



Unconscious Influences on Discourses About Consciousness: Ideology, State-Specific Science and Unformulated Experience

by David Edwards

Discussions about consciousness are complicated by the fact that participants do not share a common underlying "ordinary" consciousness. Everyday experience is founded on what Teasdale calls implicational cognition, much of which is not verbally formulated. An unacknowledged aspect of debate is individuals' attempts to negotiate the expression of their unformulated experience. This is further complicated by the way in which a discourse, based on particular ontological assumptions, exercises an ideological control which limits what underlying aspects of experience can be formulated at all. Tart's concept of state specific sciences provides a framework within which the role of unformulated experience can be acknowledged and taken into account. Unless this is done, debates will be vitiated by participants engaging in ideological struggles and talking at cross-purposes.

Introduction

The difficulty in reaching consensual solutions to the conceptual problems around the relationship between mind and body and of the nature of consciousness can be explained, in part, in terms of the real technical problems involved. However, a full explanation calls for an examination of the process of discourse itself. Conversation and discourse analysts point out that talking about something is a complex kind of behaviour and in order to understand it we need to examine more than just the truth value of the contents of the discussion. When people discuss something they are likely to be engaging in an invisible process of negotiation about the construction of experience, during which they do not usually acknowledge the way in which they subtly, or not so subtly, influence what is talked about, how it is talked about, and what is not talked about. Moreover, participants in

discussions about the nature of consciousness enter them not with a common consciousness, but with their own personal and heterogeneous modes of experiencing. They unwittingly embark on a process of negotiating the expression of this experience, much of which is unformulated. The presence of this unacknowledged factor vitiates debate.

Repression and Unformulated Experience

To what extent are we aware of the factors which motivate and shape our contributions to discussions and debates? This question was raised and discussed throughout the nineteenth century and before (Whyte, 1962). At the end of that century, Freud, Jung and Janet were not alone in documenting how individuals would often not know the underlying causes of their behaviours, and might incorrectly attribute them to entirely different causes. They documented in

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detail the way in which certain ideas, impulses, images or emotions make a contribution to the ongoing processes of behaviour, but are defensively excluded from awareness (Edwards & Jacobs, 2003). Thus Freud explored how a person might attribute a slip of the tongue to tiredness or mere chance, whereas in reality it was the result of an emotionally painful association whose meaning was not available to full awareness. "A presentation which is not put into words ... remains thereafter in the *Ucs.[unconscious]* in a state of repression" (1915, p. 202), he wrote. For Freud, then, an experience became fully conscious only when formulated in words to become the object of detached reflective awareness¹.

This is just the kind of reflective awareness which informs the discussions of human experience that this journal is devoted to. We would like our debates to be a form of rational reflective activity, in which our contributions are not shaped by psychological factors of which we are unaware. Conversation analysts warn us about the difficulty of achieving this goal. Billig (1999) argues that what Freud called repression and conceptualized as an intrapsychic process, can be better understood as an interpersonal process in which what is spoken about, how it is spoken about and the way matters are broached or avoided is continuously orchestrated in response to cues from the others with whom the conversation is taking place. In conversation analysis, the influence of such complex rules can be detected in virtually every utterance.

As Stern points out, even without the complication of defensive exclusion of material from awareness, the rendering of experience into

¹ This is, as De Quincy (1999, p. 96) notes, a particular psychological use of the word "conscious" whose opposite is "unconscious" in the sense of out of awareness. This is a different distinction from that between "conscious" = sentient, in contrast to "non-conscious" = insentient. The psychological distinction between "conscious" and "unconscious" is itself used in several different ways, some aspects of which are touched on in the present paper.

words is intrinsically problematic. He cites something Sullivan had written in 1940:

one has information about one's experience only to the extent that one has tended to communicate it to another or thought about it in the manner of communicative speech. Much of what is ordinarily said to be repressed is merely unformulated (Stern, 1997, p. 185).

This insight goes back to Adler (1938) who argued that much of what Freud called unconscious was not repressed but merely "withheld from the understanding" (p. 16). In much of Freud's writing, repression implies an active exclusion from awareness of something that has been formulated. Adler and Sullivan recognized that our experience has dimensions and aspects that have never been formulated in words. We are therefore not fully conscious of them, in the sense that we cannot communicate them to others in words or recognize them ourselves.

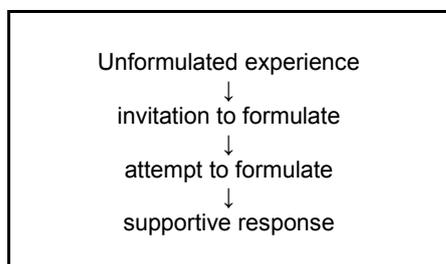
The Formulation of Everyday Experience

Stern (1997) investigates the way in which unformulated experience seeks to find expression and, in so doing, shapes an individual's participation in discourse. Experience becomes formulated during the process of social interaction only when certain conditions are met. Two important factors that determine this have already been alluded to. The first is the presence of emotionally painful associations. People will withdraw from formulating something which will give rise to emotional distress in themselves. The second is the actual and anticipated response of others participating in the interpersonal process, who effectively exercise a kind of ideological control over what may be said. Child psychologists have long recommended that parents encourage children to articulate their feelings and concerns and to respond to them in a manner which is accepting and validating. It is widely recognized that this kind of empathy lays a foundation for an articulate discourse of

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experience and a coherent and strong sense of self. This is a reciprocal interpersonal process which calls for the following steps:



Whether explicit or implicit, the invitation to formulate implies the supportive response that is to come. It is not just a formal verbal invitation, but a genuine offer of a safe context in which to experiment with bringing the unspoken into words. The supportive response includes non-judgmental acceptance of the experience itself as a part of human life. Many experiences never get put into words because this supportive context is absent. Where attempts to formulate have been met with discouragement in the form of hostility, criticism, shaming or indifference, individuals give up trying to formulate or may perhaps seek other social contexts in which to do so. The supportive person who witnesses the formulation of the experience may do more than just affirm it. He/she may actively assist in the process. This, of course, is what therapists try to do when they reflect or interpret emotions that are implicit in what the client is saying: "It sounds as if you feel guilty that you are so successful, while your dyslexic brother is struggling to make it in school at all." When therapists offer an accurate formulation, clients often experience an immediate recognition of its accuracy and feel great relief. On occasions there might be quite an intense emotional response.

