

## 23 Space without Structure, Center, or Periphery

Being unbounded and being held. [#3524]

One of the classic phenomenological characteristics of minimal phenomenal experience (MPE), which has been reported for many centuries, is a nonphysical kind of spatiality. The space of pure awareness is not identical to the space of bodily movement in which perception leads to action and in which actions cause new perceptions to arise, but it is sometimes described as permeating, enveloping, or “groundlessly grounding” the space of embodied experience as a whole (there’s more on MPE as “groundless ground” in chapter 26). Pure consciousness itself is often described as an unbounded and centerless experience of “spacious awareness.” This means that we may find the phenomenal signature of knowing discussed in chapter 7, but in an entirely uncontracted way. In other words, there sometimes arises an epistemic kind of openness, a model of a large space of epistemic possibilities.

One of the more surprising results of the MPE-92M study was how many meditators—when asked to describe a typical pure-awareness experience—actually privilege the phenomenal character of spatiality. Our participants created many beautiful figurative descriptions, saying that abiding in pure consciousness is like being “weightless in the space of infinite possibilities” (#761), for example, or like “[a] feeling of being enveloped. Like in a floating bubble” (#772). Meditators described the experience as “[t]he perception of space, infinite, unseparated, without inside or outside, velvety warm and simultaneously sharp” (#2528) or simply as “[a]n existence in boundless space” (#2565), or they referred to “[a] huge, boundless, absolutely quiet space, which however has a circular shape” while at the same time pointing out that “[i]t is so quiet that it is already loud again” (#3026). If one looks carefully, the relevant experiential quality of “spaciousness” has been reported as appearing in many forms and nuances. Let us now consider a selection of them.

First, many meditators report a phenomenal character of spatiality as such, a vast openness lacking any more concrete frame of reference. Often, we find this coemerging with some of the specific experiential qualities we have already investigated, like existential ease, simplicity, brightness, unity, a velvety character, high precision, clarity, wakefulness, and connectedness. Here are ten examples:

- 1727 I felt an incredible vastness, as if I were connected to another sphere. [. . .]
- 1739 It is an experience of spaciousness. The mindfulness is directed inward, toward the breath or the body, thus a space opens up in which there are no longer any reference points such as outside and inside, center or periphery. It feels very free and relaxed, but at the same time simple and unspectacular. Nevertheless, one is present and capable of acting, so not at all kind of distanced.
- 1894 [. . .] I would describe it as “being aware of having a mind empty of thoughts and images.” Some of your questions ask whether there was a sense of “brightness” and “unity,” and those are two adjectives I would indeed use to define my experience. Another illustration I could add was the feeling of my mind occupying a vast amount of space [. . .].
- 1947 Relating one’s experience of (what is here called) “pure awareness” tends to turn heavily on single words, or short phrases. Call these qualia-catchers. Then, an underused qualia-catcher for me is “roundedness”—the experience of. Indeed, I think this experience is explained by the type and degree of awareness of the third dimension, which is atypical in ordinary life.
- 2241 [. . .] then it felt like I was entering an emptiness, an empty space [. . .]. Suddenly all distracting thoughts are gone for quite a long time and I am in a state where only I and this space exist. In fact there is simply nothing else there. [. . .] I still know that I exist, that I am meditating, but I would say that my outward bodily awareness has decreased in that moment. As I said, I remained only in this space. It was even something like as if I felt myself moving forward in this space like a spaceship in outer space. [. . .]
- 2528 The most pronounced thing for me is the perception of space, infinite, unseparated, without inside or outside, velvety warm and at the same time sharp.
- 2759 [. . .] In the experience of pure awareness it felt as if I was simultaneously centered and spread out very wide. [. . .]
- 2771 It was an experience of not moving forward, not moving back, and also not standing still.

3329 [. . .] Then I have the feeling of vastness and clarity, as if my consciousness were expanding and becoming very calm and wakeful. [. . .]

