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Dimensions of Spiritual Growth and Enlightenment: Some Views from the Ground Up

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Abstract: While organized religion tends to content itself with social harmony and morality, the spiritual heart of many traditions is concerned with individual investigation and realization of spiritual growth or enlightenment (ENL). Gautama Buddha, for example, exhorted his followers not to simply believe his or any other

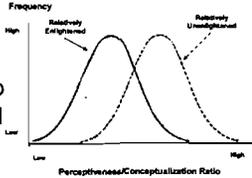
teaching, but personally investigate it to determine its truth value, a basically scientific attitude. So rather than assume only the enlightened can really understand what this is about, what can some disciplined thinking and research reveal about spiritual growth? I will share some current thinking, questioning and ideas for research on enlightenment and spiritual growth, drawing on both a variety of mystical/meditative traditions and Western psychology. What sort of method or path is the best way, or even a good way, for particular individuals, for example, and what ways might be counterproductive? Where do altered states fit in the picture? Do we all end up in the same enlightened place, or are there many desirable end points we might call growth or enlightenment? Can this search for enlightenment actually be an avoidance of real growth? How does our and our cultures' world view affect what is possible here? When are we really growing and when are we fooling ourselves? Can unenlightened people like us have any useful understandings about enlightenment?

Translation: I'm playing with ideas about "enlightenment" (sometimes ENL in these posters) and spiritual growth, and sharing them with you here so you can play with them.

And - Warning: *More questions than answers here...*

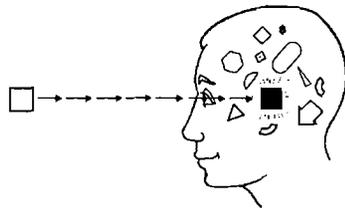
The following diagrams will, hopefully, stimulate thinking and memories of our topic.

Ontological & Methodological Considerations:

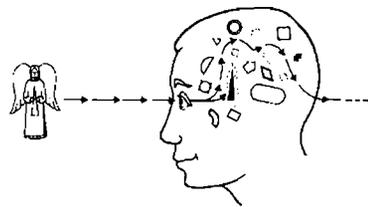
<p>If: Reality = Totally Materialistic, then ENL = Brain State and Spirituality = Illusion</p>	<p>Then: Drug companies will make us happy</p> 
<p>If: Reality = Primarily Spiritual and ENL = All-or-None [i.e. you're either (fully) enlightened or (fully) unenlightened]</p>	<p>Then: Take ENL people like these as final authorities, don't listen to unENL people</p> 
<p>If: ENL has various (semi)independent dimensions and degrees within dimensions</p>	<p>Then: Concepts like this may lead to useful empirical findings....</p> 

If we can't satisfactorily define "enlightenment," start from opposite direction:

What is Endarkenment?



Accurate perception =
(relative) Enlightenment



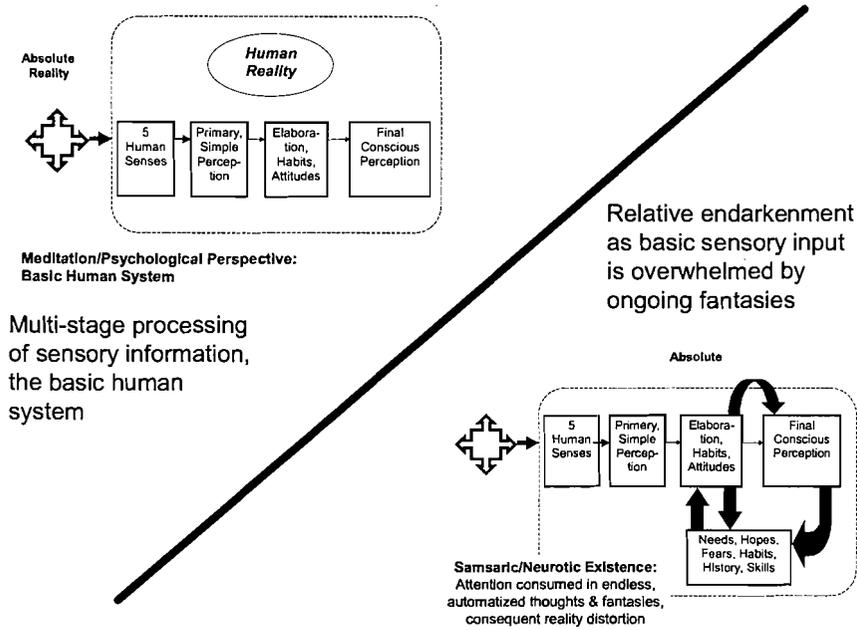
Inaccurate perception =
(relative) Endarkenment*

Direction: Less Endarkenment \rightleftarrows More Enlightenment

Q1- What is "enlightenment?"