It is not an exaggeration to say that we can only "have" those experiences which find this kind of interpersonal validation (Edwards & Jacobs, 2003). Browne (1990) captures some of the paradox in this with the term "unexperienced experience." He is discussing experiences of

trauma that individuals cannot have because the people around them deny that the trauma occurred or cannot cope with the intense emotions that mention of the trauma evokes. In cases like this there are both elements of withdrawing from experiencing something associated with emotional pain and failing to formulate it in the first place because others are unable to tolerate and support the process of speaking truthfully about what has happened. It is this particular combination for which the term dissociation is also used. Dissociation, however, is not confined to severe trauma. In everyday discourse, the invitation to formulate is negotiated in the moment to moment flux of conversation and is routinely not extended to aspects of experience that are ideologically prohibited or simply culturally unfamiliar:

The 'said' and the 'unsaid' are intimately linked: to say one thing implies that other things are not being said. If language provides the rhetorical skills for opening up lines of talk, then it also provides the skills for creating the unsaid. More than this, language provides the skills for closing down areas of talk (Billig, 1999, p. 52).

The result of this process is a kind of routine dissociation, a division of consciousness in which significant aspects of our experience are not integrated into the conversational narratives about who and what we are.

This kind of negotiation is a power struggle which is not confined to everyday conversations. It permeates much academic discourse too. In a paper in which he attacks formulations advanced by the philosopher, Searle, in support of a field theory of consciousness, Honderich (2001) employs an entertaining blend of the ebullient and the bullying, as he cajoles, humiliates, argues and persuades. He humorously calls Searle the "king of American stand-up philosophers" (p. 62) - with the clear intention, of course, of knocking him down. The paper is also full of cogent

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argument. But his evocative discourse is designed to roundly discourage anyone from joining the Searle team. Field metaphors are dismissed as “homespun poetry” and he shamelessly heaps shame on anyone who might be drawn to a “unified field approach to consciousness,” or to “more or less literal talk of a conscious field,” or who would flirt with “Californian mystery-labs” (p. 66). His scurrilous insults include the suggestion that debate with such individuals is impossible, so “we [had] better all give up and go bird-watching” (p. 65). As he is writing in a journal devoted to the understanding of consciousness, most ornithologists are unlikely to read this insulting suggestion. Probably he was not so much wanting to discredit ornithology as to transport himself in fantasy to a place not likely to be populated by field theorists, unaware that some theorists believe that a field theory is needed if we are to ever explain the remarkable long-distance migration behaviour of many birds.

Unformulated Experience and the Metaphor of Resonance

Honderich’s paper illustrates a point which he chooses to ignore, which is that we are drawn to metaphors as much as to logical analysis to make sense of the consciousness conundrum, and the metaphors people are drawn to reflect underlying and unformulated aspects of their experience. While Honderich is not alone in being horrified by field metaphors, there are others who feel the opposite. For example, several psychologists explore the idea of an *unconscious* field (e.g. Edwards & Jacobs, 2003; Rucker & Lombardi, 1998; Schwartz-Salant, 1995) - but that’s another debate which I won’t enter into in case Honderich tries to knock me down too. Perhaps he will anyway, although I have been trying quite hard not to commit myself to any position at all on the matters he addresses. However, I happily state the hypotheses which the present paper is arguing for: that the negotiation of the formulation of experience plays an important, but

unacknowledged, role in debates about the nature of mind and consciousness, that such discourses are not just a process through which we develop an accurate propositional theory, that individuals involved in these debates seek formulations that are both rationally coherent and personally satisfying, and that, in the process they attempt to formulate their own unformulated experience, seek affirmation for formulations which resonate with their underlying experience and seek to discredit ones that don’t.

The metaphor of resonance was used by Breuer (1895) to capture the way in which an event might activate a memory of an emotionally charged episode from the past and trigger an intense emotional reaction quite out of proportion to the current event itself (see Edwards & Jacobs, 2003). Similarly the metaphor of resonance captures the ability of verbal formulations to capture the essence of various aspects of unformulated experience. We see this in the way theorists are attracted to theories and discourses which fit their own (formulated and unformulated) experience. For example, De Quincy (1999) offers to “reveal his hand”, as he puts it, and describes how he was immediately attracted to Griffin’s panexperientialism.

I became a confirmed panpsychist when I first read Whitehead, and a reconfirmed panpsychist when I later read Griffin’s ... panexperientialism (1999, p. 92).

He acknowledges that he was persuaded, not so much by the force and rationality of the argument, as by the experience that what Whitehead and Griffin were articulating rang true with his felt sense of how things really are. We can detect a similar resonance in Isham’s (1994) response to an apparent chance encounter with Bohm’s *Quantum theory* which, while working in industry in electronics, he pulled down from a library shelf “almost at random”.

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I ... read it avidly for a week. By the end of that time I had resolved to drop electronics in favour of theoretical physics ... a decision I have never regretted (p. 157).