3371 I have the impression of being a large space without borders in a unity of everything. Of being awake, connected, and then again just being, without concepts. Another experience was of falling into an empty space . . .

For many respondents, the space of awareness is a prime example of unboundedness:

2202 I had a feeling of a boundless space.

2565 [. . .] An existence in boundless space.

3497 A feeling of being unbounded and observing is there, surrounded by and part of [an] unbounded space. [. . .]

In chapter 5, we saw how the phenomenology of unboundedness is not some explicitly experienced and merely quantitative infinity or a concrete, endless expanse of some sort. Rather, “unboundedness” means that the experiential character in question includes the *potential* for expansion, and that in the experience of pure awareness itself there is no such thing as a “beyond”—that is, *another* consciously experienced finite region or realm “on the other side” of a boundary. Spacious awareness may not even be an “experience” in the prototypical sense (see chapter 31). On the other hand, it evidently has a signature of effortlessness and ease:

1236 [. . .] The state is characterized by the “experiencing” and “direct knowing” [*Erleben und Erfahren*] of a completely wide open space, sometimes lasts only a short time (one to two minutes), often longer, and is characterized in particular by lightness and effortlessness. Otherwise very difficult to put into words.

The space of pure awareness is unstructured and aperspectival. Reports on the entirely nonconceptual phenomenology of spacious awareness demonstrate that the phenomenal character of consciousness *itself* is not necessarily integrated with a first-person perspective, neither in the weak and purely geometrical sense of having an origin nor in the richer, epistemological sense of an active “knowing self” forming its center:

2614 [. . .] It felt like previously my center of awareness had been a cylinder in the middle of my field of awareness, but when this experience happened I felt the borders/shape of the cylinder dissolve outward until there were no more borders, no sense of “the knower” from which attention originates, instead it was all awareness in 360 / a sphere around my body and beyond. It felt very peaceful and alert. [. . .]

Spacious awareness as such may be experienced as timeless during episodes of full absorption. In addition, we find a distinct phenomenology of entering and leaving. Here are three examples of a dynamic transition into and out of spacious awareness:

2878 [. . .] My consciousness expanded very quickly and incalculably like a balloon; there were no limits: Everything was within me—I was in everything. Afterward I was terrified.

3243 [. . .] During a sitting meditation it grew “light.” Then a feeling of vastness. Then the feeling of being in the bodies of the people sitting with you. Expanding further, merging into space.

3480 [. . .] Everything was this perception of an endless space, like between planets, without light, but somehow bright, without anything in it, a complete nothing, but at the same time with all the potentialities in it! It was also a perception of a complete, deep silence. After some time, I started to regain senses, body, and memory, and like with another type of mind I started to recall what was before. This type of thinking was not possible during the experience itself, as if all resources were used in the experience.

As #2878 shows, transitions can have an affective quality. Moving in and out of the contemplative experience of pure spatiality can also trigger positive feelings, but it seems as if states of full absorption themselves are emotionally neutral:

2580 [. . .] I notice how within me a vastness, a field opens up in which I am. Thoughts continue to appear, but are very much in the background and/or do not last long. I feel joy and enclosure in a wide space. [. . .]

2582 [. . .] Several times as a very light, weightless, wide state of complete calm and vastness. After these states it was difficult to come back because they are so light and peaceful. In the second form (less often) it was a wide, empty space, not filled with light and not so “positively colored,” but completely neutral, very very wide and “powerful.” I was the boundless space, the space was me, there was no more self or separation, no more positive or negative, no light, no shadow, just complete, powerful emptiness and silence.

3621 My experience was devoid of any emotions. It was of abstract space, feeling like enlightened awareness emanating from a constant center. [. . .]

