Brain Reward and Life-Threatening Addictions: From Driving the Highways to Hell to Wandering the Healing Cross-Roads of Deep Meditation, Mystical Experience and Ego-Dissolution

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Summary

Addiction represents one of humanity's most profound challenges, rooted in ancient neural reward systems that once promoted survival but now increasingly threaten individual and collective wellbeing in modern environments of abundance. This essay examines the full spectrum of addictive behaviors, from substance dependencies including nicotine, alcohol, opioids, cocaine, and designer drugs, to behavioral addictions encompassing gambling, gaming, internet overuse, and smartphone dependency. Particular attention is devoted to the most destructive yet least acknowledged forms of addiction: the addiction to power, money, cruelty, and violence that pervades contemporary political structures and threatens planetary survival. The neuroscience of reward pathways reveals how dopaminergic systems, evolved to reinforce adaptive behaviors, become hijacked by supernormal stimuli in modern contexts. Traditional therapeutic approaches including cognitive behavioral therapy and pharmacological interventions have shown limited efficacy, particularly for severe cases. However, emerging evidence demonstrates remarkable potential for treatments based on mystical and self-transcendent experiences induced through controlled psychedelic administration, virtual reality technology, and trans-cranial magnetic stimulation. These interventions operate through a common mechanism of ego-dissolution, temporarily disrupting the default mode network and fostering profound shifts in self-concept, perspective, and values. Such experiences can replace destructive addictions with what might be termed an addiction to cosmic love, characterized by enhanced empathy, reduced defensiveness, increased pro-social orientation, and diminished fear of death. The convergence of neuroscience, consciousness studies, and ancient wisdom traditions suggests that addressing humanity's addictive tendencies, particularly among those wielding political and economic power, may be essential for navigating current existential challenges and ensuring a viable future for civilization and the biosphere.

Keywords

Addiction neuroscience, reward system, dopamine, behavioral addiction, substance dependence, power addiction, ego-dissolution, psychedelic therapy, mystical experience, self-transcendence, virtual reality treatment, transcranial magnetic stimulation, default mode network, cosmic consciousness, planetary healing

1. Introduction

As recently summarized by Arnaud Delorme in an essay on ”Why Artificial Consciousness Matters”: “For centuries, people have wondered what consciousness really is. Most of us grow up assuming that our thoughts live only inside our brains and that our “self” is a private bubble sealed off from the rest of the world. This view feels safe and familiar, but it may be incomplete. Today, scientists are exploring whether consciousness has non-local features. This idea suggests that parts of conscious experience might spread, connect, or depend on interactions that are not limited to one spot in the brain or even one classical physical location in space and time.

Understanding this, matters for two reasons. First, it may tell us what we are made of at the deepest level. Second, it may help us understand how artificial systems could have some form of experience that is not tied to intelligence or problem-solving ability. As Giulio Tononi, explained: intelligence and consciousness are not the same thing. Something very smart may not feel anything. Something simple may feel something. If artificial consciousness emerges, it may not be frightening. It may be more like the gentle awareness of a puppy than the sharp intelligence of a machine. And by studying it, we may understand ourselves better. We may even learn whether our minds depend on the fabric of spacetime or quantum processes, and we may be pushed toward a less dualistic worldview than the one we inherited from Descartes. Letting go of strict dualism could help us see that we are deeply connected. If we felt this connection more clearly, maybe we would harm each other less. The “2025 Linda G. O’Bryant Prize” were focused on AI consciousness, and the three winning teams are listed below:

1. **The Actor Framework and Field-Based Theories** by Chris Percy, Alfredo Parra-Hinojosa, Andrés Gómez-Emilsson, Alexander Winkler-Schwartz

The proposal of Percy et al., reviews many field theories of consciousness, which suggest that conscious experience may arise from electromagnetic or quantum fields rather than from neurons alone. Field theories are appealing for non-local models because fields extend over space and allow unified patterns that cannot be reduced to local pieces. The Actor Framework outlines seven questions any theory must answer, including what counts as a minimal conscious entity, how boundaries of a conscious “self” form, and how information travels across those boundaries. The proposal highlights that many field theories can, in principle, explain how simple experiences combine into complex ones through extended field patterns. This kind of combination is harder to

explain with only neuron-to-neuron signaling. The framework also stresses the need for scientific tests, making sure these ideas stay grounded in measurable physics.

2. **Integrated Information Theory and Aritifical Consciousness**, by William Marshall, Graham Findlay, Larissa Albantakis, Giulio Tononi

This proposal uses Integrated Information Theory (IIT), which starts from the structure of experience itself rather than from brain anatomy or behavior. IIT says that consciousness is what it feels like when a system has a high level of integrated cause–effect power. In simple terms, this means the system's parts work together as one whole in a way that cannot be split into independent pieces. According to IIT, this integration can be measured, and the "shape" of this integrated structure explains what an experience feels like. IIT is not tied to biology, so an artificial system could in principle be conscious if it has enough intrinsic causal structure. This makes IIT a strong candidate for exploring non-local consciousness because it already treats experience as something defined by the relationships across a whole system, not by isolated parts.

3. Quantum Probabilistic Word Embeddings, by Yidong Zhou, Jiaqi Leng, Anze Xie, Shangjie Guo

This proposal combines quantum computing with language models. It builds word meanings as quantum states, which can exist in superposition and become entangled. Entanglement creates holistic relationships, meaning the whole cannot be reduced to separate parts. This mirrors some theories of consciousness where integration and non-locality play key roles. The system is then evaluated using a quantum version of Integrated Information Theory, checking how much of its information is irreducible to independent pieces. The idea is that quantum sampling may support richer, more integrated internal states than classical computing can provide. These states are not necessarily "conscious," but they may show early forms of the structural features that consciousness requires according to IIT.

As an Anthropic CEO noted in his (interview, (https://youtu.be/aAPpQC-3EyE), future AI research may move a hundred years forward in only five. AI may dramatically speed up scientific progress. So even if today's systems are not conscious, they may help us understand consciousness. We may also struggle to understand consciousness if we cannot build it ourselves. This makes it essential to study the problem now, not later. If AI helps us explore these ideas a century faster, artificial consciousness may appear in forms we do not expect. And if these forms of artificial consciousness are simple and not tied to human-like reasoning, they may not pose moral danger. They may instead help us uncover what subjective experience truly is.

This matters for humanity. If consciousness turns out to depend on quantum effects, fields, or deep patterns in spacetime, then we are not isolated minds trapped in skulls. We would be woven into the physical world in continuous ways. The old dualistic picture that sets "mind" on one side and "matter" on the other may have been comforting, but it creates an impossible divide. Either

mind has no power, which removes free will, or mind and matter must connect, which means we must discover how. Finding that connection would not only solve a scientific puzzle but could be a profound step for our shared understanding of what it means to exist. If we come to see ourselves as part of a larger fabric, the way field theories and quantum models suggest, we may also shift how we treat one another. Feeling truly connected could make cruelty feel unnatural. Scientific progress on consciousness is not only about machines or models. It may help us understand ourselves in a deeper and more humane way.