The encounter seems to have been about something more than mere aptitude for theoretical physics, and to have been a creative call from what Boss (1977, p. 26) termed his “existential possibilities”. The character of Isham’s review of Bohm and Hiley’s *The Undivided Universe*, supports the hypothesis that Isham found in the way Bohm wrote about physics, someone who was able to articulate and begin to address his [Isham’s] own unformulated questions and intuitions about the ultimate nature of things. I had a similar response, years ago, to reading Grof’s (1976) *Realms of the Human Unconscious*, which presented his conclusions from work with LSD-assisted psychotherapy. I had never taken psychedelic drugs myself or had spontaneous altered state experiences. Nevertheless, I had a strong sense that this is someone who has “got it,” someone with a quality of understanding that I could relate to in a far-reaching way. This feeling was confirmed when, some ten years later, I had opportunities to attend some of Grof’s lectures and workshops. On subsequent occasions, when I encountered Grof I continued to have a strong and pervasive resonance with what he said, something I have experienced with few other people.

Wilber (1982) also had an important resonance experience with a book. He describes himself as a student, as someone whose

true passion ... was for science. I fashioned a self that was built on logic, structured by physics and moved by chemistry ... my mental youth was an idyll of precision and accuracy, a fortress of the clear and evident (p. 58).

In his first year of college, he picked up a copy of the *Tao-te Ching* and was exposed to a drastically different view of the world to anything he had known so far, and how

those ancient words of Lao Tsu took me quite by surprise; worse, the surprise refused to wear off Within a period of a few months, the meaning of my life as I had known it, simply began to disappear (p. 58).

A phrase that is sometimes used to refer to experiences like this, is that the words “caught his imagination.” Following Stern, we might hypothesise that the words fitted with important parts of Wilber’s experience which were as yet unformulated, and that his reading of them, and his subsequent exploration of related texts, enabled this previously hidden aspect of his experience to find words and form.

The Interaction of Propositional and Implicational Cognitive Modes

These observations point to the existence of two fundamental cognitive modes, the one in which logic prevails, the other which lends itself to analogy and metaphor. Freud was a master of both, but some of his formal theorising is vitiated by attempts to be overly formal in domains where metaphors are more appropriate (Edwards & Jacobs, 2003). Merleau-Ponty makes the distinction using the phrases “empirical speech” (for discourse that emphasises rationality, reality testing, and propositional accuracy) and “creative speech” (for discourse that invites the process of bringing new meanings into verbal formulation). Langs (1996) makes the same distinction using the terms “theoretic” and “mythic” (see Edwards, 2003). As Stern (1997) observes, the mythic or creative mode is often referred to as the exercise of “imagination”. Cognitive science also gives a central place to this distinction. In Teasdale’s (1993, 1996, 1997) Interacting Cognitive Subsystems (ICS) Theory, an implicational system represents meaning at a more holistic and generic level. It captures very general regularities that have been detected and represents them as broad frameworks of meaning, schematic models within which different kinds of experience are summarized and organized. In parallel with it is a propositional

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system that represents reality in terms of discrete concepts with specific meanings and rules of assignment. Words refer directly to things according to demarcated rules. Propositions refer to reality in a similar rule-bound manner and are subject to logical rules of verification.

Each modality has a different relationship to language. Especially in the technical discourses of academic disciplines, language is based on definitions and distinctions which enable words and propositions to be linked directly to facts about the world. Implicational code does not map so directly on to language. Teasdale points out that often we resort to metaphor or even poetry in order to communicate it. Sometimes what cannot be rendered in language at all can find formulation in the expressive arts - *When Words are not Enough* is the subtitle of a recent book on expressive arts therapy (Levy, 1995). Language, therefore, can have two very different faces. With the first, it is seen as

a mirror of nature, a means for representing what is real ... [something that obeys] human command with the same absence of resistance or will demonstrated by a screwdriver or a knife and fork.

With the second, by contrast, it is engaged with giving voice to unformulated implicational experience, and

language uses us; we have become the utensils. Language is no longer our tool, but the very crucible of our experience (Stern, 1997, p. 9).

In the moment to moment sharing and construction of experience through everyday conversation, each of these two cognitive systems can contribute in complementary ways. Of course, not all conversation is either strongly propositionally oriented or focused on giving birth to meaning. Sometimes it is relatively trivial and “reveals only what we already know” (Stern, 1997, p. 90). However, at times the focus

is on finding expression for underlying implicational meanings which may be more felt than formulated. At others there is a deliberate engagement with rationality and propositional accuracy. At times conversation may shift from one focus to another. At times different participants may speak at cross-purposes, failing to recognize the complementary roles of the two kinds of language use. A disjunction between the propositional domain and implicational experience is also common within the experience of a single individual. Something that appears to be accurate propositionally may fail to fit with implicational meaning. When this disjunction occurs we find people saying things like, “I know it intellectually, but I don’t believe it emotionally” or “my head says this but my heart says that.”

Another complicating factor is that our underlying experience is not fixed or static, it flows and unfolds. What has been formulated today may no longer be entirely accurate tomorrow. As language connects with this flowing and unfolding, it engages ever freshly with emergent meanings. Gendlin (1999, p. 235) has provided a particularly clear account of the phenomenology of this creative process, which, he remarks, is characterized by “uncategorizable intricacies.” He illustrates it with a fine example from a psychotherapy session in which a woman is grappling with her sexuality and her search for spiritual energization. There is an implicit guilt that the experience of energization is largely sexual, but then a moment of insight that she is afraid that if she lets the energization go beyond being sexual she will lose it altogether. This is the point at which she starts to weep, as if she had never before seen the role of fear in keeping her stuck.

