when induced by naturally occurring psychotropic substances, the psychedelic experience cannot reasonably be deemed less “natural” than meditation. Conversely, if the “best” candidate is defined by its ability to most quickly and reliably induce the experience of pure consciousness, then substances like the extremely intense 5-MeO-DMT (see [Timmermann et al. 2023](#)) present a far more compelling case than meditative techniques, which often demand years of dedicated practice. It is, therefore, imperative that the psychedelic experience assumes a central role in pure consciousness research.

#### 4. Soft Perennialism and the Psychedelic Pure Consciousness

As previously noted, the experience of pure consciousness finds description across numerous religious–spiritual traditions. This historical observation naturally gave rise to the theory of pure consciousness perennialism (evident in the early work of Stace and Smart), which posits contentless or pure consciousness as one of the most important, if not the most important, aspect of mystical experience, possessing a universal core. While primarily focused on the phenomenology of this experience, the Formanian Pure Consciousness School—comprising scholars such as Donald Rothberg, Stephen Bernhardt, and Mark B. Woodhouse—nonetheless implicitly supported the perennialist assertion of a universal experiential kind. Advocates of pure consciousness perennialism maintain that direct experiences, transcending cultural and pre-existing beliefs, are possible, exhibiting striking phenomenological similarities across contexts. Conversely, critics like Steven Katz and his contextualist and constructivist colleagues reject the possibility of unmediated experience, instead emphasizing the profound differences among traditions. Also notable is Jorge N. Ferrer’s “participatory turn” critique ([Ferrer 2000](#)), which, among other points, argues that perennialism’s assumption of a pre-given ultimate reality, rooted in objectivist and representationalist epistemology, essentializes and thereby betrays the rich diversity of spiritual experience. These increasingly nuanced debates persist today. It can be cautiously stated that both hard constructivism and hard perennialism are progressively yielding to more nuanced positions.<sup>14</sup> For instance, Steve Taylor’s perennial phenomenology, or soft perennialism ([Taylor 2024](#)), warrants attention, as it shifts emphasis to the phenomenological commonalities of mystical experience rather than the specific doctrines and beliefs of particular religious traditions.

Crucially, in his book on pure consciousness, Thomas Metzinger first defines perennialism as the thesis that mystical experience shares a universal common core. He then defines Minimal Phenomenal Experience (MPE) perennialism as the acceptance of a shared phenomenal character among those undergoing MPE. After these definitions, he unequivocally states, “I am not an MPE perennialist” ([Metzinger 2024a](#), p. 325).<sup>15</sup> Following classical contextualist and constructivist arguments, one of Metzinger’s strategies involves referencing diverse traditions (e.g., the Indian and Buddhist traditions of pure consciousness, or Western concepts like *ataraxia* and *Seelengrund*) to contend that these descriptions of minimal phenomenal experience cannot plausibly refer to the same underlying experience. Yet, why does Metzinger claim, for instance, that *rigpa*, described by the Tibetan tradition, or *Seelengrund*, described by Meister Eckhart, lack a common phenomenal character, when both

are described as devoid of sensory content, concrete phenomenal qualities, and as being unstructured? Why should it not be possible that, at a pre-conceptual, post-conceptual, and non-conceptual level—as proposed by the Pure Consciousness Event school—individuals from these two traditions could indeed share an experience with an identical phenomenal character? In his attempt to discard the category of “sameness,” Metzinger also advances the argument that “perennialism is an . . . empirically untestable ideology: how would one produce intersubjectively verifiable evidence for it?” (Metzinger 2024a, p. 325).