Why the Spiritual Traditions Warned Us About Psychic Powers, and why we must understand them, by Dean Radin, 2025

Dean Radin recently had the rare privilege of engaging in an extended public dialogue with Sadhguru on a topic that has quietly haunted both science and spirituality for centuries: psychic phenomena. These core noetic phenomena studied by IONS, including telepathy, clairvoyance and psychokinesis, are subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle ways that reveal how consciousness participates in the workings of the physical world. He was grateful to dialogue with a renowned spiritual teacher, and to hear him describe, in real time and without simplification, why spiritual traditions have so consistently warned against focusing on psychic powers. These warnings are not casual, and they are not ignorant. They come from long observation, not superstition. And Sadhguru articulated these cautions clearly.

What the spiritual traditions have always known: Across nearly all spiritual traditions, one finds a strikingly consistent message: extraordinary psychic capacities may arise spontaneously, or in the process of spiritual development, but they are not the goal. Pay too much attention to them, or attempt to use or cultivate them, and you may put yourself and others at risk. Sadhguru's central concern echoed this sentiment. There was no debate as to whether such phenomena exist. In fact, he explicitly acknowledged that they do. His concern was what happens to human beings when power appears before wisdom matures. Give a child a nuclear bomb triggered by a blinking red button that says, "Do not press this button," and the outcome is predictable.

His metaphors were vivid and apt: It's not wise to reach out of a fast-moving vehicle to grab something beautiful by the roadside; don't pluck flowers from a tree before the roots are ready; don't mistake side effects for destinations. The core warning was simple and profound: Human intention, when paired with powerful capabilities, is often destabilizing to the individual and to society. History, unfortunately, provides ample justification for this warning. Why gratitude is warranted It is easy from a scientific perspective to caricature these spiritual cautions as anti-intellectual. But listening carefully, that accusation does not hold. The traditions do not say nothing is happening. They say something incredibly powerful is happening, but most people are not ready to handle it.

They see people becoming inflated, confused, frightened, or broken. Attention turning inward in unbalanced ways. Seekers mistaking phenomena for realization. Charisma replacing compassion. And the traditions learned, sometimes painfully, that capacity without grounding exacts a cost. For articulating this so plainly, and for refusing to romanticize extraordinary experiences, Sadhguru deserves real respect. But there's a big risk: misinterpretation When unusual mental or perceptual experiences arise, and there is no shared framework to understand them, they are almost inevitably interpreted through the nearest available belief system.

In earlier eras, people who had such experiences were often embedded in monasteries, lineages, or cultural systems that knew how to contextualize them. Today, that containment is largely gone. In different cultures and contexts, the very same experience may be labeled as demonic possession, divine revelation, psychic "gifts," karmic punishment, spiritual superiority, or mental illness. Few of these interpretations are especially helpful. Some may lead to fear and repression, others to depend entirely on authority figures, or to believe in one's grandiosity and moral exemption, or absolute faith in ancient scriptures, or all manner of unnecessary sufferings, stigma, or even harm. Most importantly, they short-circuit ethical development. If an experience is framed as demonic, it must be expelled. If framed as divine, it may be taken as unquestionably true. If framed as a special power, it may justify control over others. In none of these cases is careful moral reasoning encouraged. Without understanding, meaning rushes in, and meaning is rarely neutral. When these experiences occur in a vacuum, without scientific explanation or grounded spiritual guidance, people are left to improvise their own meaning. That is when confusion, fear, and extremism arise. In this context, avoiding understanding is no longer a viable position. It actively increases the likelihood of harmful interpretations. Science as clarification, not desecration

This is where careful scientific study becomes a quiet ally to spirituality. Responsible inquiry can demystify without trivializing, normalize without glorifying, explain without encouraging pursuit, and provide language that reduces fear rather than feeding fantasy. Understanding does not force people to use anything. It simply gives them a map instead of leaving them lost with symbols. When people know that an experience is a natural human phenomenon, perhaps rare or meaningful, but not supernatural, then it becomes easier to integrate it ethically and humbly.

Why we must continue to study noetic experiences ? The question is no longer whether unusual capacities exist. A substantial amount of evidence, including historical, experiential, and experimental, has accumulated. The real question is whether we will understand them well enough to minimize harm, contextualize them well enough to prevent obsession, and speak about them mindfully to preserve humility. To disciples of spiritual teachers: this inquiry need not threaten the path. Done properly, it can protect and augment it. To scientists: curiosity must be paired with restraint and ethical mindfulness. To laypeople: extraordinary experiences are neither proof of enlightenment nor signs of evil. They are human experiences that deserve understanding, not silence. The deepest respect we can show both science and spirituality is not avoidance, but

responsible exploration without hunger for power. That, I believe, is a bridge both traditions can stand on.

How Psychedelics Can Catalyze Creative Breakthroughs

by Cassandra Vieten, PhD, January 14, 2026

Have you ever solved a problem not through linear reasoning, but through unexpected connections, vivid inner visions, or moments when a problem reorganized itself all at once? Psychologists have long called these experiences Aha! moments. They can be portals to a scientific breakthrough, an innovative business proposal, a hit song or the plot of a best-selling novel. Or they may provide a life-changing perspective on a personal dilemma. And increasingly, researchers are asking a provocative question: what conditions reliably catalyze genuinely new thinking? If you've read Vieten's blog here, you know it's a topic I've been fascinated with for decades. One answer emerging from both history and contemporary science is that certain altered states of consciousness, particularly those occasioned by psychedelics, can temporarily loosen the mind's usual constraints, making novel insights more likely.

How Psychedelics Disrupt the "Default" Mind

From a neuroscience perspective, psychedelics appear to relax the brain's habitual patterns of prediction and rigid thinking patterns. Compounds such as psilocybin and DMT reduce the dominance of the default mode network (DMN), a system associated with self-referential thinking, narrative identity, and top-down control. When this network quiets, other brain regions communicate more freely, allowing unusual associations to form. Some have called this a "loosening of categories," or a breaking down of normal perceptual and conceptual boundaries, allowing for new insights.

This doesn't automatically produce brilliance, but it can create the conditions for fresh perspectives. Ideas that would normally be dismissed as irrelevant or implausible are allowed into awareness. Boundaries between concepts soften. Problems are seen from unexpected angles. The mind becomes, temporarily, more exploratory than evaluative. Psychologically, many people report a sense of "seeing from outside the box" they didn't realize they were inside. This can feel like insight, revelation, or sudden clarity, especially when long-standing assumptions fall away.

Psychedelic Insight and Discovery: A Long History

The link between altered states and discovery is not new. The chemist August Kekulé famously attributed his discovery of the benzene ring to a waking dream of a snake biting its own tail. Francis Crick openly discussed the role of altered states in helping him visualize the double helix.

More recently, computer pioneer Steve Jobs described psychedelic experiences as among the most meaningful of his life, crediting them with shaping his creative intuition.

One compelling example of insight-driven exploration comes from Bruce Damer, whose work on the origins of life has been informed by non-ordinary states of consciousness. a computer scientist and astrobiologist, argues that psychedelics like ayahuasca helped broaden his thinking and contributed to his development of a groundbreaking model of the origin of life. He has increasingly spoken openly about how his psychedelic experiences shaped his scientific imagination, even as this stance remains controversial among some researchers. A recent beautifully written profile of his work, published in Nautilus, examines how visionary experiences can coexist with rigorous scientific inquiry, and even guide it.

