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A Tentative Attempt at  
a Unified Language of Phenomenology  
by Frater Victus

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0. *Introduction*

The motto of *The Equinox* as well as SoSI is "The Method of Science, the Aim of Religion." We must have a unified language to speak clearly to each other, just as every physicist knows what is meant by "electron," every biologist agrees a certain structure is called the "endoplasmic reticulum," etc.

**Since the subject of our experiments is the consciousness of the individual, we must develop a language of consciousness.**

This language must not do injustice to science nor 'religion.' It must be rigorous enough to be understandable and precise yet flexible enough to account for diverse phenomena.

In this model, I emphasize again, **the subject of our experiments is the consciousness of the individual. Our Results are therefore phenomenological experiences.** This is a distinctly phenomenological emphasis and approach. What this means is that the language will reflect consciousness *as it appears*, and not describe the underlying biological phenomena. This does not mean we think there is a mind or consciousness separate from a body. On the contrary, all modern science



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points to the fact that an intact body (especially spine and brain) is needed for there to be any awareness. In short, although we acknowledge that the phenomenological nature of consciousness emerges out of the biological, the language used to communicate various Results (which will be, by definition, phenomenological experiences) will be itself phenomenological.

The subject of Experimentation is Consciousness, and the Results are phenomenological Experiences. Now we may get into a description of the various facets of consciousness.

### *1. Conscious vs. Unconscious*

Firstly, our model of Consciousness is that there are both conscious and unconscious parts of the psyche. The unconscious parts of the psyche are by definition not conscious and therefore not part of the phenomenological experience. This does not mean unconscious parts of the psyche are not important factors in experiencing the world. **We acknowledge that the unconscious part of man's psyche represents a powerful force of both diabolic and divine nature.** This was called the 'daimonic' by Rollo May and many other terms have been applied to it (libido, Kundalini, etc.) all with the common idea that the force can be turned towards constructive or destructive ends depending on the health and strength of the individual. That is, the unconscious is not entirely "animal" or "instinctual" but even our loftiest ideals, thoughts, intuitions, etc. come from the unconscious. In Thelemic terms, there is an abyss of height and an abyss of depth and in each abyss you will find a Companion, and that Companion is Yourself. This also means that **all things experienced are within the psyche of the individual - every demon, angel, god, image, sound, and smell arise out of the depths of the psyche.** It is when the unconscious contents infiltrate the consciousness that they become part of the Phenomenological Experience of the individual.

Essentially, we can conceive of the subject of our Experiments, Phenomenological Experience, as a circle within which is the entire world we are aware of (including everything we include as 'ourselves'). Outside of this circle in all directions is the unconscious.



## 2. *The External World/Environment*

In this model, there is no 'external world,' there is only the phenomenological sense of interior vs. exterior. To become aware of the 'environment,' various sensory stimuli have to impinge on sensory organs which then carry the information to the brain through various translations and interpretations and finally a conscious picture of 'the environment' emerges. Therefore, **the external world or the environment is simply a facet of Consciousness** - it is by definition 'those parts of the world one is aware of which lie physically outside of one's own body.' I must emphasize again: the environment which one is phenomenologically aware is perceived as spatially external to the body but it is still a content of consciousness. We are aware of the world through our five senses, and so experiences of the world are described in terms of taste, touch, etc.

Think of a dream: the 'external world' certainly feels exterior and we interact with it as if it is external yet in reality, this entire 'external world' is self-generated along with the sense of 'exterior-ness' that the environment takes on. This also leads to the theoretical possibility of overcoming this sense of interiority vs. exteriority, which is characteristically described in mystical literature.

## 3. *The Emotions and Meaning/Value*

We also imbue the world with meaning and emotions. **Overlaid on every single part of the conscious experience is an emotional value. We must not understand emotions and emotional reactions as some part of the consciousness separate from reason, thoughts, and objects but as diffused throughout all parts of the Phenomenological Experience.** Part of the reason we recognize our friends and family is the emotional reaction that appears when we see them - there is a certain disorder where emotional reactions to people fail to trigger and the individual in question feels they can no longer recognize their friends, or that an imposter that looks identical to them has taken their place (Capgras delusion, see Haydn Ellis and Ramachandran's work; the point is that our ability of 'recognition' relies almost entirely on our emotional overlays of people). When people argue against our



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viewpoints, we feel emotionally hurt because of the emotional value we unconsciously attribute to consistency of belief. We attribute a sense of security to the objects which give us comfort, etc. In short, we imbue the world with meaning and value through various emotional attributions, which is controlled biologically by the limbic system. Therefore, each part of the Phenomenological Experience is imbued with meaning and value through a largely unconscious process of emotional attribution. This may be the difference between a "dead symbol" and one that is "charged:" one has created an unconscious, emotional overlay of the particular image (i.e. the limbic system responds strongly when presented with this particular stimulus).