Could empirical arguments for perennialism hold any weight? For instance, Taylor’s aforementioned article, in advocating for phenomenological perennialism, posits that several factors indicate a universal phenomenological basis for mystical experience and a shared experiential landscape. These include strong phenomenological commonalities, developmental processes independent of cultural context, the striking similarity between experiences outside formal traditions and those within, and spontaneous mystical reports from children. Crucially, however, pure consciousness perennialism suffices to establish a more minimalist position: namely, that a universal core exists within the experience of pure consciousness. Consistent with the arguments of the Forman school, pure consciousness perennialism might posit that this core transcends cultural contexts and linguistic conditioning, affording epistemic access to fundamental awareness. Metzinger, while acknowledging strong patterns of commonality in verbal reports, contends that such similarities do not allow for a definitive assertion of identical phenomenological referents (Metzinger 2024a, p. 326). Against this, one might argue that if phenomenological descriptions are truly devoid of empirical content (e.g., sensory perception, mental imagery, sense of time and space), maximally empty, and refer to unstructured experience, then substantive differences between them are, by definition, impossible. Consequently, what could constitute the “slight differences” to which Metzinger refers (Metzinger 2024a, p. 326)? Indeed, if all differentiators of experience—sensory input, thoughts, emotions, and individual self-awareness—are stripped away, what remains is, by definition, phenomenologically identical empty consciousness. Furthermore, variations in individual accounts might be attributed either to an incomplete realization of the described experience or to discrepancies arising from prior beliefs or subsequent interpretations. Finally, it is imperative to stress that pure consciousness itself is a non-interpretative state, implying that verbal identity lends strong support to phenomenological identity. Metzinger’s skepticism, therefore, demands more robust argumentation. Indeed, even Metzinger concedes that the discovery of a neurocomputational signature for pure consciousness would constitute an argument for perennialism (Metzinger 2024a, p. 326). Furthermore, Metzinger, drawing on the Schopenhauerian and Wittgensteinian notion of family resemblance, posits the utility of speaking of a “hard prototypical core” of pure consciousness—“phenomenal properties that ‘hang together’ with high probability” (Metzinger 2024a, pp. XXV, 327). However, the concept of family resemblance itself is problematic: it struggles to yield a coherent concept, lacks explanatory power, is prone to self-referential paradoxes and overextension, and contradicts contemporary cognitive science models of concept formation (see, e.g., Hazard 1975; Williamson 1994, pp. 84–89). Similarly, prototype theory has faced severe criticism for analogous reasons, including issues with boundary clarity and limited applicability beyond concrete nouns (e.g., Armstrong et al. 1983; Osherson and Smith 1981). Instead, it appears more reasonable to posit that the concept of pure consciousness encompasses not only properties with a high probability of co-occurrence, but also certain universal core properties: maximal simplicity, awareness as such, zero perspective, unstructuredness, and a lack of empirical phenomenal qualities. There are strong grounds to argue that these elements, as necessary and invariant markers, fundamentally constitute the essence of pure consciousness—the bedrock of all consciousness, persisting even when concrete

phenomenal qualities vanish. Consequently, Metzinger's claim that pure consciousness "is not some sort of mysterious 'essence'" (Metzinger 2024a, p. 463) must also be treated with reservations. Contemporary philosophy exhibits strong trends toward defining essence in a non-mysterious manner, divested of unwarranted metaphysical baggage (e.g., Fine 1994; Lowe 2008; Soames 2002). In brief, if pure consciousness truly lacks all content, then its essence is precisely its absolute emptiness—a minimal definition immune to cultural variation. Indeed, one might contend that an implicit essentialism subtly operates within Metzinger's work.