Some reports describe the silent quality of pure awareness as something that you can attend *to*, as if it were still some distinct entity, but also as something that can never be reified and that, in a very subtle way, permeates everything—even what you took to be your own body. In addition, many dozens of meditators report that if

this all-pervasive quality becomes explicit and gradually becomes the foreground of experience, then it can lead to a sense of their body boundaries dissolving and to an attenuation of the feeling of being *situated* in this world, of being present as a self. This phenomenological aspect will be the central topic of chapter 24, but as it is intimately related to the experience of spatiality, I will present three examples here:

24 For me, pure awareness is an all-pervasive state where the boundary between me and the reality around me melts away while both my body and reality remain clear. It has to do with a rhythm linked to the breath that becomes a unison between me and every form of life around me. It is muffled and clear at the same time.

32 My experience of consciousness occurred during meditation, suddenly I felt my body dissolve and become something like an energy, there were no limits, and it merged with the cushion I was sitting on and spread around the room. I was fully aware and amazed by what was happening. Everything seemed to originate in my hands, from there this feeling grew. Everything was silent, and there was a lot of light. Presence of the here and now.

2859 [. . .] it is a simple condition of just “stopping.” Although the world clearly continues (sounds, people talking, etc.) I am not aware of being present in it; there is just a stillness that permeates everything.

In these examples, which are typical of the broader pattern of responses, it seems as if body and environment can still be clearly represented, while the spacious silence of pure awareness expands or permeates everything and the boundary between self and nonself blurs, becomes meaningless, or melts away. Sometimes practitioners say that it is their *mind* that merges with space, as in the following example: “My mind then broke open, all breath ceased entirely, and for the next few hours I bathed in an ineffable experience of mind mixing with space” (#185). But most of the time, the experience of vast, open space is associated with bodily self-experience. Careful phenomenological investigation demonstrates the existence of a type of conscious experience in which we experience ourselves as *embodied* in an experience of unbounded epistemic openness. We identify with space itself.<sup>1</sup> This perhaps maximally abstract form of embodiment is highly interesting from a theoretical perspective because it has an additional quality of nonconceptual “knowingness.”

Please note that bodily self-consciousness is a special case of spatial experience. There is a deep connection between embodiment—the holistic quality of being an aware self, grounded in and present as a lived body—and the functional capacity for self-location in a spatial frame of reference.<sup>2</sup> Here, my main point is that there clearly

exists an equally holistic phenomenology of being groundlessly grounded in and present as a timeless space of knowing. What in chapter 5 I termed the conscious “model of an epistemic space” can actually function as a nonegoic self-model. Human beings can *embody* the space of knowing. The following experiences therefore serve to create a gradual transition to chapters 24 and 25, which focus on the rich and variable experience of “bodiless body-experience” and what scientists call “ego dissolution,” before the new philosophical concept of a “nonegoic unit of identification” is introduced in chapter 29. I will let our participants speak for themselves, beginning with this description of an unusual kind of ground:

1557 [. . .] as if sunk into an all-embracing space, or in other words: settled on/in a ground that has no floor at all, but is nevertheless completely safe. Perceiving this “ground” fills me—no matter what is going on in my consciousness in parallel—with unconditional trust and acceptance, or something like that. It has a strong quality of “ground” (like a floor) without being really physical. The “velvety” that came up earlier in the questionnaire would also fit here. [. . .]

A recurring phenomenological motif is the sense of self dissolving into spatiality *per se*, or of the meditator being “embodied” in the space of pure awareness itself:

82 [. . .] It happened that at one point in the formal practice, I entered or became an infinite, timeless space and was no longer identified with my thoughts and emotions. It was as if everything was expansion, and the sensations were incredibly pleasant, I felt so much lightness, harmony, and fullness. [. . .]

2724 [. . .] . . . . the sense of self becomes an infinite space.

2652 [. . .]—space disappears or is boundlessly open—everything is in harmony—everything is my “body”—[. . .]

2543 I felt as if I and my room with all the objects in it were one single space, i.e., there was no clear separation between me and the space around me. I was as much a part of the space as the bed I was sitting on and the street lamp visible through the window.

2764 Most impressive was the experience of unity and the associated release from physical boundaries. I was still in my space, but I no longer knew whether I was the whole space or just a fraction. It was a feeling of limitlessness and deep peace. [. . .]