#### *4. The Body*

**Phenomenologically, we are always at the center of our own universe.** In the center of our Phenomenological Experience is the experience of the body. Our sense of our body can be classified in terms of the phenomenological experience of:

a) Tactile sensations, i.e. the feeling of pressure, pain (nociception), temperature (thermoception), tension, or pleasure on the skin or even from internal organs (like lungs or muscles)

b) Vestibular sensations, i.e. the sense of your body's balance

c) Proprioception, i.e. the feeling of your body's orientation in space and the sense of your body parts in relation to one another. Sensations of body parts expanding, contracting, disappearing, combining, etc. are all examples of proprioception (stemming from the parietal cortex)

Therefore, **descriptions of the Phenomenological Experience of the body must either be in terms of tactile sensations (pressure, pain, pleasure, tension, temperature, stretching), vestibular (balanced/unbalanced), and/or proprioception (orientation of body in space, sense of body parts in space and in relation to one another).** There are no other possibilities phenomenologically and no supernatural energies or sensations will be accepted as valid explanations.

#### *5. The Mind*

In this model, the mind does not refer to consciousness as a whole, the psyche, or awareness. **The mind refers specifically to the basic, cognitive abilities of the**



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**individual: memory, reasoning, imagination, and willpower/volition.** The latter is a special case for we can only admit a feeling or the appearance of willpower/volition. Phenomenologically, willpower means we feel like we are controlling a particular action or train of thought. Whether this is actually the case is of no matter (chances are that the feeling of agency is a sophisticated illusion, explained beautifully in the works of Daniel Wegner).

Much of the mind's work is to interpret the world. Since there is always too much information to process, the mind selects which information is most pertinent. Although this is evolutionarily and practically useful, it unfortunately leads to perceptual biases. These biases are inherent in the cognitive structure of our evolved organisms and not simply the product of 'ignorance' or 'superstition,' although the biases often lead to these things. Since every Experimenter can be the only expert on their particular subject of Research (namely their own Phenomenological Experience), we must each become aware of (these biases are virtually all unconscious) and hopefully overcome many perceptual biases. The Experimenter's perceptions of reality are ideally unclouded by assumptions, generalizations, oversights, and basic mistakes. In this way, our Results will theoretically be less skewed and the Reports more objective.

5A. Perceptual biases (based on Andrew Newberg's list)

1) **Family and cultural bias** - we tend to believe the information given to us by family and friends along with the culture as a whole that we grew up in. The Experimenter must recognize that the beliefs they grew up with are not necessarily true. This can be very subtle; for example, in the West individualism is looked upon as virtuous much more than in the East where interdependence is highly praised. A person in the West could easily criticize an idea for being too restrictive of the individual whereas someone in the East would see a symphony of cooperation at work; both are biased to perceive the original idea in terms of their own family/culture's values.

2) **Authoritarian bias** - we tend to believe information given to us from authorities or those who hold power. This can be insidious and subtle as well, for many people reject traditional cultural icons of authority and simply switch to counter-cultural icons of authority. How many hipsters revere Che's words (without even knowing who he really is, too), how many Thelemites revere Crowley's words,



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how many hippies revered Leary's words, etc. In short, we cannot rely on any authorities but instead we must rely on the evidence itself and our own judgment. We must apply critical thinking to all authorities and all claims.