It is worth exploring the relationship between psychedelic pure consciousness and perennialism. As discussed in Section 3, psychedelics can reliably induce states that align with the definition of pure consciousness and appear phenomenologically indistinguishable from those achieved through meditative practices. This means that accounts of psychedelic pure consciousness can significantly support the assertion of a common underlying ground for all conscious possibilities. Despite interpretive diversity and variations in descriptions, there are strong grounds to claim that these experiences point to a universal capacity and a shared core that is reproducible across different methods. Notably, psychedelic pure consciousness in naïve individuals often entirely lacks doctrinal framing. Furthermore, the distinctions between skill-based epistemic practices and pharmacological triggers seem to have no bearing on the phenomenological outcome. In short, the phenomenologically consistent psychedelic pure consciousness reports validate a modified version of weak, phenomenological perennialism. This perspective suggests that pure, unstructured, maximally simple, zero perspective consciousness, free of concrete empirical qualities, forms the basis of human consciousness and represents a universally realizable possibility in its phenomenal purity. Considering the shared neurophenomenology of meditation and psychedelic experience (e.g., Millière et al. 2018), there is also a strong argument for this universal basis and possibility being anchored in a common neurocognitive framework. This framework might relate to the self-modeling processes of the default mode network and increased global functional connectivity (e.g., Carhart-Harris 2018). Metzinger's "autonomous arousal system" theory (Metzinger 2021) could further contribute to this understanding. In other words, we might be dealing with both phenomenological identity and neurofunctional equivalence. Ultimately, the experience of psychedelic pure consciousness offers an essential contribution to understanding human experience itself, especially mystical experience. It provides even more reasons to believe that hard constructivism, which asserts that all experience is conceptually mediated, is incorrect, and that there is a phenomenological identity to pure experience. In other words, besides the abundant cross-cultural evidence for unmediated experiences, the shared neurobiological basis also argues for commonalities in a minimally defined pure experience. Accounts of psychedelic pure consciousness enhance the empirical verifiability of pure consciousness's phenomenological perennialism and can enrich systematic analysis. While strong perennialism often confusingly and reductively ignored differences between traditions by claiming that all roads lead to the same mountaintop, it might be fair to say that there is a mountain and a mountaintop without which all other mountains and mountaintops wouldn't exist. Continuing to use these metaphors, one could say that the complementary roads leading to it might vary, but the universal phenomenal bases—the primordial mountain as the Mount Meru in Indian mythology, supporting the heavens and earth—the same. Of course, the mountain metaphor can be misleading, because this phenomenologically describable mode of self-presenting givenness itself will never be a reifiable entity, as it phenomenologically precedes and surpasses all ability to be reified.

## 5. What Is the Religious–Spiritual Import of Psychedelic Pure Consciousness?

The experience of psychedelic pure consciousness undeniably offers significant contributions to our understanding of consciousness, capable of profoundly transforming established scientific and philosophical beliefs. For instance, it provides compelling arguments against the notion of consciousness as solely a subjective phenomenon—suggesting instead that the self is an emergent, and indeed dissolvable, construct—and posits that temporal properties are not intrinsic to consciousness’s essential structure. More broadly, in this context, it is reasonable to state that “psychedelics as agents of knowledge, insight, and spirituality is. . . perfectly compatible with a naturalistic worldview and a scientific outlook” (Letheby 2021, p. 35). This compatibility stems particularly from psychedelics’ capacity to recalibrate fundamental beliefs concerning our self- and world-models. They can contribute, for instance, to the insight that the individual self is merely an emergent process, capable of dissolving while consciousness persists, or that the world itself is, in fact, a transparent and controlled hallucination or online simulation (Metzinger 2003, pp. 51–52), thus calling into question our habitual naïve realism. Accordingly, psychedelic pure consciousness, experienced in its phenomenal purity—a state where the individual self and the world-model by definition vanish—can reasonably be regarded as the psychedelic experience offering the most profound epistemic benefits, providing essential insights into the nature of our consciousness and experience. Furthermore, it can be argued that psychedelics, including those inducing pure consciousness, are not inherently distortive compared to everyday experience (Moen 2022). Indeed, there is compelling evidence to suggest that psychedelic experiences can offer a more veridical perception of certain aspects of reality (Buchanan 2022; Losoncz 2023a; cf., e.g., Metzinger 2024a, p. 86), with particular attention being paid to those related to consciousness. Psychedelics—and, within this, the psychedelic pure consciousness—can also facilitate the revelation of mindfulness-related capacities, such as meta-awareness—which enables the observation of thoughts as transient mental events—and decentering, fostering a diminished identification with one’s thoughts and emotions. Attentional flexibility and present-moment focus are additional capacities worth noting.