* Note: "Angel" deliberately chosen to activate viewer...

From Western psychological perspective, we know a great deal about many aspects of endarkenment: e.g., neurosis, psychosis, propaganda, conditioning, defense mechanisms, etc.



Tool Analogy for Relative Enlightenment/Endarkenment
(Relatively) Unenlightened Functioning



Relatively Unenlightened Functioning: Board "cut" with Hammer

Insensitive perception	Hammers don't cut well
Biased perception, attachment	My hammer is <i>my</i> hammer and expensive!
Personal needs predominate	It's too much trouble to find the *!@*!& saw!
Actions have many unintended consequences	Won't fit & boss says do it over again...
Only partial knowledge available	Doesn't recall previous experiences of results of not planning ahead
Neurotic, selfish, egotistical	Damned boss always criticizing <i>me!</i>

Q1- What is "enlightenment?"

Q2- Cultural effects

Q3 - All end up same place?

Relatively Enlightened Functioning



Board cut with Saw



Foundations for relatively enlightened functioning: knowing what tool/state is suitable for the task and having it available

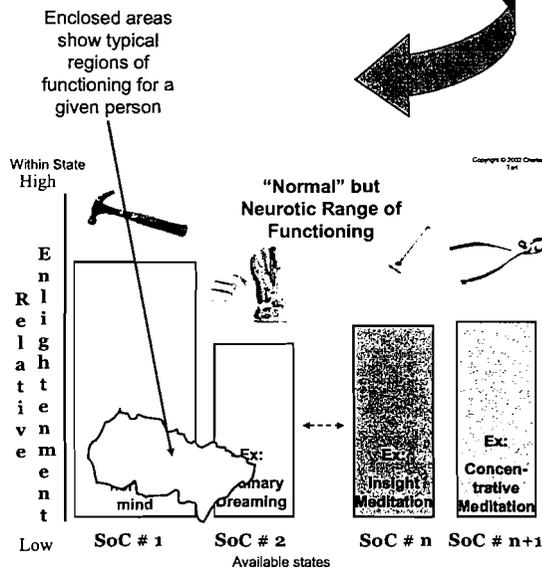
Relatively Enlightened Functioning

Sensitive perception	Knows good tool for job
Unbiased perception, non-attachment	Task determines right tool, not attached to <i>my</i> tool
Personal needs subordinate to task, higher goals	Go find right tool. Enjoy the walk!
Actions have few unintended consequences	Outcomes fit well into necessary sequence
All relevant knowledge available	Recalls right tool & consequences of using wrong tool
Transcendent, ego negligible	Satisfaction of job well done

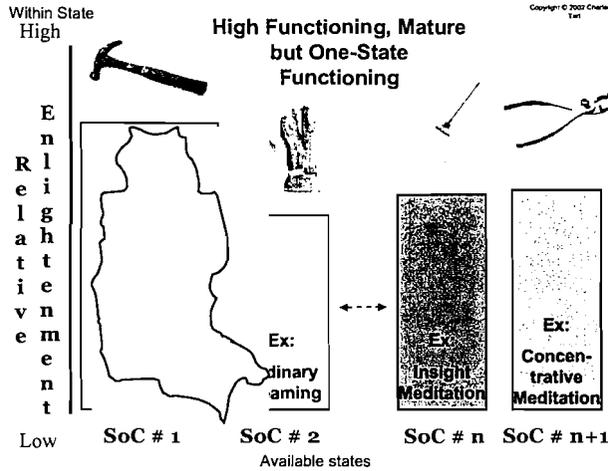
Possibilities in 2 Dimensions of Relative Enlightenment

“Normal,” Somewhat Neurotic Functioning:

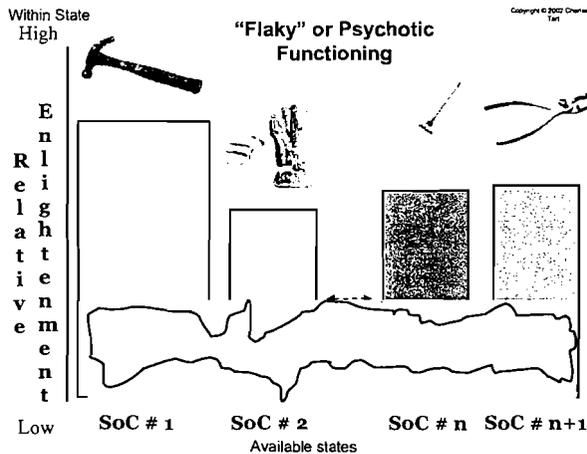
Many people exist almost exclusively within ordinary, consensus consciousness, with occasional dream recall. This is a relatively endarkened kind of existence, with 2 SoCs at most available and lower levels of functioning within those states.