When this kind of formulation works, there is the accompanying sense of recognition that the words do justice to the underlying experience. Above we used the metaphor of resonance for this kind of experience. Gendlin (1996) has

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described training in focussing in which individuals are taught how to put a word to a felt sense and test for this kind of resonant accuracy. In qualitative research in psychology, this matching of words to experience has been called phenomenological validity. For example, a researcher may interview someone, and then summarize and organize the material in the form of a coherent narrative or thematic analysis. The question arises as to how accurately this presents the material of the interview, and more importantly, the actual experience of the interviewee. If there is phenomenological validity, the interviewee will say something like the participant in one of my own case studies (Edwards, 1996, p. 119):

You are saying many of the things that I would like to say and it all resonates well - very well.

Phenomenological validity, therefore, concerns whether there is a fit between verbal formulation and implicational meaning.

This does not, of course, mean that the implicational meanings are necessarily accurate reflections of reality. The central point of Breuer's (1895) classic contribution already referred to is that perception of the present may be significantly distorted by resonance with memories of the past. Teasdale's papers all address the challenge of finding ways to change implicational meanings which are inaccurate and dysfunctional and which, having been evoked by such resonance, interfere with effective functioning. Once implicational meaning has been formulated, it needs to be reflected on and its significance worked out in terms of the consensual realities of everyday life using the rules of propositional code. This is the focus of a great deal of activity within psychotherapy.

Unformulated Experience and State-Specific Science

Experiences of recognition and resonance occur

when we encounter words which render conscious for us dimensions of experience which are significant but as yet unformulated. Such as yet unformulated experience will deeply influence our contributions to philosophical debates about consciousness. We ignore this when we assume that all adult participants in a scientific or philosophical investigation bring the same cognitive toolkit to bear. Although we recognize that participants differ in terms of intelligence or training, this is not believed to be particularly relevant to participation, so long as one has the requisite background and can follow the argument. As Cardena, Lynn and Krippner (2000, p. 16) remind us, "The strong normative impact of language and social conventions may deceive us into believing that we are more alike than we really are". Aldous Huxley recognized that individuals have distinctive experiential modes, which he referred to with the term "being":

Knowledge is a function of being. When there is a change in the being of the knower, there is a corresponding change in the nature and amount of knowing (Huxley, 1974, p. 1).

The implication is that individuals can differ markedly with regard to ways of being and knowing, and, as a consequence, in their understanding of whatever may be being discussed.

Huxley also implies that one's mode of being and knowing can change with the result that one's perspective will change too. This is illustrated in Walsh's (1984) biographical account of personal changes that were unexpectedly initiated by his psychotherapy with James Bugental, a process which he entered because it was a formal requirement of his training as a psychiatrist. Walsh began to have insights into the way automatic cognitive and emotional activity constructs the everyday experience we call reality. This, combined with his own aptitude for

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this kind of self-exploration, led him to engage in some intensive meditation retreats, and he found his experience becoming so drastically transformed that he could write,

One after another, my most ... stable, sensible, ... taken for granted, and culturally shared beliefs have been shattered I don't know ... how correct my currently cherished set of beliefs, assumptions and world views are I do feel that I know that I have been wrong, that I've underestimated the mind, consciousness, us, the extent to which we are asleep, sleepwalking, trapped in our individual and shared cultural illusions (p. 31).

Walsh shows how what may feel like a certain and fixed way of experiencing the world can deconstruct itself and give way to a quite different mode of experiencing. Rather than happening once, Walsh reports how this deconstruction became an ongoing process of what Huxley would have referred to as a “change in the being of the knower” which resulted, in turn, in a series of alterations of “the nature and amount of knowing”.

Tart (1972) addresses this phenomenon through the concept of state-specific sciences. He supposes that our everyday mode of experience, our ordinary state of consciousness, is not the only one that is possible or meaningful. It is of course, very useful as it has been selected through evolution as a mode which enables survival in a world which poses continual challenges to an individual's practical resourcefulness. However, humans are capable of entering and stabilising other “altered” states of consciousness. This can be achieved through training of various kinds, for example shamanic training (Krippner, 2000) or meditation (Claxton, 1996), or by taking psychedelic drugs. It can also occur in spontaneous mystical experiences (Wulff, 2000) and in the kinds of processes that Grof and Grof (1989) call “spiritual emergence.”

The term “altered states” puts the focus on modes of experiencing which are markedly different from our everyday consciousness. However, even “everyday consciousness” is not a unitary mode of experiencing. We can think of each person's everyday mode of experiencing as being like a complex lens built up in layers. Only the outer layers are visible and formulated. The deeper layers, invisible and unformulated, shape how they experience what is said and what they express in response. One example of a distinctive mode of everyday experiencing is sometimes encountered by psychotherapists. A client dreams of being a robot or a zombie. This is often an expression of an, as yet unformulated, experience of life as automated and meaningless, and talking about the dream may help the client identify a sense of life being mechanical, predictable, lacking feeling, heart or soul. Such states usually point to an underlying fragmentation, as if the individual has distanced him/herself from possibilities for experiencing in an organic and enlivened way. There have long been discussions among philosophers about whether a machine could be designed that mimicked human consciousness, or whether there are ingredients to human experience which would inevitably be missing from a robot, however sophisticated. A great deal of attention was devoted to these questions in the first two volumes of the newly founded *Journal of Consciousness Studies* around the question of whether conscious human beings could be distinguished from zombies who behave like humans but whose responses are purely mechanical (Dennett, 1995; Moody, 1994; Tart, 1995). From the perspective being advanced here, individuals who dream of robots or zombies might be expected to be more sympathetic to the view that consciousness is a mere epiphenomenon, an insignificant by-product of brain complexity, and less inclined to theories which give consciousness a unique and active role in human life.