However, alongside these insights, suggestions and theoretical possibilities, it is crucial to recognize that the phenomenology of pure consciousness can also reinforce or shape certain religious–spiritual or metaphysical perspectives. Indeed, research suggests that psychedelics can profoundly alter beliefs about reality, guiding individuals away from rigid materialism or physicalism towards more mystical or non-physicalist stances (Timmermann et al. 2021). While the resulting metaphysical beliefs are diverse—panpsychism being one example—the experience of psychedelic pure consciousness can also foster views characterized as transcendental or pantheistic idealist monism (Letheby 2021, pp. 29–30). Regarding these interpretations, Metzinger contends that certain traditions—and what he dismissively terms “delusional New Age folklore”—make illegitimate leaps by reifying the experience of pure consciousness into a distinct metaphysical entity. For instance, they might infer from the experience’s freedom from bodily and material phenomena that consciousness generally lacks bodily and material conditions or external causes. Similarly, they might conclude that the “true self” is identical with the entire universe, or that pure awareness is an all-permeating feature of reality. For Metzinger, however, such claims betray a lack of intellectual honesty which is already possible with our current knowledge. As he puts it, we “have to understand that, just as for all other conscious states, experiences of effortlessness, the phenomenologies of ‘givenness’ and ‘spontaneous presence’, depend on unconscious causal precursors in the brain—anything else would be sheer magic” (Metzinger 2024a, p. 108). Methodologically, it is thus paramount for him to exercise caution regarding the purported authority of traditions and reports, given their

susceptibility to a range of epistemological errors. One such error is what he and Jennifer Windt termed the E-error (Windt and Metzinger 2014), which occurs when a vague intuition derived from mere appearance is mistaken for genuine knowledge. Closely related is the M-fallacy, which erroneously infers an experience's metaphysical status from its seeming self-causation, foundationlessness, or "unborn" quality. The C-fallacy, in turn, arises when individuals presume actual knowledge about the essence of consciousness based on a feeling of encountering "consciousness as such." For Metzinger, these all constitute non sequiturs—unwarranted conclusions. These three fallacies share a common thread: their reliance on the inherent unreliability of subjective appearance in epistemological and metaphysical reasoning. Taking these into account, this article has also carefully formulated the soft perennialism of pure consciousness, avoiding unwarranted metaphysical claims—also speaking about the essence of consciousness in a phenomenological sense. Moreover, unlike hard perennialism, the phenomenological perennialism of pure consciousness does not assert that all mystical experiences are identical; instead, it focuses specifically on the realizations of pure consciousness. Regardless, this is not to deny that traditions and reports faithfully describe experiences; rather, Metzinger argues that experiential immediacy and transparency pertain merely to the level of appearances, not to the "thing itself." Despite the profound sensation of phenomenal purity, Metzinger asserts that "nothing is given here—no direct form of inner perception" (Metzinger 2024a, p. 127). He cautions against illusions of insight and self-justification, even acknowledging the potential for these experiences to be abused. An example of such fabrications is mortality denial, wherein the "unborn" quality of pure consciousness is erroneously extrapolated to imply the immortality of consciousness itself. Following these arguments, Metzinger also ambitiously proposes a principle of phenomenal correlates, suggesting that every metaphysical theory mirrors some mode of conscious experience. Ultimately, his primary objective is to foster a "new generation of scholar-practitioners not blinded by ideology" (Metzinger 2024a, p. 327).

The foregoing discussion elucidates the complex mechanisms through which the experience of pure consciousness contributes to, or shapes, certain religious-spiritual beliefs with metaphysical implications. However, it simultaneously provides strong grounds to question the validity of such beliefs due to inherent epistemological challenges. It may seem surprising that many perceive psychedelic experiences—induced by material substances—as challenging rigid materialism. Yet, these experiences, in isolation, do not furnish decisive arguments against physicalism. Likewise, while the psychedelic experience of pure consciousness might foster a perception of reality as entirely empty consciousness, this perception itself can engender further skepticism. Furthermore, such beliefs can adopt an explicitly theological dimension, as illustrated by the following report: "I was beyond time and space, there was no thought, there was no self, there were no visions, only pure consciousness. I cannot even say that I was one with everything, for I was everything and everything was me, God was with me and I was with God. I cannot say how long I was in this state, but it was glorious and I felt ecstatic beyond words. I wanted to be eternal" (#115990)<sup>16</sup>. This vivid description of identity with divine universal consciousness also invites the charge of phenomenological fallacy (Metzinger 2003, pp. 57–59)—the error of inferring allegedly intrinsic features of a (divine) reality from subjective phenomenal properties, thereby conflating personal experience with metaphysical truth. Jerome Gellman, in *The Mystical Experience of God*, aptly argued—referencing experiences of nothingness or the void—that "mystical experiences cannot count toward their own genuineness." He identified a serious problem "when they appear to people with a »God-ish« phenomenal content [and] they think they perceive God" (Gellman 1997, pp. 11, 18). In other words, from the perspective of this article, the prevalent use of psychedelics as entheogens—substances believed to generate the divine within—warrants significant caution.