2665 [. . .] my perception altered toward brightness, toward a feeling of being one with the space surrounding me, and beyond the boundaries of physical space.

2619 [. . .] The big awareness was beyond it. I felt like a humungous sphere, that my awareness was not located in my body but sort of in a big sphere around it. Anything I could sense at any distance was within my sphere of awareness and I was identified (though that's not really correct) with that big awareness. This awareness was without words. It felt incredible and huge and spacious. It was wonderful. The sounds I was hearing from far away were all perfect and wonderful. The self that was selfing inside the awareness, making narratives and having feelings, was also wonderful. Whatever "I" was was not just the I. [. . .]

In sum, we see that MPE is often compared to an experience of vast, open space without center, periphery, or boundaries. This space is not a physical space, but an "aware-space" that carries the signature of knowing—and it can even be embodied, functioning as a new phenomenological unit of identification.

### Centerlessness and Unboundedness

So meditation is the inquiry into, and the discovery of, this space without a center.

Therefore it is not an experience at all. You understand?

—Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986), *Fourth Talk in Rajghat*, November 26, 1964

The entirely nonconceptual phenomenology of spacious awareness demonstrates that consciousness itself—our inner model of the space of knowing—is not necessarily integrated with a first-person perspective. It *can* be a subjective experience in this sense, but as it turns out, subjectivity is not one of its essential features. This observation relates directly to the "contraction principle" introduced in chapter 8: The phenomenal character of openness is not necessarily tied to a knowing self, but nevertheless it remains an *epistemic* form of openness. Phenomenologically, there are nonegoic forms of knowing.

One important piece of evidence for the existence of nonegoic forms of knowing is that many practitioners make clear that pure awareness is not simply identical to what is experienced as physical space during ordinary wake states. From a scientific perspective, this means that the "space" of consciousness is not simply the space of sensorimotor integration or the behavioral space in which the brain represents boundaries between objects, in which it simulates movements, action goals, and complex bodily navigation within a physical environment. On the other hand, the nonphysical space of pure awareness almost certainly has a deep relationship to all these other ways in which we represent space. For example, as we saw in chapter 11, peripersonal

space may be an important part of the scientific picture. Not only can it be viewed as an invisible extension of the embodied self,<sup>3</sup> but it is also related to the experience of connectedness investigated in chapter 11.

I think that on its most fundamental level, far below the level of egoic self-awareness, conscious experience is a prediction about the possibility of knowledge. MPE could be a model of an unstructured but integrated space in which states carrying epistemic value can appear and in which different *kinds* of knowing can manifest—perception, thought, attention, or active inference through embodied action. Yet MPE is not identical to any single one of these manifestations because what it nonconceptually represents is precisely a very large number of possibilities: the epistemic *openness*, the potential itself. It predicts epistemic gain. MPE, the experience of awareness itself, is capaciousness, the self-knowing experience of mere epistemic capacity. If you will, pure awareness is *virtual* knowing in an abstract, centerless space.

Let me now draw your attention to a second conceptual point. A large number of our reports mention the quality of unboundedness, and of course, this experiential feature is especially prominent in descriptions of spatiality. The phenomenal character related to the concept of “unboundedness” can be misunderstood as implying the conscious experience of very large distances or an explicit representation of infinity in the spatial domain. Rather, unboundedness is the phenomenal experience of there being no second, finite region to which attention could be directed, and no consciously experienced boundaries, limits, or horizon. To say that the space of pure consciousness is “boundless” does not imply that there is an explicit experience of infinite expansion or of large distances. Rather, it means that there is no “other side beyond the boundary” to which attention could shift.