3) **Confirmation bias** - we tend to emphasize information that supports our beliefs while unconsciously ignoring/rejecting information that contradicts it. This was warned against in the Golden Dawn and in Crowley's "Liber Librae" where he writes, "The sin which is unpardonable is knowingly and wilfully to reject truth, to fear knowledge lest that knowledge pander not to thy prejudices." Accepting information that contradicts our beliefs, especially the deeply held ones, is a very important and difficult process but a necessary one to accomplish (at least to a great degree) by Experimenters. This is also related to the "Expectancy bias," which is the fact that we have a propensity to 'discover' what we are already looking for when conducting research or looking through information. The Experimenter must be able to balance the attitudes of maintaining a one-pointed focus on testing the particular Hypothesis of the particular Experiment and that of being 'delivered from lust of result.' The Experimenter must also be able to objectively assess information that contradicts his or her current beliefs without emotional or intellectual knee-jerk reactions.

4) **Self-Serving bias** - we tend to believe things that benefit our own interests and goals. If an angel tells us we are Kings, we are likely to believe; if he tells we are beggars, we are likely to argue or ignore.

5) **In-group/Out-group bias** - we tend to believe things/give preferential treatments to believe who we consider "part of our group" and we tend to reject/disparage the beliefs of people perceive to be outside of "our group." There are many in-groups and therefore out-groups that each person organizes their world into. One that is especially detrimental to the progress of SoSI is the apparent Science vs. Spirituality dichotomy. Many 'spiritual' people view science as a threat to their beliefs and many 'scientific' people view spirituality as a threat to good sense. This can cause the spiritual to unrightfully reject the points of the scientific and vice versa. The Society of Scientific Illuminism is, in part, an attempt to bridge this one in-group vs. out-group dichotomy.

6) **Group Consensus/Social Proof bias** - the more people that agree with us, the more likely we assume that our beliefs are true. The converse is also true that we will disbelieve ourselves if many people disagree. We should know that every new thought is heresy and every new act is revolution in the eyes of the status quo. Every



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great intellectual inventor and discoverer has challenged the beliefs of the past (and his current time). We need to be strong enough to maintain our beliefs in the face of opposition but we need to be even stronger to be able to doubt our beliefs when many agree and support them. It is much easier to ignore blame than it is to ignore praise.

**7) Cause-and-Effect/Illusory Correlation bias** – we are predisposed toward making causal connections between two events, even when there is no connection. This is extremely apparent in occultism: someone will do a ritual and a completely unrelated event is taken as proof of the ritual somehow ‘working.’ The Experimenter must be especially careful of drawing these conclusions about causal connections.

**8) Pleasure and Comfort bias** – we tend to assume that pleasing and comforting experiences reflect greater truths than unpleasant experiences. Nietzsche’s counsel is apt here: “How much truth can you bear?” Truth is not a collection of comfortable facts but can often be disconcerting, and in this sense one can only ‘bear’ so much truth in relation to one’s courage and strength. This goes back to the section on emotional overlay on our experiences: any experience can be extremely blissful and comforting but this does not make it true (or false) at all. These are a particular case of various Emotional biases: anger skews our perception to make ourselves feel overly justified, anxiety undermines our sense of justification in our own beliefs, depression predisposes us towards pessimistic beliefs, etc. All of these indicate that emotion clouds the perception of the truth of any matter: we must be able to separate the feeling of something from the truth of something. Something comforting and pleasurable may be false, and something terrible and painful might be true.

**9) Personification bias** – we tend to give inanimate objects and ambiguous stimuli lifelike qualities. The parallels with occultism as a whole should be clear: we will name a certain force as an angel, demon, god, etc. The problem is not that we attribute a personality to an ambiguous gestalt of stimuli but that we actually believe these things to be ‘entities.’ As Crowley said, it may be useful to treat an ‘angel’ as a separate entity and we agree: it can be useful, but it can also be dangerous if you view it as something more than a merely pragmatic approach, i.e. if you grant actual objective existence to whatever personified entity. In short, Experimenters should guard against attributing any ambiguous stimuli that are perceived to some sort of animate entity. The experience of perceiving stimuli as an entity is a valid phenomenological fact in itself, although it says only that the person in question is



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currently interpreting stimuli as belonging to some animate entity and nothing about whether this entity exists or not.

**10) Memory biases** – there are an amazing amount of biases that the memory is subject to including the fact that every time a memory is recalled it is slightly altered, we tend to recall events in a more favorable light than when they had first occurred, and we can be easily manipulated into believing in false memories (which was partly responsible for scares about Satanic possession and child abuse). In short, one cannot trust one's memory of a situation. This is a large reason why we, following Crowley, counsel each Experimenter to record the results of their Experiments and to do this right after they have occurred.