Yet, even with skepticism regarding the veridicality of a divine dimension in psychedelic pure consciousness experiences, acknowledging this possibility can illuminate, at least partially, the genesis of certain religious–spiritual beliefs. As previously discussed, pure consciousness in its phenomenal purity—including its psychedelic manifestations—facilitates not merely a wider perspective, but a zero-perspective. This maximal “zooming out” causes the objects and empirical contents characteristic of the phenomenal world and the ordinary stream of consciousness to dissolve. This phenomenon echoes the historical debate between Romain Rolland and Sigmund Freud concerning the origins of the most basic religious feeling that is oceanic and boundaryless (see [Parsons 1999](#)). Aligning with the contours of this debate, it can be proposed that the psychedelic experience of pure consciousness, as a maximally unconstrained mode of cognition, significantly contributed to the emergence of our high-level belief in God. This perspective resonates with Metzinger’s analysis, wherein the idea of God is seen as a reification into an egoic entity, resulting from the “ideal observation” inherent in pure consciousness. For him, it is a “metaphysical reification of what originally was a phenomenological process” ([Metzinger 2024a](#), p. 208) (interestingly, Metzinger views the more abstract Advaita doctrines as epistemologically more faithful in this context). Letheby offers a similar assertion: “this can be construed as a naturalistic error theory of psychedelic mysticism: it explains why we should expect psychedelics to induce vivid experiences as of a cosmic consciousness, even if no such thing existed. In light of this, positing an actual cosmic consciousness to explain such experiences seems superfluous, and a naturalistic explanation more parsimonious” ([Letheby 2021](#), p. 121). In light of these considerations, it is plausible that the pure consciousness accessible via psychedelic experience has also contributed to the emergence of the concept of God found across religious–spiritual traditions. This includes, for instance, much speculation surrounding the doctrine of soul immortality. It might have also contributed to the speculations about the immortality of the soul.

Overall, while the experience of psychedelic pure consciousness can certainly shape religious and spiritual beliefs concerning the metaphysical nature of ultimate reality, it might, in this specific regard, be accused of being a “metaphysical hallucination” ([Flanagan and Graham 2017](#), p. 294) or a “comforting delusion” ([Pollan 2015](#)). Crucially, however, pure consciousness, through what philosophers term knowledge by acquaintance, can also contribute to or foster beliefs that are highly likely to be true, supported by robust scientific and philosophical arguments, and potentially even empirically verifiable in the future. Furthermore, the psychedelic pure consciousness experience possesses an aspect that can reasonably be considered a form of transcendence, as it essentially moves beyond the sphere of everyday experience. Namely, it manifests the ever-present consciousness that resides in the background of transient, ever-flowing mental contents. However, the experience of psychedelic pure consciousness does not, by itself, grant us license to draw definitive conclusions about the metaphysical characteristics of reality as a whole, nor to believe that our experience of consciousness as a non-natural or supernatural entity is veridical.

The phenomenon widely termed the “psychedelic renaissance” has undeniably bolstered certain religious–spiritual beliefs and practices. Concurrently, however, an alternative approach has gained prominence, championed by thinkers such as Letheby and Metzinger, often referred to as “the naturalization of spirituality” or “spiritual naturalism” (e.g., [Letheby 2021](#), pp. 196–205; [Metzinger 2024a](#), p. 459). Proponents of this current establish a naturalistic metaphysics or naturalized spirituality as their foundation, reinterpreting mystical experiences, for instance, and deriving various ethical and existential implications therefrom (see, e.g., [Stone 2012](#); [Jones 2012](#)). To this extent, the intellectual and cultural dominance of naturalism within certain social spheres presents an ambivalent effect: it

can enhance attention to, and serious consideration of, phenomenological reports from religious–spiritual traditions, while simultaneously marginalizing or entirely disregarding the metaphysical baggage and ideations frequently embedded within them. Advocates of this naturalizing program and methodological naturalism consciously aim “to demystify the psychedelic experience” (Carhart-Harris et al. 2018, p. 549). This involves moving beyond the non-scientific and pre-scientific “manifest image” and the naive conclusions it often engenders.

