



ABSTRACTS

Note: Included alphabetically by author's last name.

LSD and the Mind of the Universe

Chris M. Bache, Ph.D.

Psychedelics represent a turning point not only for clinical psychology but for western philosophy as well, giving us a new method for exploring the deep structure of consciousness. *LSD and the Mind of the Universe* tells the story of my 20-year journey with LSD – 73 high dose sessions conducted between 1979-1999 following Stanislav Grof's therapeutic protocols. I spent years digesting these experiences, pondering their implications, and integrating the truths I was shown. This journey became the philosophical adventure of a lifetime, but one I had to keep largely hidden from my university colleagues. Now that psychedelics are returning to legitimate scientific and academic discourse, I am sharing the story of my experiment in doing psychedelic philosophy – clarifying the methodology used, describing the successive dimensions of consciousness that opened and the challenge of achieving sustained, cognitively coherent communion with these dimensions, and reporting my visionary experience of an emerging global crisis and the death and rebirth of humanity.

Deep Time Mind

Marcia Bjornerud, Ph.D.

Some recent theories of consciousness posit that intelligent awareness emerges when components in a large system have a high degree of connectivity. By that definition, Earth is hyperconscious. The web of connections among the many parts of the planet are like an elaborate neural network. Microbes and minerals carry on intimate conversations in soils. Subduction of seafloor unites the Earth's mantle with the oceans and atmosphere. The magnetic field, emanating from the very core of the planet, protects organisms at the surface and reaches

far into space. The components of Earth are also connected across vast expanses of time. Rocks formed before the dawn of Life lap up today's rain, while on a single Lake Superior beach, cobbles spanning two billion years congregate in the present. Through such intersections and interactions, Earth has continuously invented new minerals, landscapes, lifeforms, and ecosystems - while also keeping records of its experiments. No other known planet or moon behaves this way. In the presence of such durability, creativity, and wisdom, how could we imagine that our own, recently acquired version of awareness would set the standard? Human consciousness, with its tendency for narcissism, hubris, and self-destruction has not yet demonstrated its capacity to persist in the long term.

Sanctuary: Relearning How to Take Refuge in the Earth

Dekila Chungyalpa

The word "sanctuary" often evokes a feeling of safety, an understanding that there are places of refuge where we are held safe, that there are demarcated spaces within houses of worship that are holy and provide security for all of us. In this talk, Dekila Chungyalpa, explores the meaning of sanctuary within the context of the Anthropocene, a time when Earth's ecological processes are collapsing due to human activity, and how relearning to take and to build refuge in Earth can restore safety for all of us.

Essence of the Sacred

Wade Davis, Ph.D.

From his essay, *On the Sacred*: "The sacred is eternal, reaching far into the past, shining as a beacon to the future. It is everywhere and nowhere. What is sacred can never be diluted or compromised, coopted, or copied, commodified, or made sordid through commerce and greed. Sensed if never seen, elusive and mysterious by its very nature, the sacred may lie beyond our reach, yet there is comfort just in knowing that such a radiant presence may one day be encountered. The clock is not ticking. No force exists that can rob us of its promise. The traveler today walks the same spiritual ground as the pilgrim of old..."

Why we are the only humans in the universe and why it matters

Marcelo Gleiser, Ph.D.

We need to change the way we see each other and our relation to our home planet. Civilization is at a crossroads. To move beyond, we need to reframe our connection to other living creatures and to the planet we all share. We need a new unifying narrative that has the power to awaken humankind to a very

urgent truth: that despite our political and religious differences, we are a single species living on a fragile and rare planet. The essence of this new narrative is that the Universe has a history only because we are here to tell it. But this story is not just about the Big Bang and the expanding Universe, of myriad galaxies and stars, of electrons and quarks, of planets and moons. It is a story of the interconnectedness of the nonliving with the living, of the uniqueness of our planet and its biosphere, of our cosmic loneliness and its deep moral implications. This talk is about this story and how to relate it to the life collective and our planetary future.

Bewusstseinskultur: The natural state, connectedness, and non-egoic self-awareness

Thomas Metzinger, Ph.D.