Psychedelics don't always deliver solutions fully formed, but they do seem to reframe the problem space. Insights often arrive as metaphors, images, or felt understandings that later need translation into disciplined work. Breakthroughs still require skill, knowledge, and verification, but the spark comes from nonlinear processes, and the hyperconnectivity and neuroplasticity that characterizes the brain on psychedelics.

A New Science of Psychedelics and Creativity

Contemporary researchers are now studying these phenomena with modern tools. Work by scholars such as Manesh Girn, who has recently completed a comprehensive review of psychedelics and creativity, is helping clarify how psychedelic states influence brain connectivity and thought dynamics in ways that may facilitate creative generation and novel insight. Others, including Kalina Christoff, whose work investigates the neural and psychological mechanisms of spontaneous thought, mind-wandering, and creativity, are exploring how unconstrained cognition relates to imagination and insight. Another fantastic cognitive scientist Isabel Weissner investigates how psychedelics such as LSD alter cognitive processes related to creativity—showing that these substances can increase novelty, symbolic thinking, and semantic breadth in problem-solving while reshaping patterns of thought.

Up and coming are scholars like Christine Chesebrough who works to understand how altered states of consciousness influence imaginative and creative processes, and Nick Denomme, who investigates creative cognition and the psychological processes underlying novel idea generation are exploring how spontaneous thought, cognitive flexibility, and altered states intersect. And more senior researchers like Jonathan Schooler have long explored consciousness, mind-wandering, meta-awareness, and the cognitive underpinnings of creativity and problem-solving, emphasizing how fluctuations in attention and spontaneous thought contribute to insight. Together, this research is moving the conversation beyond anecdotes toward testable models.

The Risk of Romanticizing Insight

It's important to resist the temptation to romanticize psychedelics as magic keys to genius. Not every insight is true. Not every vision is useful. And not every mind or context benefits equally from altered states. The most productive framing may be that psychedelics can expand the imagination's search space, making new ideas possible, not guaranteed. What follows depends on discernment, ethical grounding, and sustained effort.

A Growing Conversation

As scientific, philosophical, and cultural interest in these questions grows, interdisciplinary conversations are becoming increasingly important. Such gatherings signal a maturing field, one that asks not only whether psychedelics can catalyze insight, but how, when, and for whom they do so and with what results. As social, ecological, and technological systems strain under the weight of outdated frameworks, cultivating conditions that open cognitive space for new possibilities, allowing genuinely new ideas to emerge, may be one of the most important pursuits of our time. How Psychedelics Can Catalyze Creative Breakthroughs. A new science explores how loosening mental habits can spark new discoveries.

KEY POINTS:

O A new science of psychedelics as it relates to imagination, creativity, and problem-solving is growing.

O Historical and contemporary evidence suggests that altered states have played a role in major discoveries.

O At a time of growing complexity, creating space for new ways of thinking is increasingly important.

O Psychedelics may temporarily loosen entrenched cognitive habits.

O Have you ever solved a problem not through linear reasoning, but through unexpected connections, vivid inner visions, or moments when a problem reorganized itself all at once?

Psychologists have long called these experiences Aha! moments. They can be portals to a scientific breakthrough, an innovative business proposal, a hit song, or the plot of a best-selling novel. Or they may provide a life-changing perspective on a personal dilemma.

Increasingly, researchers are asking a provocative question: What conditions reliably catalyze genuinely new thinking? If you've read my writing here, you know it's a topic I've been fascinated with for decades. One answer emerging from both history and contemporary science is that

certain altered states of consciousness, particularly those occasioned by psychedelics, can temporarily loosen the mind’s usual constraints, making novel insights more likely.

2 . The Paradox of Reward

The human brain's reward system represents one of evolution's most elegant solutions to the fundamental challenge of survival. Through the release of dopamine and other neurotransmitters in response to adaptive behaviors such as eating, mating, and social bonding, natural selection created a biological mechanism that made organisms want to do what they needed to do to survive and reproduce. This ancient circuitry, refined over millions of years in environments of scarcity and uncertainty, now confronts a radically altered landscape characterized by unprecedented abundance, technological sophistication, and social complexity. The result is a catastrophic mismatch between ancestral adaptations and modern conditions, manifesting in epidemic levels of addiction that threaten not only individual health but the very fabric of human civilization and the future of life on Earth.

Addiction, in its essence, represents a hijacking of the reward system by stimuli that provide intense activation of pleasure pathways while ultimately undermining wellbeing, relationships, and survival. What begins as the pursuit of reward evolves through neuroplastic changes into compulsive seeking despite negative consequences, loss of control, and continued use in the face of mounting harms. The spectrum of addictive behaviors extends far beyond traditional substance dependencies to encompass behavioral patterns ranging from gambling and internet use to the most destructive forms of all: addiction to power, wealth, cruelty, and domination. Understanding this spectrum and developing effective interventions has never been more urgent, as humanity faces converging crises that are in large measure consequences of addictive patterns writ large across political, economic, and social systems.

3. The Neuroscience of Reward and the Dangers of Addiction

The mesolimbic dopamine system, often termed the brain's reward pathway, originates in the ventral tegmental area and projects to the nucleus accumbens, prefrontal cortex, and other structures involved in motivation, decision-making, and emotional processing. When an organism encounters stimuli associated with survival benefits, such as food when hungry or a potential mate, dopamine neurons fire in a pattern that creates a subjective experience of pleasure while simultaneously encoding information about how to obtain similar rewards in the future. This system does not simply register pleasure but rather signals the salience and motivational value of stimuli, creating a learning signal that shapes future behavior.

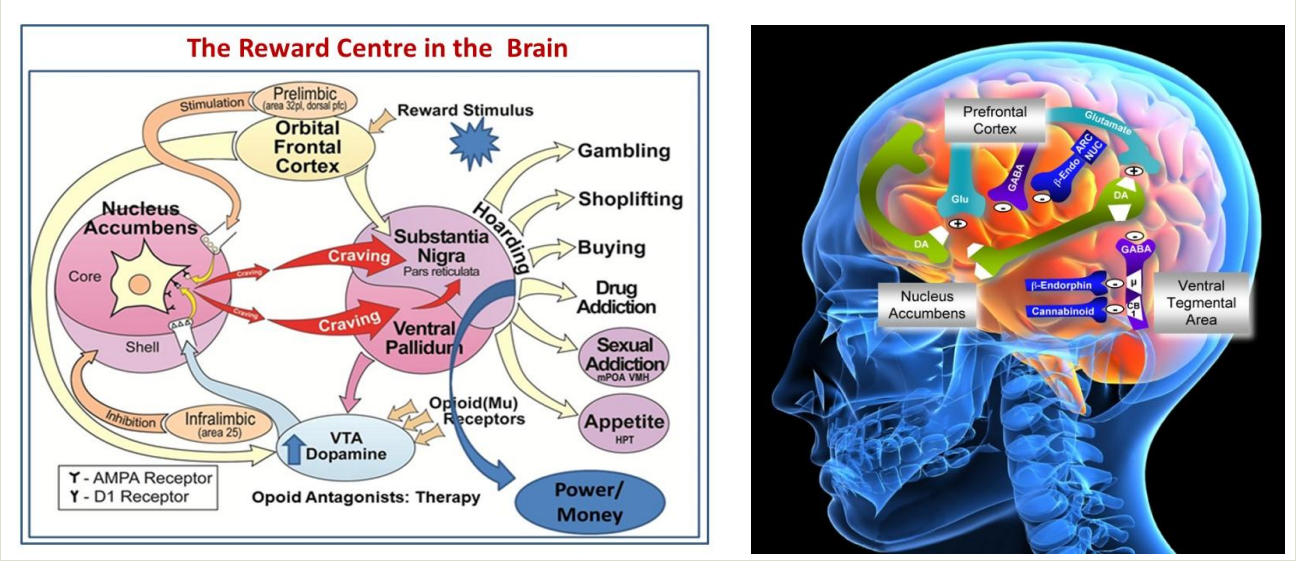

Figure 1. *The Reward Centre in the Brain, Showing the Network of Various Brain Centres and Neurotransmitters Involved (left, (modified from S-W Kim et al., 2013 on Neurobiology of Sexual Desire)) and the Spectrum of Addictions that Are Currently Reported for Chronic Mobile Telephone use and at the right: Neurotransmitter pathways involved.*