It is noteworthy, however, that certain religious–spiritual traditions and their teachings are often viewed more favorably within this framework. A prime example is the anti-substantialist and anattā-centric Buddhist doctrine of no-self (for its significant implications, see, e.g., Garfield 2022). Pollan’s psychedelic account also merits consideration: “There was life after the death of the ego. This was big news. . . . This might not come as a surprise to Buddhists, transcendentalists, or experienced meditators, but it was sure news to me, who has never felt anything but identical to my ego. Could it be there is another ground on which to plant our feet?” (Pollan 2018, pp. 264–65). In line with these observations, the psychedelic experience of pure consciousness simultaneously points to the potential—at least partial—veracity of traditional teachings on pure consciousness, while equally underscoring the necessity for their critical review from a distinct analytical perspective.

Having used the term “religious–spiritual” broadly, it is now opportune to explore its nuances more deeply. While the precise definitions of “religion” and “spirituality” are widely debated (see, e.g., Losoncz 2023b; Carrette and King 2005) and lie beyond the scope of this article, a significant evolving trend warrants emphasis. For instance, Metzinger, in his work on pure consciousness, posits that the “deepest sense of the word ‘spirituality’” might denote “a form of conscious experience that is completely independent of religious belief systems” (Metzinger 2024a, p. 491). It is arguable, however, that such a clear-cut distinction between spirituality and religion can be arbitrary, especially when considering historical forms of spirituality, particularly those explicit manifestations post-Saint Paul. This arbitrariness is underscored by the conceptual confusion Metzinger himself acknowledges regarding phrases like “spiritual but not religious” or “spiritual but not affiliated,” conceding that “nobody knows what these concepts actually mean” (Metzinger 2024a, p. 27). Regardless, a significant shift is undeniably underway. Historically, experiences of pure consciousness frequently informed religious perspectives grounded in supernatural or non-natural metaphysical worldviews. Today, however, we observe the ascendance of a secular and naturalistic spirituality, a trend poised for increasing significance. Thus, when a journal like *Religions* issues a call for papers on “the relevance of psychedelics for religion and spirituality,” it implicitly acknowledges these two increasingly distinct paths. This is not to suggest that spiritual naturalists disregard the rich phenomenological heritage of religious traditions; rather, they approach metaphysical views with unwavering skepticism. Consequently, the experience of pure consciousness will likely be increasingly interpreted through the lens of spiritual naturalism.

## 6. Further Possibilities and Questions

This article underscores the basic, necessary features of pure consciousness—such as unstructuredness, maximal simplicity, selflessness, awareness as such, a zero-perspective, and the absence of specific phenomenal qualities—along with other subtle characteristics of this experience. It argues that a full-fledged pure consciousness can be attained within the psychedelic experience, demonstrating no substantial phenomenological difference from pure consciousness experienced through practices like meditation. This finding further problematizes and prompts the rejection of Metzinger’s thesis that meditation constitutes the “best and most natural candidate” for accessing minimal phenomenal experience

and pure consciousness. Moreover, building primarily on arguments against Metzinger, the article advocates for a soft or phenomenological pure consciousness perennialism. This position—a middle ground between hard perennialism and radical constructivism—emphasizes the identical phenomenological core shared by all pure consciousness experiences, including those induced by psychedelics. It is further contended that psychedelic pure consciousness experiences can yield significant epistemic insights into the fundamental nature of consciousness and the self. Additionally, the systematic phenomenology of pure consciousness can deepen our understanding of certain religious–spiritual concepts, such as the genesis of the idea of God. However, considering naturalistic critiques, it is stressed that caution is paramount regarding religious–spiritual interpretations formulated in the wake of pure consciousness phenomenologies. Finally, it is crucial to underscore the growing prominence of the spiritual naturalistic interpretation of pure consciousness.

Experiences of pure consciousness also raise other related questions that are not addressed in full in this paper, as discussed below.