This talk will briefly introduce the idea of a “culture of consciousness” and then report some selected results from the Minimal Phenomenal Experience-Project, which aims at a minimal-model explanation for consciousness “as such” by using the experience of pure awareness in meditation as a new entry point for consciousness research.

Bewusstseinskultur is a culture that values and cultivates the mental states of its members in an ethical and evidence-based way. Just as humans have long asked what makes an action a good action, the new question is: What, really, are good states of consciousness? This core question leads to many others. For example: Which ones do we want to show our children? Which one would you like to die in?

Bewusstseinskultur is something eminently practical—it has been called “a practical philosophy of mind”—and it has three major aspects: first, adopting an ethical stance toward one’s own mental states; second, systematically cultivating states assessed as valuable; and finally, sustaining a continuous process of enculturation, or cultural embedding. In a post-metaphysical age, all of this should be rational and evidence-based.

The MPE-Project asks the following question: What, exactly, is the simplest form of consciousness? Is “pure awareness” a form of phenomenal character *sui generis*, which cannot be reductively defined or subsumed under a higher-order concept, a distinct class of conscious experiences? Does it exist? In the spirit of Blanke and Metzinger (2009), who introduced the concept of “Minimal Phenomenal Selfhood” (MPS; TICS 13(1): 7-13) there is a new research program targeting the notion of “Minimal Phenomenal Experience” (MPE; originally introduced by Windt 2015), which brings together philosophy of mind, the phenomenology of meditation, and a neurocomputational model of “pure consciousness”.

The talk will not present an argument or a ready-made theory, but only highlight three preliminary results: The fact that many subjects in our phenomenological data-base describe the pure-awareness experience as “the most natural state”, the entirely unexpected discovery of connectedness as a phenomenological marker of awareness itself, and empirical evidence for a non-egoic form of self-awareness. All three types of conscious experience are, of course, well-known from psychedelic states, but they also possess direct political relevance. *Bewusstseinskultur* will have to paint a fuller picture by contextualising them in two directions: our response to the climate catastrophe and the quest for a new, secular kind of spirituality.

The Re Enchantment of Food

Odessa Piper

I hold a personal philosophy that food doesn't begin in the soil or end in the gut; rather food takes us on an infinite journey in a hand-off of photons, chloroplasts, hyphae and synapse and on, into an ecology of gratitude that seeds love into the world.

When we look beneath the frenzy of our industrial foodways we find an ancient Earth that has always fed us. In these times of rapid global change how we consume reveals many practical solutions to our troubled relationships with food. I set out to look for answers in my own life, and found them while running an ambitious farm-to-table restaurant for which I was woefully unprepared. I turned to the natural world for lessons and learned that nature's resiliency is bound in reciprocity. I recognized emerging networks of farmers and artisans capable of lifting entire communities based on their respect for region, climate and complex soil relationships. I learned that the more we connect to our locales, the more local becomes a distance best measured by our hearts.

Every meal is a gateway from our own body to the body of the world. The Planet's table invites us to love to eat, importantly, because we eat to Love.

Kinship from the Ground Up

Gavin Van Horn, Ph.D.

In efforts to foster respect and care for the natural world, it may be helpful to first identify some of the deeply rooted stories that inform human perceptions of the other-than-human, particularly the differences between dualistic and animistic understandings of nature. In this talk, I will suggest that shifting away from individual and culturally exploitative relationships with nature requires shifting toward stories that embody an animistic, kinship-based perspective. Though plants, fungi, breathing techniques, various physical deprivations, and so on can open portals to nondual experience or nonordinary reality, I will be

drawing from my work on the Kinship book series to provide examples of everyday relations and reciprocity based on “kinning” with nature. Such kinship consciousness is not confined to the brain; it is a visceral, bodily (or bodymind) activity that can deepen relations to place and alter how we perceive and experience our enmeshment within the natural world. One methodology for practicing kinship—and expanding regard for other-than-human neighbors—is as close to us as our feet, and I will conclude by discussing how mindful walking, or what anthropologist Tim Ingold calls a “heels over head” perspective, offers a pathway to an accessible, close-at-hand experience of kinship, from the ground up.