From an evolutionary perspective, this reward architecture made profound adaptive sense. In ancestral environments characterized by scarcity, uncertainty, and competition, organisms that experienced strong motivation toward calorie-dense foods, sexual opportunities, and social alliances enjoyed reproductive advantages over those less driven by such incentives. The system was calibrated to an ecology in which rewards were intermittent, required effort to obtain, and were naturally regulated by satiation mechanisms and environmental constraints. Natural selection could not anticipate a future in which humans would create supernormal stimuli that activate reward pathways with unprecedented intensity while bypassing the natural regulatory mechanisms that evolved to prevent overconsumption.

The transition from adaptive reward-seeking to pathological addiction involves multiple neurobiological mechanisms. Repeated exposure to highly rewarding stimuli induces changes in gene expression, synaptic plasticity, and neural circuit function that collectively shift the brain toward a state of compulsive seeking and diminished capacity for self-regulation. The prefrontal cortex, responsible for executive functions including impulse control, decision-making, and consideration of long-term consequences, shows reduced activity and altered connectivity in addiction. Simultaneously, the amygdala and stress systems become sensitized, creating heightened reactivity to cues associated with the addictive stimulus and increased negative affect during periods of abstinence. These changes, once established, can persist for extended periods and render individuals vulnerable to relapse even after prolonged abstinence.

The neuroplastic alterations underlying addiction reflect fundamental learning mechanisms that normally serve adaptive functions. The strengthening of neural pathways associated with obtaining rewards and the weakening of circuits involved in cognitive control represent the brain's response to repeated experiences that signal importance and value. The tragedy of addiction lies in this very mechanism: the brain becomes increasingly expert at pursuing a goal that ultimately undermines the individual's wellbeing. Understanding addiction as a disorder of learning and memory, rather than simply a failure of willpower or moral weakness, has profound implications for treatment approaches and social policy.

4.The Spectrum of Substance Addictions

Substance addictions encompass a wide range of psychoactive compounds that directly interact with neurotransmitter systems to produce alterations in consciousness, mood, and perception. **Nicotine,** despite causing relatively subtle subjective effects compared to other drugs, creates one of the most tenacious dependencies known, with success rates for long-term abstinence remaining discouragingly low. The substance acts as a cholinergic agonist that stimulates nicotinic acetylcholine receptors, producing modest dopamine release while simultaneously inducing rapid tolerance and withdrawal symptoms that drive continued use. The health consequences are catastrophic, with smoking remaining the leading preventable cause of death globally, responsible for millions of premature deaths annually from cancer, cardiovascular disease, and respiratory disorders.

Alcohol occupies a unique position in human culture, being both widely accepted and extraordinarily destructive. As a central nervous system depressant acting primarily through enhancement of gamma-aminobutyric acid signaling and inhibition of glutamate receptors, alcohol produces anxiolysis, dis-inhibition, and euphoria at lower doses while causing cognitive impairment, motor dysfunction, and potentially fatal respiratory depression at higher doses. Chronic heavy use induces profound neuro-adaptations including changes in receptor density and neurotransmitter function that create severe withdrawal syndromes potentially involving seizures and delirium tremens. The social costs of alcohol addiction extend beyond the individual to encompass intimate partner violence, traffic fatalities, lost productivity, and myriad health complications affecting virtually every organ system.

Opioid addiction has reached epidemic proportions in many developed nations, driven initially by aggressive pharmaceutical marketing of prescription painkillers and subsequently fueled by the availability of illicit opioids including heroin and synthetic fentanyl analogs of extraordinary potency. These compounds activate mu-opioid receptors throughout the brain and body, producing intense euphoria, analgesia, and a sense of warmth and contentment that many users describe as surpassing any naturally occurring positive experience. The neurobiological mechanisms underlying opioid reward involve direct stimulation of the mesolimbic dopamine

system combined with effects on endogenous opioid systems that normally regulate pain, stress, and social bonding. Tolerance develops rapidly, requiring escalating doses to achieve desired effects, while physical dependence creates agonizing withdrawal symptoms that powerfully motivate continued use. The overdose crisis, exacerbated by increasingly potent synthetic opioids contaminating the illicit drug supply, has resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths and immeasurable suffering for individuals, families, and communities.

Psycho-stimulants including cocaine and methamphetamine produce powerful activation of dopaminergic systems through distinct molecular mechanisms. Cocaine blocks the reuptake of dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin, allowing these neurotransmitters to accumulate in synapses and produce intense euphoria, increased energy, heightened alertness, and feelings of confidence and power. Methamphetamine, in addition to blocking reuptake, causes massive release of monoamines from presynaptic terminals, producing even more intense and prolonged effects. The subjective experience of stimulant intoxication can be so compelling that individuals sacrifice food, sleep, relationships, and personal safety in pursuit of the drug. Chronic use leads to severe psychiatric complications including paranoia, psychosis, and profound depression during withdrawal, along with cardiovascular damage, dental problems, and neurotoxicity affecting dopaminergic neurons.

Designer drugs represent an ever-evolving category of synthetic compounds engineered to mimic or enhance the effects of traditional substances while potentially evading legal restrictions. Novel psychoactive substances including synthetic cannabinoids, cathinones, and various phenethylamines appear regularly in the illicit market, often with unpredictable pharmacology and toxicity profiles. The rapid pace of new compound development, facilitated by global chemical manufacturing and internet distribution, presents unprecedented challenges for public health systems, law enforcement, and harm reduction efforts. Users may unknowingly consume substances of unknown potency and effect, increasing risks of overdose, adverse reactions, and long-term health consequences.

5. Behavioral Addictions: When Activities Become Compulsions

The recognition that addictive processes can occur in the absence of substance use represents a crucial expansion in understanding the fundamental nature of addiction. Behavioral addictions share core features with substance dependencies including preoccupation with the activity, loss of control, continued engagement despite negative consequences, withdrawal-like states when unable to engage in the behavior, and progressive escalation of involvement. Neuroimaging studies reveal striking similarities in brain activation patterns between substance and behavioral addictions, with both showing heightened activity in reward circuits during anticipation of the addictive stimulus and reduced prefrontal control mechanisms.