Perhaps it will be helpful to recall the example already given in chapter 5, when we investigated the experience of clarity. In visual awareness, attention can shift from a red patch into an adjacent green patch, transgressing a color boundary. For the experience of spacious awareness, there is no such boundary because nothing outside the space of pure awareness can be deliberately attended to. Everything outside is simply unconscious. There is no possible phenomenal contrast here.<sup>4</sup> To take another empirical example, perhaps the physical correlate of an unbounded and centerless space of knowing, rather than being a well-defined pattern of electric activation in the brain, could be a cloud of transmitter molecules that supports this pattern. This cloud could be something dynamic and variable, and it could have indeterminate boundaries in the sense that the brain’s subpersonal mechanisms cannot detect them. In any case, it would be false to interpret relevant reports of unboundedness as the phenomenology of an explicitly experienced and merely quantitative infinity or as a concrete, endless



expanse of some sort. “Unbounded” just means that (1) the phenomenal character in question includes the *potential* for expansion and (2) in the experience itself, there is no such thing as a “beyond”—another consciously experienced finite region or realm “on the other side” of a boundary.

I have often wondered why, in normal wake states, the phenomenal world appears as irrevocably real. Perhaps the world appears as real because we can never experience its boundaries? The potential for exploring the virtual reality (VR) in our head seems almost infinite, and there also seems to be no real beyond because all you ever get is more appearance—but then why is it transparent? (See chapter 28 for more on transparency.) You can experience a picture *as* a picture only if you are able to see its frame. Is it the framelessness of consciousness itself that ultimately makes the content of the multimodal virtual image in our brain become real and fully immersive?

Unboundedness as potentiality and the absence of beyond has another interesting implication, with a deep philosophical flavor. In the relevant phenomenological domain, there are no countable entities: The domain of MPE is an unstructured space that has neither center nor periphery and cannot be fragmented or split into indivisible units of experience—not even a single one. Individuation is impossible. Phenomenologically, pure awareness is not a thing or a substantial entity in any sense, because it is not a *particular* form or object of consciousness. This has the interesting consequence of adding “non-oneness” to “nonduality” as a new phenomenological descriptor for MPE.<sup>5</sup> Pure awareness is that which can never be reified. I think that precisely this combination of non-oneness and nonduality also explains a large portion of its ineffability. Perhaps you will recall my brief mention of Śāntarakṣita’s classical “neither-one-nor-many argument” in chapter 5. If the phenomenal character of consciousness itself is open, in the sense of having no inherent nature at all (neither singular nor manifold), then this openness is almost impossible to contract into verbal descriptions—at least in the kinds of language that we have today.

On January 15, 2006, in the Swiss city of Basel, I heard a 100-year-old person give a lecture for the first (and still only) time in my life. It, too, was about something that is almost impossible to put into words. The speaker needed two crutches and had to be helped up onto the stage. But the lecture itself was brilliant, of admirable, almost unbelievable clarity and lucidity, and the audience was deeply moved by it. One of the lecture’s essential points was this: Every natural scientist will also become a mystic in the end, for whatever the creator is, he speaks to us not in churches and through words, but through his own creation itself.<sup>6</sup>

I had met the speaker before, seventeen years earlier, in May 1989.<sup>7</sup> We had two long conversations, one of them at a breakfast table in the Hotel Maritim in the city of Bad

Homburg, close to Frankfurt am Main, Germany. He was Albert Hofmann (1906–2008). He was the person who single-handedly and inadvertently changed the lives of millions: Without him, many millions of barely effable experiences would never have been known, and their consequences never have been lived. Because of him, many people who have never meditated in their lives have directly experienced the unbounded, centerless space of self-aware knowing that this chapter is all about—and some of them have even become one with it. Hofmann was the discoverer of LSD, and he would always consider it something as dangerous as it is valuable. “LSD is a tremendously potent drug; there is no other substance that is effective in these quantities,” he told me.