#### A. Deconstructing Consciousness

Generally, a critical examination of the vastly influential Stacean understanding of mystical experience is crucial, especially when contrasted with perspectives prevalent in contemporary philosophy, science, and psychedelic research. Within this broader critique, particular scrutiny must be directed at the term “pure consciousness,” which Stace elevated to a technical term whose use has become generally accepted. Indeed, not only is the very notion of consciousness (or mind) far from self-evident (see, e.g., [Hacker 2012](#)), but liberation from concrete phenomenal qualities, the phenomenal world, and the self is also not universally described by diverse traditions as an experience leading to pure consciousness. Mahāmudrā, for instance, asserts that, from an absolute perspective, there exists no “mind” or consciousness ([Brown 2006](#), p. 415), aligning with concepts such as “beyond mind” (Tibetan: *sems med*) and early Mādhyamika’s *nirodha*. Similarly, Pāli and Theravāda traditions describe the attainment of a “mindless” or “conscienceless” (*acittaka*) state ([Griffiths 1990](#), pp. 78–82). It can be argued that these practices often “do not yield ‘nonconceptual awareness’ so much as the cessation of consciousness itself” ([Sharf 2014](#), p. 944; for a similar interpretation, see [Komarovski 2015](#), pp. 68–78). Collectively, then, a critical question arises: has “pure consciousness” become a generally accepted term among thinkers from Stace to Forman and Metzinger precisely because these figures may be constrained by Western modernist preconceptions and reifications of consciousness and experience (e.g., [Sharf 2012](#))? Moreover, it is crucial to recognize that the common understanding of consciousness, largely tied to its intentionality (i.e., being directed at something), inherently contradicts the radical absorption characteristic of pure experience. Ultimately, the myriad meanings of “consciousness,” each fraught with subtle differences, render the choice of precise terminology exceedingly difficult.

#### B. Naturalism and Metaphysics

The naturalist program presents compelling arguments, particularly in grounding the psychedelic experience of pure consciousness within its neurobiological basis and in addressing challenges such as the phenomenological fallacy. However, this does not signal a definitive triumph for naturalism. Conversely, critics contend that naturalism has yet to resolve the “hard problem” of consciousness—failing to explain how subjective experience arises from matter. They also argue that pure consciousness experiences can veridically reveal consciousness as non-objective and non-local (in the context of pure consciousness see, e.g., [Sjöstedt-Hughes 2022](#)). Furthermore, some contemporary theories of consciousness propose alternatives that integrate naturalist insights while extending beyond them (e.g., [Fasching 2016](#); [Albahari 2019](#); [Velmans 2008](#)). Notably, even staunch naturalists like Thomas Metzinger acknowledge metaphysical alternatives to their position,

such as neutral monism or non-reductive materialism (Metzinger 2024a, p. 463). Therefore, it is premature to declare that naturalism has definitively refuted religious–spiritual or theological perspectives on consciousness and reality. Conversely, while a complete refutation remains elusive, naturalism’s insights undeniably pose a significant challenge to metaphysical views that, for example, infer from pure consciousness experiences that matter or physical phenomena are strictly non-existent or illusory. Finally, having anticipated the rise of spiritual naturalism, we can now also foresee a further proliferation of theories aimed at reconciling these disparate viewpoints. Some of these emerging positions (e.g., psychedelic neurotheology) will likely propose that consciousness—especially pure consciousness—is both a fundamental feature of reality and, crucially, a natural phenomenon. Crucially, the experience of psychedelic pure consciousness, serving as a powerful phenomenological tool, offers controlled perturbations for studying consciousness fundamentals. Furthermore, psychedelic pure consciousness cannot be dismissed as merely a pharmacologically induced simulacrum or a biologically constructed illusion, precisely because it reveals some fundamental phenomenal properties of consciousness.