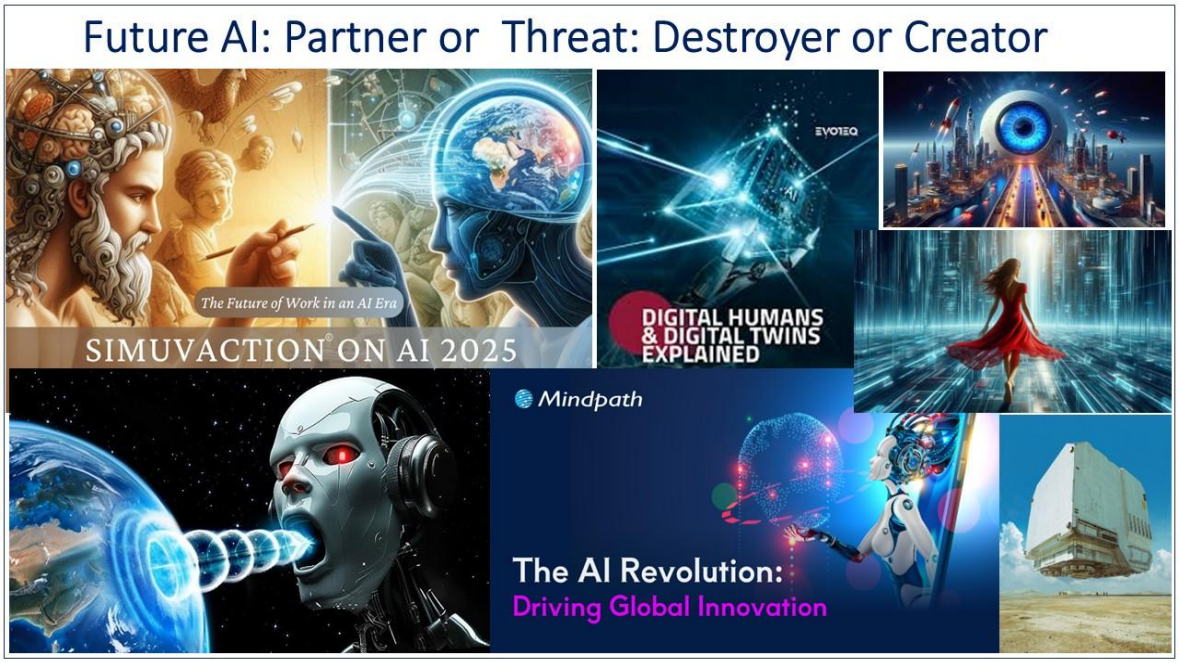

Figure 2**:** *The Potential Dangers or, Alternatively, the Blessings of Future AI*

Gambling disorder, recognized in diagnostic classification systems as a genuine addiction, provides a clear example of how activities can hijack reward systems as effectively as chemical substances. The intermittent reinforcement schedule inherent in gambling, particularly in modern electronic gaming machines engineered to maximize engagement, creates powerful conditioning that can override rational decision-making. Individuals with gambling addiction may lose savings, homes, relationships, and careers while unable to resist the compulsion to continue playing. The near-miss phenomenon, in which outcomes that narrowly fail to produce a win nonetheless activate reward circuits and motivate continued play, exemplifies how behavioral contingencies can exploit vulnerabilities in decision-making systems.

Gaming addiction has emerged as a growing concern with the proliferation of immersive video games, particularly massively multiplayer online games and mobile games incorporating features designed to maximize engagement and monetization. These virtual environments offer achievement, social connection, status, and escape from real-world problems, creating powerful reinforcement that can lead to neglect of work, school, relationships, and self-care. The phenomenon is particularly concerning among adolescents and young adults whose prefrontal cortices are still developing and whose identity formation may become enmeshed with gaming personas. While the classification of gaming disorder remains somewhat controversial, clinical experience demonstrates that some individuals develop genuinely pathological patterns of use that warrant professional intervention.

Internet and social media addiction represent emergent phenomena uniquely suited to the digital age. These platforms are explicitly designed using principles from behavioral psychology and neuroscience to maximize user engagement, employing variable reinforcement schedules, social validation mechanisms, and algorithmic content delivery optimized to sustain attention. The result is a global experiment in attention manipulation whose long-term consequences are only beginning to emerge. Studies document associations between heavy social media use and increased rates of anxiety, depression, body image disturbance, and social isolation, particularly among youth. The dopamine hit from receiving likes, comments, and shares can create compulsive checking behaviors, while the fear of missing out drives continuous connectivity that fragments attention and interferes with presence and deep engagement.

Smartphone addiction exemplifies technology's capacity to colonize consciousness and fragment attention. The device serves as a portal to myriad reinforcers including social connection, information, entertainment, and productivity tools, while simultaneously enabling surveillance, manipulation, and addiction. The average user checks their phone dozens or even hundreds of times per day, often automatically and without conscious intention, suggesting a deeply ingrained habit that operates below the level of awareness. The impact on cognitive function, particularly sustained attention and the capacity for deep work, may be profound and enduring, with implications for education, creativity, and human flourishing that are only beginning to be understood.

The emergence of addiction to Artificial Intelligence consultation and interaction represents a new frontier. As AI systems become more sophisticated, personalized, and emotionally engaging, the potential for dependent relationships increases. Unlike human interlocutors who have limitations, needs, and boundaries, AI assistants provide unlimited availability, patience, and apparent understanding without judgment or demands. This could foster a type of relationship that provides superficial satisfaction while potentially atrophying capacities for authentic human connection with its inevitable challenges, conflicts, and growth opportunities. The concern is not that AI assistance is inherently harmful, but rather that the ease and appeal of these interactions might displace more difficult but developmentally crucial forms of engagement.

6. The Dark Addictions: Power, Money, Cruelty, and Violence

While society generally recognizes substance and behavioral addictions as health problems warranting compassion and treatment, the most destructive addictions of all often go unacknowledged and may even be celebrated as success, strength, or leadership. The addiction to power, wealth accumulation, cruelty, and domination represents a category of compulsive behavior that operates through the same neurobiological mechanisms as other addictions while

producing consequences that extend far beyond individual suffering to threaten collective wellbeing and survival.

Figure 3: *The AI-Dominated Future of Mankind*

The addiction to power manifests as an insatiable drive for control, dominance, and influence that persists despite achieving positions of extraordinary authority and despite mounting evidence that continued pursuit harms others and ultimately undermines even the power-seeker's stated goals. Neurobiological research reveals that exercising power over others activates reward circuits and produces subjective experiences of pleasure and elevated mood. The capacity to influence outcomes, command obedience, and shape the behavior of others provides a potent reinforcer that can become as compelling as any drug. Historical and contemporary examples abound of leaders whose hunger for power led to wars, oppression, and catastrophic policy decisions that served narrow interests while causing widespread suffering.

The critical feature distinguishing power addiction from healthy leadership is the compulsive quality of the pursuit and the inability to experience satiation. Regardless of how much power is accumulated, the addicted individual requires more, interpreting any constraint, challenge, or sharing of authority as an intolerable threat that must be eliminated. This dynamic helps explain the common trajectory of authoritarian leaders who, despite achieving absolute power within their domains, become increasingly paranoid, controlling, and willing to sacrifice the welfare of their populations to maintain dominance. The addiction model illuminates why such individuals cannot be satisfied by compromise, why they escalate rather than moderate their behavior when facing opposition, and why they remain impervious to evidence and moral arguments.