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Furthermore, the same person can alternate between different modes of experiencing according to what they are engaged with. A colleague working on a technical article on the neuropsychology of brain injuries remarked how she was finding her weekly art classes to be an unwelcome interruption. Yet at other times she greatly welcomes the classes which allow her to experience and express a different and creative side of her nature. She needs to be in a different mode for each of the two activities and it takes effort to switch from “writing scientific paper” mode to “art class” mode. We encounter a different mode of everyday consciousness if we ask artists to talk about their experience when working. They will often describe a state which is quite “altered” compared to that in which most of us operate most of the time and speak of having to make a significant adjustment when they want to focus on mundane activities.

It is also possible to bracket experience in one mode while one is in the other. The scientist who is moved by a symphony concert may or may not see a need to make sense of this experience when engaging in scientific discussion. However, this kind of separation of modes of experiencing can result in what Freud called disavowal (Goldberg, 1999). Consciousness is divided so that in one mode of experiencing, the implications of the other are effectively denied. At times this may be practically useful. At others it is the basis of psychopathology. Can it make any sense in consciousness studies to systematically exclude from debate the implications of any mode of experiencing? Western science can be termed a unistate discipline (Walsh & Vaughan, 1993). It recognizes only one specialized epistemological mode, sees no value in these kinds of altered states and tends to dismiss them as aberrations. This can be contrasted with a multistate view of science which recognizes that there is not one unique mode of consciousness which is the sole route to valid knowledge. Other modes, such as those referred to above, may disclose reality in ways which complement the way it is disclosed

in ordinary states of consciousness. Those who enter them may gain insights and acquire perspectives which they could not otherwise reach. By putting together views of the world from different states, we can obtain a more complete and comprehensive understanding than could be gained from any single state.

In terms of the concept of state-specific science, the kind of experience you can address and the kind of knowledge you can construct out of it, depends on the states of consciousness you are familiar with. There is no absolute kind of knowledge, only knowledge that is disclosed by particular states of consciousness, states which furnish different modes of knowing the world. This means that a group of individuals cannot engage in a coherent discourse unless they have experienced the same basic state and are all articulating their experience of that state. This means that debates in science, philosophy and psychology are shaped as much by the unstated assumptions implicit in modes of experiencing as they are by the logic of the arguments that are employed. Yet there is no easy route to identifying these unstated assumptions. Even where we deal with more obviously “altered” states, the situation is no less complicated since there is not just one altered or shamanic or meditative state which is achieved by different spiritual or consciousness altering practices. Wilber (1981) has provided a map of the kinds of states of consciousness that have been widely described in the literature of the world’s spiritual traditions. However, Walsh (1993) has pointed out that the development of psychological concepts for addressing this complexity of states is still very much in its infancy. It is very easy therefore for people to be at cross-purposes because in their interaction they are articulating experience from different modes of consciousness.

Western Science and the Ideological Control of Consciousness

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It is often argued that philosophy or science must be rooted firmly in the propositional use of language and that there is little role for other modes of consciousness. Western science can be understood as a comprehensive articulation of a specialized epistemological mode grounded in propositional code. The discourses and rituals of practitioners of shamanism (Krippner, 2000) or esoteric spiritual paths (Versluis, 2000) can be understood as instrumental in shaping and stabilizing a specialized mode of consciousness suited to the goals of these practices. In the same way, the practitioners of science also engage in practices which are designed to stabilize a specialized mode of consciousness, although the nature of the mode of consciousness is, of course, very different. Thus the practice of science includes the rehearsal, implicitly or explicitly, of ideological positions regarding assumptions about ontology (what kinds of things exist or are real?), methodology (how can we, in practice, advance knowledge?) and epistemology (how can we ensure the validity of the knowledge we acquire?). For many, there is an ideological commitment to: (1) the ontological principle that only matter exists and that everything (including consciousness) must be somehow derived from that; (2) the methodological principle that only the objectively observable can be studied and it must be studied in such a way that others can observe or replicate; (3) the epistemological principle that knowledge must be verifiable, falsifiable and testable according to the assumptions of the methodology. These assumptions govern a set of discourses which entrench the privileging of a particular mode of consciousness as the only route to valid knowledge. Explicitly and implicitly, detailed instructions are provided for cultivating and maintaining it, a process which exercises ideological control over the consciousness of its practitioners.

Conversation and discourse analysts would argue that in practice no discourse can be purified of the agendas of its opinion leaders and the power

struggles in which it is socially embedded. Power plays often masquerade as arguments, and rational argument is apt to be spiced with more or less heavy doses of invitation, rhetoric, and persuasion. Just as the course of an everyday conversation is shaped by the hidden agendas of the participants, so are the discourses and practices of science. As Keller and Longino (1998, p. 1) observe,

Scientific observation is never innocent
... but always and inevitably influenced
by theoretical commitments.

This state of affairs is the outcome of a historical process in which advocates of different epistemological modes have struggled for supremacy. Feminist critics like Keller (1985) have documented some of this process in the laying of the foundations of science in the seventeenth century. For example, she visits heated debates in the Royal Society between proponents of the vision of Francis Bacon on the one hand and, on the other, those who were influenced by Paracelsus and Hermetic philosophy. She particularly draws attention to a predominance in Baconian discourse of metaphors which spoke of masculine aggression towards the natural world aimed at domination and assertion of control. For example:

Henry Oldenberg, Secretary of the Royal Society, announced ... that the intention of that society was "to raise a Masculine Philosophy ... whereby the Mind of Man may be ennobled with Solid Truths" (Keller, 1985, p. 52).

For Keller, the predominant mode of knowing in science is a largely masculine one which emphasises detachment and objectivity at the expense of intuition and holistic engagement.