**11) Uncertainty bias** – we do not like uncertainty and ambiguity and so we will often impose black-and-white understandings in order to retain some degree of certainty. This leads to fundamentalism of all sorts, and this bias would indicate that being an Agnostic takes far more cognitive strength than being a staunch Theist or Atheist. In short, the Experimenter must be able to face ambiguity and uncertainty without feeling the need to impose order. In doing so, we overlook the various shades of grey in which the various facets of experience actually manifest. In short, we must be able to say 'I don't know.'

These are just a rudimentary sketch of basic biases which every individual has: no one is exempt from these biases. Because of this, it is necessary that each and every Experimenter takes it upon themselves to acknowledge and overcome these biases.

The mind also organizes the world. One way it organizes it was already mentioned: it divides its perception into inner and outer. This accounts for the fact that a feeling not often experienced is often attributed to some 'other' spirit, entity, or force infusing the person in question. What is important is to note the character of this feeling and *the sense* of it being 'outside of one's self.' The same is true with the sense of 'owning' one's thoughts, i.e. of identifying oneself as an ego or personality. There is no discussion of whether a self really exists or not but we can accurately and informatively say whether a *sense* of self exists or not at any given time. This also means that Phenomenological Experience isn't necessarily a dichotomy between ego and non-ego, i.e. experience can be 'non-differentiated' or 'unified.'



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## 6. Examples

Now we have the basic Phenomenological Picture and the basic Language. Every experience can be described using the terms above in various combinations. Let us try some examples to see how this may be applied:

Example A. Suppose person X is meditating on the image of a yellow square. Phenomenologically, X has the sight of a yellow square and perhaps various pressures in the body where the legs meet the ground (and/or each other) and muscular tensions from holding the same position. Suddenly X feels energy like a lightning bolt creeping up his spine. Many people would describe this sloppily as 'Kundalini rising,' 'the chakras opening,' or 'L.V.X. dawning' but we must remain clear and concise: Phenomenologically, X is experiencing a physical sensation in the spine. The sensation is powerful and slightly pleasurable. In short, we engage in no metaphysical speculation but rather report the Findings as they are: phenomenological experiences.

Example B. Person Y performs an invocation of Isis and then closes her eyes to begin a chant. Suddenly a figure resembling Isis appears before her and tells her to "Love all beings with your heart and soul." Y feels a great sense of peace and comfort. What exactly happened here? Was Y visited by Isis and bestowed divine blessings? Did Zeus or a demon or some spirit manifest themselves as Isis and give Y comfort for some reason? Perhaps the Devil disguised himself as Isis and gave the feeling of security to lure Y away from Jesus? All of these metaphysical speculations are baseless. Phenomenologically, Y experienced the sight and sound of Isis. These were overlaid with the emotional content of comfort and peace. Now to the content of her message: one bias mentioned above is that we tend to believe what makes us comfortable and peaceful is true. Fortunately or unfortunately, the opposite is often the case: the truth is often discomfoting. This is where the individual must be trained mentally: most people will jump to the truth or validity of the experience because of this emotional overlay but we must acknowledge it for what it is: simply the limbic response to an experience or the emotional attribution to stimuli. The truth or falsity of the experience is something not affected by the emotional reaction to it, although the *sense* of truth or falsity is all-too-often swayed by emotional content.



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Example C. Person Z is performing Buddhist insight meditation when suddenly he feels no sense of separateness from the world and immersed in the reality he calls Emptiness. He believes the entire Universe is his true Body. Now this is an unfortunately vague account of the actual phenomenological experience of Z. What we need to know is what exactly was experienced? The sense of the environment and the body being merged together is associated with decreased activity in the orientation centers of the parietal cortex - in our phenomenological language, Z's sense of his body's boundaries dissolved and the default cognitive interpretation was that the entire Phenomenological Field of experience was his body. There is no mention of peace or bliss but if there were, we could say Z's limbic system activated a sense of bliss or "the experience was imbued with the emotional content of 'bliss.'" The conclusion of this line of thinking is that the sense of non-separation between self and other is not *necessarily* correlated with bliss and ecstasy (as many mystics speak about). In fact, there are many accounts of the sense of body dissolving in patients with various neurological disorders, and the experience can be terrifying (i.e. not blissful) to certain people even without any kind of pathology.

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