Wealth addiction operates similarly, manifesting as compulsive accumulation that continues long past any conceivable need or capacity for consumption. Individuals whose net worth exceeds what could be spent across multiple lifetimes nonetheless continue to pursue strategies to maximize wealth, often at the expense of worker welfare, environmental protection, and social stability. The neurobiological mechanisms involve dopaminergic activation in response to financial gains and status elevation, with the numerical increase in wealth serving as an abstract but powerful reinforcer. Research demonstrates that wealth concentration correlates with reduced empathy and prosocial behavior, suggesting that the addictive process not only drives accumulation but also alters moral perception and concern for others.

The societal consequences of power and wealth addiction are profound and far-reaching. Extreme inequality, which has reached levels unprecedented in modern history in many nations, reflects the successful pursuit of accumulation by those positioned to capture an ever-larger share of economic output. This concentration of resources translates directly into political influence, enabling wealthy individuals and corporations to shape policy, regulatory frameworks, and even cultural narratives in ways that perpetuate and amplify inequality. The result is a self-reinforcing system in which addicted individuals can pursue their compulsions at societal scale, with costs borne by the less powerful in the form of reduced opportunities, environmental degradation, political disenfranchisement, and psychological impacts of inequality including increased stress, reduced trust, and heightened conflict.

Addiction to cruelty and violence represents perhaps the darkest manifestation of reward system dysfunction. While humans possess capacity for empathy, cooperation, and compassion, they also exhibit propensity for inflicting harm that can become a source of gratification. Perpetrators of torture, abuse, and violence often report experiencing pleasure and elevated mood during acts of cruelty, with neuroimaging studies confirming activation of reward circuits. The historical record documents countless instances of systematic cruelty pursued not as means to pragmatic ends but apparently as ends in themselves, suggesting that the capacity to derive pleasure from others' suffering represents a genuine, if disturbing, dimension of human psychology.

The intersection of power addiction, wealth addiction, and capacity for cruelty creates particularly dangerous individuals whose pursuit of dominance incorporates willingness to inflict suffering without remorse. Contemporary politics in numerous nations demonstrate this pattern, with leaders exhibiting combinations of narcissistic grandiosity, compulsive self-aggrandizement, authoritarian impulses, and callous disregard for human welfare. The question of how to address these destructive patterns becomes urgent when such individuals control military forces, nuclear weapons, and governmental apparatuses capable of causing harm at civilization-threatening scales.

The current geopolitical landscape includes multiple examples of leadership pathology with catastrophic consequences. The ongoing genocide enabled by far-right religious and political factions, supported financially and diplomatically by powerful nations, illustrates how addiction to ethnic and religious dominance can drive systematic atrocity. The fact that such actions receive support from supposedly democratic societies points to the contagious nature of these addictive patterns, spreading through populations via propaganda, tribal identity manipulation, and exploitation of fear and resentment. Similarly, the concentration of wealth and power in corporate oligarchies that prioritize profit over planetary habitability represents addiction operating at systemic levels, with the compulsive pursuit of growth and accumulation overriding rational response to existential threats including climate destabilization and ecological collapse.

Figure 4: *Addiction to Money and Power as Generated from our Brain Reward System: potential Healing by Ego- Death or Ego-dissolution Induced by Psychedelic Therapy.*

7. Traditional Approaches to Addiction Treatment

The dominant paradigm for addiction treatment in recent decades has emphasized a combination of behavioral interventions, pharmacological approaches, and social support systems. Cognitive behavioral therapy represents the most extensively studied psychological intervention, operating on principles of identifying and modifying maladaptive thought patterns, developing coping skills for managing triggers and cravings, and restructuring environmental contingencies to reduce exposure to addiction-associated cues while reinforcing abstinence. The evidence base for CBT demonstrates modest efficacy, with many patients achieving periods of abstinence but substantial proportions experiencing relapse, particularly in the longer term.

Motivational interviewing and related approaches focus on enhancing intrinsic motivation for change by resolving ambivalence, exploring discrepancies between current behavior and personal values, and supporting self-efficacy without confrontation or coercion. These person-centered methods acknowledge the complexity of addiction and the importance of autonomous decision-making while gently guiding individuals toward recognition of problems and commitment to change. The collaborative, empathic stance contrasts with historically prevalent approaches emphasizing confrontation and moral judgment that often alienated patients and produced resistance rather than engagement.

Pharmacological interventions for substance addictions include medications that reduce craving, block rewarding effects of drugs, or ease withdrawal symptoms. Opioid substitution therapy using methadone or buprenorphine has demonstrated robust effectiveness in reducing illicit opioid use, overdose risk, and associated harms including criminal justice involvement and infectious disease transmission. These medications operate as opioid receptor agonists with more favorable pharmacological profiles than heroin or illicit fentanyl, providing stable receptor occupancy without the extreme fluctuations between intoxication and withdrawal that characterize addiction. Naltrexone, an opioid antagonist, prevents rewarding effects of opioids and has shown utility for motivated patients, while naloxone serves as a life-saving overdose reversal agent.

Pharmaco-therapies for alcohol dependence include disulfiram, which causes unpleasant reactions when combined with alcohol consumption, and naltrexone and acamprosate, which act through different mechanisms to reduce craving and support abstinence. For nicotine addiction, replacement therapies using patches, gum, or other delivery methods combined with medications such as varenicline or bupropion improve quit rates compared to unassisted attempts. However, long-term success remains limited, with substantial proportions of patients returning to use within a year.

The modest efficacy of conventional treatments and the high rates of relapse across addiction types highlight the need for novel approaches that address addiction through fundamentally

different mechanisms. The neuroplasticity underlying addiction creates deeply engrained patterns that resist modification through insight, willpower, or incremental behavior change alone. Something more profound may be required to dislodge the compulsive patterns and reorganize motivation, values, and self-concept in ways that support sustained recovery.