The stronger the commitment to an ideological position, the greater is the willingness to forgo one's personal experience as a guide to understanding. This means that ideological

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commitments lead apparently rational investigators to selectively focus on information that supports their positions and inaccurately interpret data that might contradict them. These ideological commitments may arise from a particular mode of experiencing, or they may entrench it, but either way they contribute to an inhibition of the formulation of any experiences that cannot be fitted into consensually negotiated categories. This explains why some philosophical problems have remained intractable for centuries. The intensity of ideological struggle that accompanies them frequently calls forth the metaphor of warfare. For example, an editorial in the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* that addressed these kinds of issues was entitled, "Another front in the science wars?" (Editorial, 2001, p. 3).

It is to just this sort of ideological conflict that Gray (1995, p. 5) refers when he points out how hard it has been historically

to get the conscious part of our existence, which is the most important part of our existence, into the scientific framework which that very conscious existence has allowed us to build in the first place.

As a distinguished neuroscientist himself, he is talking from first hand experience when he speaks of how,

in the general scientific and philosophical community there have been enormous efforts to resist seeing that there is a problem, and these efforts continue today.

The experience of Roger Sperry, another distinguished neuroscientist with nearly half a century of mainstream research under his belt, provides another illustration of the power of ideological pressure to actively discourage certain kinds of formulation of experience. He describes how, in moving from a view of the

cosmos as "strictly physical, value empty, and mindless" to a holistic perspective which acknowledges consciousness and values, "one puts much more of one's personal self 'on the line,'" and he remarks how many of his colleagues would tell him, "Quit wasting your time! Get back to science!" (Sperry, 1995, p. 506).

Another episode that illustrates the intensity that this ideological conflict can generate is the controversy which greeted Rupert Sheldrake's *A New Science of Life* when it was published in 1981. Contributions to this often acrimonious debate were collected as an appendix to a later edition of the book (Sheldrake, 1985). In the prestigious *Nature*, an anonymous reviewer referred to it as an "infuriating tract ... [which is] ... the best candidate for book burning there has been for many years" (Sheldrake, 1985, jacket). These comments were not tongue in cheek, and the metaphor reveals the intensity of feeling which is evoked in some quarters when any research or theory is discussed which supports the idea that so-called paranormal phenomena occur, or indeed might be quite normal. The review was full of disdainful comments about "the motley crew of creationists, anti-reductionists, neo-Lamarckians and the rest," and contemptuous dismissal of anyone who might take Sheldrake seriously. Such blatant power tactics are, of course, not officially part of the scientific method. As one respondent remarked (p. 223), "does this mean that *Nature* has abandoned the scientific method whereby ideas are launched upon the world to be tested by the scientific community?" Turning the book-burning metaphor back on the author, another remarked that he had used the journal as "a pulpit from which to denounce scientific heresies" and commented wittily, "after seeing the disastrous effect Sheldrake's book has wrought upon the detachment ... of one with the responsibilities of the editorship of *Nature*, I shudder to contemplate the effect upon the ordinary man" (p. 225).

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Bem and Honorton (1994) discuss their own experience of this kind of ideological pressure with reference to occasions on which they had discussed the possibility that “one or more of the more radical models of reality compatible with both quantum mechanics and psi [paranormal phenomena] will eventually come to be accepted.” However, “we have learned,” they remark, “that all such talk provokes most of our colleagues ... to roll their eyes and gnash their teeth” (p. 16). This metaphor also points to the fact that when the core of a paradigm is threatened its adherents are wont to respond irrationally, and in this irrational state they are likely to abandon their rational principles. Similarly, Child (1985) discussed how research on extra-sensory perception in dreams was treated by the psychological community. First he notes that, although the experimental designs were state of the art, the mainstream journals which would have enabled the researchers to communicate with other psychologists did not publish any of the studies. Second, he shows how other psychologists, in reviewing the field, selectively ignored or misrepresented important aspects of the procedure and findings.

The Promise of a Multistate Paradigm

A multistate perspective offers a route towards a resolution of some of these ideological conflicts. It recognizes the methodology and epistemology of Western science as a powerful and effective way of knowing and supports the rigour of the formulation of its principles and practice. However, rather than privileging it as the only or a superior way of knowing, it recognizes other ways of knowing which are based on different principles and which call for different kinds of practice. It would also look for the same kind of rigour in the work of exponents of other ways of knowing with regard to the clarification of the practices and epistemological principles by which they operate.

Let us bring this perspective to bear on Versluis’ (2000) discussion of the writings of the Western esoteric spiritual traditions. Very often, he suggests, they are “the writings of someone who has actually realized the tradition’s aim of spiritual illumination” (p. 26) and which offer an authoritative account of the phenomenology of the experience. Versluis suggests that they differ in character from the kinds of discourses in which Western scholars usually engage. However, this is not altogether true. Scientific writings are also written by individuals who have realized the ideal of the kind of consciousness that is aspired to, although it is not a consciousness for which the phrase “spiritual illumination” would often be used. Versluis also points out that their aim is not simply descriptive. They serve as a vehicle for the transformation of the consciousness of the reader. He writes of Milosz’ poetry that it “is intended not only to describe, but also to evoke the kinds of consciousness it represents” (p. 27). Again this is true of scientific writings. They also serve to suggest, model, invite and even prescribe a distinctive mode of experience. What is different, of course, is the nature of the experience. Versluis (2000, p. 28) tells us that Böhme “warned his readers not to read his works unless they are attuned to them.” This is because esoteric writings appeal to the unformulated experience of the reader and will convey their meaning accurately only when the reader has an experiential resonance with them, at some level. We saw an example of this in Wilber’s response to the *Tao-te Ching*. But this kind of recognition is by no means confined to spiritual texts - people have been inspired in the same way by statements of the scientific perspective.

Versluis commented on the difficulty faced by someone schooled in contemporary Western secularism of appreciating the perspectives of the Western esoteric traditions, since

the secular modern world emerged
through the jettisoning, suppression of

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ignoring of most of these esoteric currents" (p. 31).