#### C. The benefits of a common phenomenological basis

Our exploration has thus far focused on the epistemic and phenomenological benefits of psychedelic pure consciousness. Beyond metaphysical debates, however, it is crucial to acknowledge, even within a naturalistic framework, that “there are other phenomenological Realities, many of which put our ordinary, default mode in the shade” (Letheby 2021, p. 219). In other words, these profound experiences cannot be dismissed. They undeniably reveal aspects of experience that can be considered phenomenologically ultimate, or at minimum, as Henry Corbin suggests, “phenomenologically true” (Corbin 1971, p. 57). This shared phenomenological basis, particularly in light of our discussion on the soft perennialism of pure consciousness’s essence, might offer a crucial point of convergence where traditional religious and spiritual teachings can meet naturalistic methodologies and philosophies. The experience of psychedelic pure consciousness, in particular, fosters this common ground, enabling a rich and unprecedented dialog. Ultimately, reconciling the tension between phenomenology and metaphysics within the spirit of a careful “phenomenological metaphysics” (e.g., Tengelyi 2011) is not impossible. Previous versions of such a framework, however, must be revised to account for pure consciousness’s freedom from the self and the phenomenal world. Moreover, in a certain sense, there is something irreducibly transcendent or sacramental about the raw datum of pure consciousness. As Rudolf Otto suggested in his classic phenomenology of the sacred, it is “entirely different” (*ganz andere*)—at least by profoundly surpassing ordinary experience.

#### D. Revealing Consciousness

Future research into psychedelic pure consciousness would be significantly advanced by adopting a standardized, highly precise, and systematic questionnaire, perhaps modeled on Metzinger’s framework. Such a tool should transcend the privileging of meditative paths, placing greater emphasis on the affective dimensions of experience, among other aspects. A well-designed questionnaire, ideally employing minimal descriptors and integrated with neuroscientific methods like neuroimaging, could also facilitate the exploration of subtle phenomenological distinctions across various routes to pure consciousness. Furthermore, intersubjective verification would both strengthen and enrich insights into the essential phenomenological core of consciousness. By granting pure consciousness a central role, a science and philosophy informed by transpersonal and psychedelic insights could profoundly deepen our understanding of consciousness. The original, etymological meaning of “psychedelic” refers to the mind or soul (*psykhē*, ψυχή) being revealed (*dēloun*, δηλοῦν). Indeed, the psychedelic experience of pure consciousness is, in this profound sense, a true revelation.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> A claim I criticize in detail in a still manuscript article, *Is Meditation the Royal Road that Leads to Pure Consciousness?*.
- <sup>2</sup> These are what Hans Blumenberg called absolute metaphors, analyzing metaphors such as light or the ocean, which also appear in psychedelic phenomenology. (Blumenberg 1992).
- <sup>3</sup> <https://www.erowid.org/experiences/exp.php?ID=115273> (accessed on 15 July 2025).
- <sup>4</sup> <https://www.erowid.org/experiences/exp.php?ID=66049> (accessed on 15 July 2025).
- <sup>5</sup> <https://www.erowid.org/experiences/exp.php?ID=23487> (accessed on 15 July 2025).
- <sup>6</sup> <https://www.erowid.org/experiences/exp.php?ID=99920> (accessed on 15 July 2025).
- <sup>7</sup> <https://www.erowid.org/experiences/exp.php?ID=113995> (accessed on 15 July 2025).
- <sup>8</sup> <https://www.erowid.org/experiences/exp.php?ID=16020> (accessed on 15 July 2025).
- <sup>9</sup> <https://www.erowid.org/experiences/exp.php?ID=117708> (accessed on 15 July 2025).
- <sup>10</sup> <https://www.erowid.org/experiences/exp.php?ID=99956> (accessed on 15 July 2025).
- <sup>11</sup> See above Note 3.
- <sup>12</sup> <https://www.erowid.org/experiences/exp.php?ID=115846> (accessed on 15 July 2025).
- <sup>13</sup> <https://www.erowid.org/experiences/exp.php?ID=1961> (accessed on 15 July 2025).
- <sup>14</sup> Hard constructivism claims that all mystical experiences are entirely mediated by prior conceptual, linguistic, and cultural frameworks. Hard perennialism is the position that mystical experiences share an identical, universal phenomenological core across traditions, pointing to a single transcendent reality
- <sup>15</sup> In his book *The Elephant and the Blind*, Metzinger defines minimal phenomenal experience (MPE) as the “maximally simple form of consciousness” (Metzinger 2024a, p. XXVIII) and considers it to be synonymous with pure consciousness (e.g., Metzinger 2024a, pp. 4, 47).
- <sup>16</sup> <https://www.erowid.org/experiences/exp.php?ID=115990> (accessed on 15 July 2025).

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