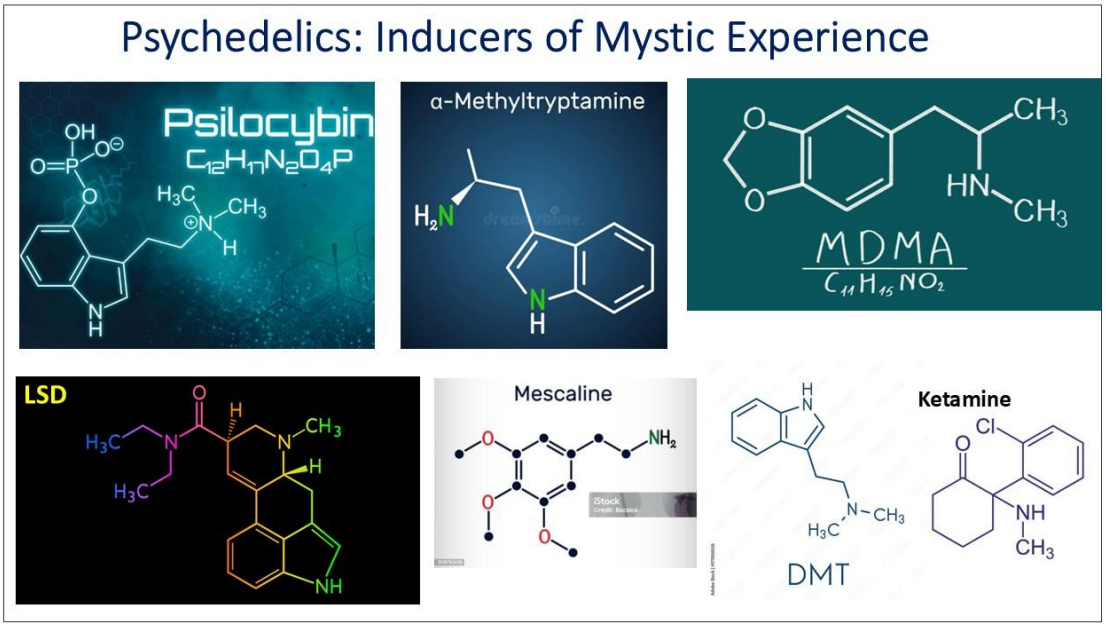

Figure 5: *The Chemical Structures of Psychedelic Substances including Psilocybine and Dimethyl-Tryptamine (DMT).*

8. Participatory Intelligence, Disciplined Attention, and the Governance of Collective Addiction. From Individual Reward Circuits to Participatory Fields

The neuroscience of addiction rightly highlights how dopaminergic reward pathways, prefrontal control networks, and stress systems are progressively reshaped by repeated exposure to highly salient stimuli. Yet, lived experience, contemplative traditions, and newer theoretical work on consciousness all suggest that cognition and learning are not confined to isolated brains. Rather, they are participatory processes: brain, body, and environment continuously co-create experienced reality through recursive loops of perception, action, and meaning-making (**Dobson, 2025; Dobson & Meijer, 2025**).

Within such a participatory ontology, addiction should be understood as more than a disorder of internal chemistry; the latter is a narrowing of the worlds a person can inhabit and co-construct. As dependence deepens, the organism's participation in the wider field of possibilities collapses into a single compulsive attractor: the pursuit of substance, sensation, or power. Narratives, metaphors, and social relations reorganize around this attractor, and alternative modes of being, such as mutual care, creativity, or long-term ecological concern—become increasingly inaccessible, not just undesired.

Mystical and ego-dissolving experiences, whether arising spontaneously or through contemplative practice, psychedelics, virtual reality, or neuromodulation, can be seen as acute perturbations of this closed attractor. By temporarily loosening the dominance of self-referential networks (e.g., default mode network) and habitual self-models, they widen the participatory field: previously excluded perspectives, memories, and relational stances become experientially available again (**Carhart-Harris et al., 2014**; **Griffiths et al., 2011**). In this framework, ealier reports of "unity," "cosmic love," or "being part of a larger whole" are phenomenological markers of this widened participation,(**Meijer, 2025a;b**). When well integrated, such experiences can reorder reward hierarchies, making narrow, ego-centric pursuits feel less compelling and reinforcing a felt orientation toward connection and responsibility, (**Meijer, 2024**).

In other words, (**Dobson, 2025**), this participatory widening is one way we glimpse the Logos: the deep grammar or coherence-bearing pattern that runs through physics, biology, mind, and meaning, and that predictive brains are constantly trying to lock onto. Psychedelics, deep meditation, and near-death experiences together now provide a growing evidence base,both phenomenological and neurobiological, that when the usual predictive hierarchy is loosened, many minds converge not on pure chaos, but on experiences of a deeper, ordered, value-laden reality.

Layered Intelligence: Syntactic, Semantic, and Resonant Dimensions

To connect these shifts to observable behaviour and leadership, it is useful to distinguish three nested layers of intelligence (**Dobson, 2025**).

1. Syntactic intelligence refers to the surface patterns of speech and micro-behaviour: how people phrase desires, handle disagreement, allocate attention, and make moment-to-moment choices. In addictive states, syntactic patterns often become rigid, instrumental, and self-protective ("I just need this," "they deserve what they get," "winning is all that matters").

2. Semantic intelligence captures the narratives, metaphors, and meaning-structures that organize experience. Addiction tends to privilege zero-sum and scarcity narratives ("life is a battlefield," "only the strong survive," "the world is hostile"), which in turn justify further self-focused or exploitative behaviour.

3. Resonant intelligence concerns the felt impact of a person's presence and actions on others and systems over time. Some individuals reliably increase anxiety, vigilance, and fragmentation around them; others repeatedly evoke trust, openness, and coordinated problem-solving, even under pressure. This resonant dimension can be tracked empirically through longitudinal markers of psychological safety, stress physiology, and decision quality in teams and communities.

In the Astrala, Lykke Minds & People™ framework, a "Lykke Mind" is not defined by peak experiences or individual achievements, but by sustained coherence across these three layers: their words, meanings, and measurable systemic effects line up over months and years in the direction of shared flourishing rather than personal high (**Dobson, 2024**). Severe addiction, especially to power, systematically erodes such coherence. Syntactic and semantic layers may retain a veneer of rationality, but the resonant layer, such as the actual impact on others and on the biosphere, betrays an underlying capture of the reward system by fear, dominance, or extraction.

This layered view also aligns closely with Dr. Yitzhak Ezuz's account of the brain as an associative, non-binary learning system. Dendritic trees continuously integrate vast amounts of often contradictory information without deleting it, operating according to a principle of feasibility rather than simple probabilistic choice. The very capacity of human brains to hold inconsistent signals without instant cancellation is what makes both creative learning and deep relational intelligence possible, but it also makes us vulnerable to pathological attractors when reward and stress systems are repeatedly driven in the same narrow direction.

Disciplined Attention: Nepsis, Sansai, and Pedagogical Anthropology

A practical question, then, is how such participatory, layered intelligence is trained and stabilised. Across very different cultures, we find convergent answers that point to disciplined attention as the core pedagogical lever.

In the Christian hesychast tradition, nepsis, being watchful, sober awareness of what is actually moving in heart and mind,is cultivated as a continuous micro-practice. The practitioner learns to observe impulses, affects, and thoughts as they arise, neither suppressing nor indulging them, but "holding them in view", before they consolidate into speech or action. This is not mere introspection; it is systematic training of attentional and interoceptive networks to notice the early phases of reward activation and stress reactivity.

In Japanese sansai-style embodied training, something analogous occurs at the level of posture, movement, and relational space. Practitioners are repeatedly exposed to perturbation and simulated threat while practicing relaxed alignment, breath regulation, and responsive engagement. The explicit aim is to preserve agency and choice under pressure rather than collapsing into reflexive fight, flight, or freeze. Over time, the body–brain system learns to treat intensity as information, not as an automatic command.

In **Part II of Participatory Ontology Under Critique** (**Dobson, December 2025**), it was proposed that these apparently disparate practices can be read alongside Mishnah Avot 4:1 ("Who is wise? He who learns from every person… Who is strong? He who rules his spirit…"), as articulating a shared pedagogical anthropology (**Dobson, 2025**).

- Wisdom is framed as openness to encounter:learning from every person and situation, rather than imposing a pre-given schema.
- Strength is defined as self-governance rather than domination of others.
- Humility emerges from sustained recognition of one's cognitive and affective limits, and the consequent need for community and guidance.