Several aspects of this process have been examined above. However, the interest in spiritual practice which has characterized Western societies during the past forty years or so reflects how individuals brought up with the experience of Western secularism have been actively seeking alternative ways of experiencing. Since many of these individuals are philosophers, psychologists, medical doctors and scientists, there is a significant number of educated individuals who are experientially prepared to engage meaningfully with these texts. The approach of state-specific science provides a way of appreciating these as valid human experiences which complement the findings of the traditional scientific literature.

The idea of state-specific knowing is central to understanding the shamanic traditions. All over the world, these incorporate "technologies of the sacred," methods of entering "shamanic states of consciousness" which enable the world to be experienced in radically different ways (Krippner, 2000). These allow the shaman to know things that most people do not know, and more important, to put this specialist knowledge to use for the benefit of the communities in which they live, for example, by using it as a basis for healing practices. By sharing these consciousness altering practices and discussing with each other what they experience, shamanic practitioners develop their own discourses and consensual understandings of consciousness, reality and the place of human life within it.

Shaman healers appeal to assumptions very different from those of Western science (Krippner, 2000). Ontologically they will probably not share the materialist assumption. Instead, they might claim that only consciousness exists and that the material world is derived from it for example, or they might hold that there are two ontological realms, spirit and matter. Methodologically, they would hold that progress

and advancement of knowledge is not possible without learning to alter consciousness by the ritual use of intensive techniques such as prayer, meditation, trance dancing, drumming or using psychedelic substances. They would point out that the suggestion that one should eliminate the subjective as far as possible would make the advancement of this kind of knowledge impossible. Epistemologically, they would agree that knowledge has to be consensually verified and they would point to different means of verification, for example by finding correspondences in traditional teaching, sacred texts and in the experiences of others who have achieved the same kinds of alterations of consciousness. In countries like South Africa, where there is an active shamanistic tradition, this is not just an academic debate. How it is handled will determine the working relations between traditional and Western healers in the health services. It is impossible to offer any meaningful integration of shamanistic ideas and Western medicine within a unistate paradigm. However a multistate paradigm provides a basis for understanding and respecting both.

Another area in which the state-specific science perspectives offers a unifying vision is the understanding of altered states of consciousness induced by psychedelic drugs. Consider this account of an altered state experience of a psychiatrist described by Grof (1998, p. 28):

... my only reality was a mass of swirling energy of immense proportions that seemed to contain all of Existence in an entirely abstract form It seemed to be pure consciousness, intelligence, and creative energy, transcending all polarities. It was infinite and finite, divine and demonic, terrifying and ecstatic, creative and destructive I had no concept, no categories for what I was witnessing. I could not maintain the sense of separate existence in the face of such a force. My ordinary identity was shattered and dissolved: I became one with the Source. Time lost any meaning whatsoever.

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As Wulff (2000) observes, one has the choice of approaching an experience like this from one of two diametrically opposite approaches. From a normative science perspective, individuals who study these states should remain “outsiders,” and should not themselves experiment with psychedelics because this would bias their judgement. From a multistate perspective, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to understand an experience like this unless one was an “insider” who had had a similar experience oneself. From the unistate science perspective, Grof’s experience, as an “insider”, risks

... the loss, not only of the minimal critical distance that disinterested scholarly analysis requires but also of one’s credibility ... in the eyes of many outsiders (Wulff, 2000, p. 428).

However, from a multistate perspective, by “working as an outsider” the scientist’s “pronouncements are likely to be viewed by insiders as uncomprehending or irrelevant” (Wulff, 2000, p. 428).

At stake is the central question as to whether these experiences can be noetic, that is, whether they can have ontological implications (Edwards & Jacobs, 2003; Wulff, 2000). From a unistate perspective the answer is, of course, “No!” The main basis of this answer is the epistemological assumption that knowledge can only be obtained and verified in a state of detached “ordinary” consciousness. This means that drug induced states can never be more than interesting hallucinations. If several individuals have the same kind of experience, this does not provide evidence that there is some common reality that has been encountered. It can better be attributed to commonalities in the aberrations of brain chemistry induced by taking the drug. From a multistate perspective, where similar experiences are described repeatedly, the alternative hypothesis, that something real is being disclosed, needs at least to be kept on the table

and investigated. The claim is not, of course, that an understanding of the implications of such experiences needs to be developed while in an altered state. Reflection, insight and theory development call for a balanced and careful stance of the same kind that is needed for reflecting on the results of scientific experiments. However, as we have seen, such experiences are likely to bring about a significant “change in the being of the knower” to use Huxley’s phrase, so that the experience brings to the debate a very different underlying experience which may be largely unformulated or only partly formulated.

Within the scientific paradigm, there is the concern that those who claim that their experiences in altered states *are* noetic have simply lost their detachment and objectivity. There is doubt that individuals can

maintain a posture of disinterested agnosticism in the face of the overwhelming impressions of reality that are characteristic of such experiences (Wulff, 2000, p. 428).

From a multistate perspective, hidden in the scientist’s emphasis on “disinterested agnosticism” is a commitment to specific ontological assumptions which, as Harman (1988, p. 14) remarks, are themselves “a cultural artifact of Western society.” The scientist is anything but disinterested or agnostic.