On April 19, 1943, he had embarked on the first planned LSD trip ever:

I started my experiment with the smallest amount that could be expected to have any effect, namely a quarter of a milligram. If you take a milligram of prussic acid, nothing will happen to you; the strongest poisons do not work even with a quarter of a milligram. I thought of increasing gradually. And that was the first planned LSD trip; 1943, on 19 April. And it was actually five times overdosed. That’s when I had this dramatic reaction; it was some kind of horror trip.<sup>8</sup>

Decades later, Hofmann compared the substance to nuclear energy. He even used the term “psychological atom bomb.” This was not just about its extraordinary psychoactive potency per gram. He continued:

Secondly, the effect attacks the core of our humanity, our consciousness. That means it is an enormously potent substance, and the more potent a substance and its effect are, the more possibilities there are, the greater the danger of abuse. Just think of ordinary energy and atomic energy. The possibilities are enormous, but so are the dangers. It is the same with LSD. It is an extraordinarily dangerous substance. Extraordinarily potent in its possibilities, but it is very dangerous. If you take it carelessly, unprepared, not in the right environment, or not in the right mental state or not under guidance, then really serious things can happen—catastrophes, personally and also in the outside world. That’s what happened. In the sixties, maybe 80% or 90% had a positive experience, but the remaining 10%—if maybe a few million took it, it was still an enormous number who ended up in psychiatry.

In the midst of my research career as a philosophical psychonaut, I knew this all too well, but I still wanted to know what exactly he thought made it so dangerous. “We were not born to live out there in space,” he said. “If you want to go on a journey into space, you have to prepare, it’s dangerous, but then you also have to keep a log somehow, you have to process that and you have to come back to Earth.”

The next question I asked was this:

“What would you advise young people today who say, we have an interest in expanding consciousness, perhaps we have a religious interest, we want to undergo this experience—but there are no teachers for us. We have LSD, but we don’t have teachers here in Europe or in America.”

I noticed that this question made him somewhat uneasy, and in a slightly more severe tone, he replied: “I don’t quite understand when young people—especially very young people—want that. They still have so much ahead of them; they still have the whole normal reality to build up. I understand it more when someone of advanced age has the need, the feeling ‘I can’t get any further, now I want to expand my consciousness with pharmacological help’. Then I understand that.” Hofmann clearly thought that taking LSD responsibly required a certain level of personal maturity—and as much as I disliked his answer at the time, as the years passed, I came to agree with him. He then explained that he thought that LSD can help us refine and develop a certain quality of cognitive flexibility and openness to the world, and help us sustain it throughout our lifetime:

And if we can do that, then growing old is beautiful, and we grow richer and richer, don’t we? But most people close up, they start to close up. That has to do with our top-heaviness. If you live only with your head, with your mind, then over time it becomes routine and then you ossify, at forty or fifty. I see this with many of my friends and colleagues, you start to get narrower and narrower and soon everything is over. But when you realize that I make the world, that I become richer through what comes in, you try to stay open.

And were there any other reasons, I wondered, why someone might want to be a psychonaut and explore the *Weltraum der Seele*,<sup>9</sup> the deep outer space of the soul? “You have a wonderful opportunity,” Hofmann told me. “You see the world from a different perspective, you see the world as a blue planet floating in this infinity.” As is well known, the LSD experience can have considerable overlap with the phenomenology of meditation. For example, you can directly learn (sometimes the hard way) and nonintellectually understand what it means for your experiential world to be *literally* just a virtual model (chapter 28). Millions have also directly experienced what phenomenological terms like “ego dissolution” or “nondual awareness” (discussed in chapters 25–27) may refer to. Just as many people do today,<sup>10</sup> in the early twenty-first century, Hofmann already thought that ego dissolution might have therapeutic potential: “This detachment from the personal, from the ‘encapsulated ego’ as the Americans say, this blasting, that seems to me to be a very important function, a possibility.”

I asked if he thought that LSD should be used therapeutically. He said:

You have to bring that in as a healing element above all. In most cases, and this is how I have experienced it myself, the difficulty is that a psychological problem, any personal problem, is only seen in isolation and as such and then takes on gigantic proportions. These disorders are based on this egotism, which somehow becomes pathologically fixed there and lets the problems take on oversized contours. If, on the other hand, I know: I am safe, I don't have to be responsible for everything about my mind, I can have confidence, my five senses also function without me thinking about it, my heart functions without me thinking about it, and my eyes, I see and hear—that is all something that opens up a whole world for me. If I have that, that would be the therapeutic thing in medicine, in psychiatry: if patients can be released from their narrow, egotistic problems. If they can suddenly realize: Aha—it also works without!