Mixed Enlightenment/Endarkenment: High Level, But Single State Functioning. Many “successful” (by conventional standards) people have only their ordinary, consensus consciousness SoC available (with perhaps some dream recall), but function throughout the entire range of that state, especially the high end. They are relatively enlightened.

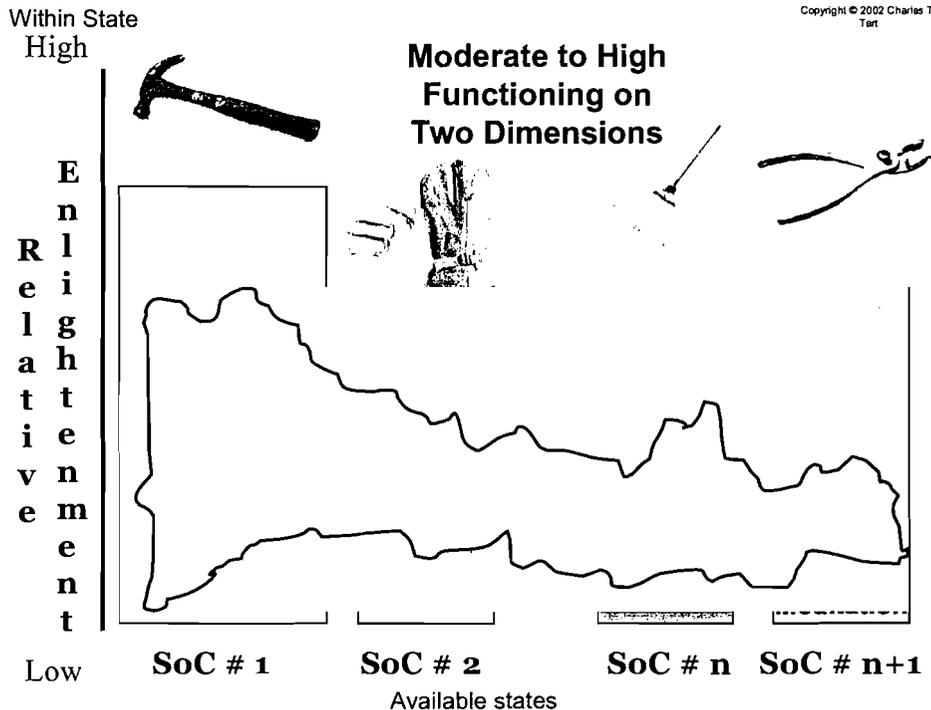


They use the tools and functions of consensus consciousness well, but are also relatively endarkened through not having access to some kinds of functions and understandings that are *state-specific* and thus not available in consensus consciousness.



Relatively Endarkened:

We have all met people who have access to unusual experiences in a variety of altered SoCs, but seem to function at the low, neurotic end of the spectrum within each of these SoCs. Exotic and colorful folks, perhaps, but not very happy or effective in life.



This is just a start. What needs to be added? Clarified? Demystified? "Mystified?"

Some Other Dimensions that could be explored in their various combinations and consequences include:

-Wide-mindedness: Too little concentration makes us ineffective, too much makes us blind to other, significant aspects of situations.

-Perception/Concept Ratio: It's easy to "live in your head," so immersed in concepts (influenced by your personality and psychodynamics) that accurate perception of reality is too low. Would a relatively enlightened person have a high perception-to-concept ratio?

-Tools for handling stress: Relative enlightenment may be easy sitting in a cave in the mountains and feeling serene, but how do you deal with annoying people without losing whatever relative enlightenment you have?

--Unconscious versus conscious enlightenment: Training and willpower may produce relative enlightenment at a conscious level, but what is needed to produce it at an unconscious level, so the "enlightened" person does not have a major Jungian Shadow side?

-Grace: G. I. Gurdjieff said "Work as if everything depends on work. Pray as if everything depends on prayer." Help from ostensible non-corporeal sources is an upsetting and rejected concept in most scientific endeavors, but experiential *data* is that many report things this way. How do we deal with it?