The multistate perspective also throws light on one of the issues discussed in the “science wars” editorial in the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* referred to above. This is the creation and maintenance of the “unbridgeable gulf between science and the arts” (Editorial, 2001, p. 3). Different disciplines attract individuals whose mode of experiencing resonates with that dominant mode of experiencing of the discipline. Keller (1998, p. 37) observes that “scientists are ... selected by the appeal of particular (stereotypic) images of science.” We can expect

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that this is equally true of practitioners in the arts and humanities. In turn, within each discipline, particular modes of experiencing are cultivated and even prescribed. If people from different disciplines fail to take account of the fact that their experience and conclusions are founded on a different articulation of consciousness, it would hardly be surprising if they fail to understand each other. A multistate perspective offers an optimistic response to the “the general question of whether insights from science and humanities can be integrated, or at least be allowed to peacefully co-exist” (Editorial, 2001, p. 3). It provides a framework within which to understand how a practitioner in the humanities cultivates and articulates a particular kind of epistemological mode which makes certain kinds of knowledge possible, and that a scientist does the same. A recognition that knowledge gained in the two epistemological modes is complementary, not contradictory, provides a foundation for mutual respect between disciplines.

This in turn can resolve some of the conflicts found in disciplines which bridge the domains of “arts” and “science.” Too often science, in prescribing its approach and methods, diminishes and straitjackets the arts. This is illustrated by McNiff’s (1998) approach to research in art therapy. He shows how the application of “scientific method” has the effect of distancing students from the very questions that they want to answer. He attributes this to the suppression of the creative aspects of experience within scientific practice and recognizes that, whereas this may be useful in some fields of investigation, in art therapy it is self-defeating. He comments that

One of the most enduring themes in science and philosophy is the tension between what can and cannot be known and expressed. I believe that this gap is the most creative energy of the human spirit ... Creative arts therapy is engaged with both aspects of experience, and this clearly

distinguishes our practice from disciplines which base themselves on totally predictable outcomes. ... I recognize the value of science and its research methods: but they can never encapsulate the totality of what I do (McNiff, 1998, p. 31).

In developing a new form of art-based research, McNiff articulates a distinctive epistemological mode for art therapy research within which the empirical and creative gestures are in balance. This does justice to the needs and experience of art therapists, but also allows for the development of consensual knowledge.

Facing up to Unformulated Experience in the Consciousness Studies Field

I have argued in this paper that contributions to debates and discussions about the nature of mind and consciousness will be influenced as much by unformulated aspects of participants’ experience as by formulated ones. These unformulated aspects are encoded in implicational cognitive systems whose content does not necessarily find articulate representation in words. Implicational cognition is founded on information gained through a wide range of life experiences which has been synthesised into schematic meaning frameworks, and individuals differ in the range of experiences that have contributed to this process. However, a more important contributor to these individual differences is the fact that there is not a single mode of experiencing that is the basis for implicational cognition. Information processing is determined by underlying factors which we are still not easily able to define, and which have been addressed in this paper using a range of terms from the literature: states of consciousness or being or modes of experiencing, for example.

In the case of propositional and empirical knowledge, it has been possible to operationalize procedures for ensuring that the truth value of findings can be consensually negotiated. This has been achieved through the systematic

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application of rationality and procedures for detached and replicable observation. However, it is not easy to reach consensus in the development of such procedures for implicational knowing, a problem exacerbated by the fact that practitioners of different disciplines cultivate and stabilize a range of distinctive modes of experiencing, and articulate these in distinctive discourses. One solution to this dilemma is to deal exclusively with propositional knowing and as far as possible diminish the significance of implicational knowing. This is the route taken by "science". In the "arts", by contrast, the limitations of propositional knowing are recognized and implicational cognition is acknowledged as fundamental to any complete account.

In conclusion, therefore, it is not possible to free our discussions about the nature and implications of consciousness from the subtle and not so subtle effects of the modes of experiencing of the participants. These may have been shaped by experiences of personal significance which have been acknowledged and reflected on, but are also inevitably shaped by experience that is, as yet, unformulated. This includes dissociated aspects that have been unconsciously split off because of *inter alia* (i) trauma, (ii) routine everyday separation of modes of consciousness in which the significance of experiences in one mode of experiencing is simply disavowed when in another, and (iii) creative possibilities which are emergent and as yet unrealized. These creative possibilities may themselves involve such radically different modes of apprehension that they are often conceptualized as altered states of consciousness. Concepts like implicational cognition, unformulated experience and state-specific sciences provide a means of addressing the problems posed for academic discourse by the diversity of human experience. However, until we can develop a more coherent understanding of this and reach some consensus about it, we can expect that there will be many occasions when participants will simply speak at

cross-purposes and the age old debates will remain unresolved.

About the Author



David Edwards is a Clinical Psychologist who was born in Britain. He moved to South Africa where he has taught at Rhodes University since 1971. He is certified as a Cognitive Therapist (having spent a year as a post-doctoral fellow at the Centre for Cognitive Therapy at the University of Pennsylvania in 1984). In parallel with this, he has a longstanding interest in humanistic and transpersonal approaches to psychotherapy and has done experiential training with Stanislav Grof and Roger Woolger. He co-edited a South African introductory psychology textbook which was based on a classical international introductory syllabus, extensively illustrated with southern African research and contextual examples. His integrative approach to understanding personality and psychotherapy is evident in his 2003 book, *Conscious and Unconscious*, in the series, "Core concepts in therapy", with Michael Jacobs, the series editor, as co-author, published by Open University Press, a branch of McGraw Hill. This book reviews psychological discourses that address the dialectical relationship between conscious and unconscious from before the time of Freud, Jung and Janet up to the present. This interest is also reflected in a 2003 contribution to the *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* entitled "Mythic and theoretic aspects of the concept of 'the unconscious' in popular and psychological discourse." [See in references below – Editor] He has published a series of papers and book chapters on case study research, the most recent of which appeared in *Professional Psychology: Science and Practice* in late 2004 with Frank

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Dattilio and Dennis Bromley as co-authors. In other published work he has written case studies which examine cognitive therapy interventions for social phobia and chronic pain, as well as the use of guided imagery in cognitive therapy and the complementarity between cognitive-

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