But, of course, therapeutic potential isn't all there is. The psychedelic experience is clearly a dramatic expansion of phenomenal state space, and there is no corresponding risk analysis that would support simply *excluding* almost all members of society from actively exploring this space. Exploring it may bring significant epistemic benefits. At the very least, as I have noted elsewhere,<sup>11</sup> it is now a well-established fact that psychedelic phenomenology contains strong elements of spiritual insight or even religious experience.<sup>12</sup> However, it is often overlooked that—for the large majority of citizens—these forms of spiritual or religious experience cannot be accessed by any other means. Multiple human rights issues are at stake here, concerning cognitive liberty and the freedom of private religious practice, among others; and from a philosophical point of view, drug law currently fails to recognize a basic human right to mental self-determination, which guarantees an individual's sovereignty over her own mind.<sup>13</sup> From an ethical perspective, the current situation is clearly untenable. But what we lack is an evidence-based, rational, and unideological approach to enculturation, an appropriate sociocultural context in which to optimize the risk/benefit ratio for anybody who wants to enter the relevant regions of phenomenal state space. I am skeptical that such a context will ever be created, but I hope that it will. Of course, I also asked Albert Hofmann about all of this. When it came to LSD, he thought that its use needs a sincere and respectful attitude, and that we should let the knowledge of the right application grow in silence.

I wondered: Is meditation training one way of trying to sustain some of what LSD may give you in a quick and seemingly effortless way? For now, we still live in a world where most people never go near a meditation center, and those who do usually cannot

access guidance on how to access, sustain, express, and learn from states further along the spectrum of neurochemical alteration. And in this world, caution is wise. But when I mentioned training, Hofmann made clear that he saw contemplative practice not just as a way of reducing the dangers of the nuclear option, but also as a way to open new dimensions through gentler, less risky practices that make us ready to use the nuclear ones where they're needed. He added, "I also have the hope that in time meditation centres might emerge. We do meditation courses and so on; I could imagine that centres will emerge—real meditation centres, where the aim is not to heal the sick, but to develop people further, to open up new dimensions through meditation, through all these techniques, where chemical help could then also come."<sup>14</sup>

This sounded absolutely right to me, as it does today (see the epilogue for more). But at the time, Hofmann corrected me on my choice of words when I spoke of *Bewusstseins-erweiterung*, the expansion of consciousness. He said:

It is an expansion of consciousness, but I consider "expansion of consciousness," as it is used in the drug scene, to be too narrow. Every new experience, every encounter with a new person is an expansion of consciousness. This is of course a dramatic expansion of consciousness, but our whole life should be an expansion of consciousness, should become richer and richer—what else should we live for and be able to open up to?

Hofmann, the wise chemist from Switzerland, clearly knew about the self-constructed, virtual character of our experiential world and about the value of centerless experience, and he had a deep understanding of many of the phenomenologies described in this book. He also had his own opinion on the quality of epistemic openness. Continuing his thought about resisting middle-aged ossification, he said: "When you have grasped that I make the world, that I become richer through what comes in, you try to remain open. And it is also possible to remain open and to open yourself more and more, to let more and more of this immense miracle of creation flow in."

Of course, I couldn't let our conversation end without asking him what *everybody* wanted to know. In the almost half-century since that late afternoon in 1943 when he measured out those 250 micrograms for the first intentional LSD trip ever, how many times had he repeated this experience for himself? Many people still refuse to believe the answer that he gave, but I have it on tape: He told me that he had taken it maybe about twelve times.



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# The Elephant and the Blind

The Experience of Pure Consciousness: Philosophy,  
Science, and 500+ Experiential Reports

By: Thomas Metzinger

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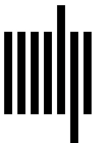
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