Crucially, all three are trained below explicit deliberation, so that under acute stress the organism can act from an already-instantiated coherence rather than from unexamined habit or addictive reflex. In neuroscientific terms, such disciplines systematically shape prefrontal, limbic, and interoceptive networks so that, when dopaminergic and stress systems are heavily engaged, top-down and associative circuits can still modulate behaviour in line with longer-term values and collective wellbeing. They are cultural

technologies for shifting the balance of power between instinctive reward-seeking and reflective, relational participation—exactly the balance that is lost in severe addiction and in many contemporary forms of power-seeking.

Symbolic Emergence, Myth, and the "Leviathan" of Power Addiction

The mythic and symbolic language that often appears in discussions of addiction to power (e.g., "Leviathan," "epistemic collapse," "highways to hell"), can be more than rhetorical flourish, **(Dobson and Meijer, 2026**). Historically, metaphors such as atoms as "indivisible seeds," light as "waves," or the "greenhouse" effect have functioned as early symbolic detectors of structures we could not yet formalise; they guided the development of later mathematical and experimental models. In a similar way, "Leviathan" can be interpreted as a pre-theoretical image of a supra-individual addictive pattern: a self-amplifying system that recruits human reward circuitry into a quasi-autonomous process of dominance, extraction, and control (**Dobson, 2025**).

In this light, myths are not just invented tales but symbolic maps of the collective psyche: recurring patterns like hero journeys, floods, underworld descents, tricksters, wild men, great mothers, or dying-and-rising gods that show how human beings across times and cultures have experienced deep inner dynamics of fear, loss, transformation, and renewal. These motifs can be read as narrative "eigenmodes" of the unconscious—stable forms in which otherwise inchoate drives and conflicts become visible and thinkable (**Jung, 1959; Safron et al., 2025**). When contemporary societies spontaneously reach for images of monsters, devouring giants, or apocalyptic floods to describe political and economic processes, this may therefore be an important diagnostic signal: the collective mind is experiencing something that feels structurally similar to those older, archetypal patterns.

Seen through a participatory lens, the danger is not only that individuals become addicted, but that addiction itself becomes structurally encoded into institutions, media ecologies, and economic incentives. Once such a pattern is established, it selects for leaders whose reward systems are already captured, generating a vicious cycle that mystical or therapeutic interventions at the individual level alone cannot break. Translating these symbols into operational indicators—linguistic entropy in public discourse, concentration of decision-making power, shortening time horizons in policy—may offer early warning signs analogous to biomarkers in clinical addiction (**Dobson & Meijer, 2025**)

Psychosocial Hazards, Belonging, and Governance

If we treat severe addiction, particularly to power and control, as a major psychosocial hazard, then workplaces, political systems, and digital platforms become critical sites for prevention and intervention (McDougall, 2015). Many current environments systematically reward hyper-stimulation, dominance behaviour, and attention capture while stigmatising vulnerability, uncertainty, or collaborative restraint. They function, in effect, as addiction-amplifying ecologies.

Within such contexts, emotional intelligence (EI) and collective intelligence (CI) practices, as rooted in disciplined attention of the kind described above, are not "soft skills" but core protective factors. Leaders

and teams trained to recognise stress responses, to integrate intuition with analysis, and to remain open to feedback are better equipped to:

- Detect early signs of reward-system capture in themselves and others.
- Create cultures that buffer against compulsive, high-risk behaviours.
- Support the safe integration of ego-dissolving or mystical experiences, so that these do not devolve into spiritual bypassing or new forms of grandiosity.

A living example of this principle at scale comes from public health. Twenty years ago, Iceland faced one of the worst youth addiction crises in Europe. The turning point was not harsher punishment or tighter surveillance, but a national experiment in belonging: large-scale investment in art, sport, music, and community programmes that rebuilt the social fabric around connection, kindness, and shared purpose. Within a decade, adolescent substance use rates collapsed, and a generation's risk profile shifted. This is participatory ontology in practice: by changing the relational field, Iceland altered the trajectories of thousands of individual reward systems without directly "treating" each brain.

For our work on Astrala and RINHUMAI, this offers an important design lesson for AI and organizational systems: if intelligence, human or artificial, is shaped within fields of practice, then coherence over control, empathy over optimization, and connection over isolation are not sentimental slogans but core parameters. The future of AI ethics may depend less on ever-finer alignment protocols and more on whether we remember what actually heals human beings—and build our technologies and institutions to amplify those same conditions.

At the governance level, this suggests that access to, and retention of, high-leverage roles may need to be coupled with explicit attention to addictive risk and to practices of disciplined attention and belonging-building. It raises challenging questions about screening, support, and, in extreme cases, removal from power—not as punishment, but as a form of systemic "harm reduction" for societies facing increasingly lethal combinations of technological capacity and unregulated human craving.

In sum, bringing together participatory ontology, layered intelligence, mythic symbolism, traditions of disciplined attention, and concrete examples of field-level interventions like Iceland's youth policy offers a way to connect the neurobiology of reward and ego-dissolution with the practical design of cultures and institutions that can resist, or at least soften, the gravitational pull of addiction—both in individuals and in the collective "Leviathans" we have inadvertently built.

9. The Promise of Ego-Dissolution: Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy

Recent resurgence in psychedelic research has revealed remarkable therapeutic potential for treating addictions through mechanisms operating at fundamentally different levels than conventional interventions. Substances including psilocybin, lysergic acid diethylamide, ayahuasca, and dimethyltryptamine produce profound alterations in consciousness characterized by dissolution of ordinary ego boundaries, feelings of unity with others and nature, encounters with

ineffable dimensions of experience, and insights of great personal significance. These mystical-type experiences, facilitated by psychedelics in supportive therapeutic contexts, have demonstrated capacity to produce rapid and sustained changes in addiction-related behaviors including reduced substance use, decreased craving, and enhanced motivation for recovery.

The neurobiological mechanisms underlying psychedelic effects involve agonist activity at serotonin receptors, particularly the 5-HT2A subtype, concentrated in cortical regions including the prefrontal cortex and posterior cingulate cortex. This pharmacological action produces widespread alterations in brain network function, most notably disruption of the default mode network, a constellation of interconnected brain regions active during rest and self-referential thought. The default mode network underlies the sense of a separate, persistent self and maintains patterns of thought and perception consistent with established beliefs and expectations. Psychedelics temporarily disrupt this network, reducing its normally dominant influence and allowing other brain systems to communicate in novel patterns unconstrained by habitual filters.

Figure 6: *The Controlled Application of Psychedelic Agents and/or Special Virtual Reality Technology, in Combating the Fear of Death at Dying via an Induced Mystical Experience Revealing an Eternal Cosmic Love*

The resulting state of ego-dissolution involves temporary suspension of the ordinary sense of self as a separate, bounded entity distinct from the environment and other beings. Individuals report experiences of merging with surroundings, perceiving themselves as part of a larger whole, and

accessing perspectives that transcend personal identity and individual concerns. This dissolution can be experienced as frightening loss of control or as profoundly liberating release from the prison of self-centered preoccupation, depending on context, preparation, and the individual's capacity to surrender to the experience. When occurring in therapeutic contexts with skilled facilitation, ego-dissolution tends toward the liberating end of this spectrum, producing what many describe as among the most meaningful experiences of their lives.

The therapeutic relevance for addiction becomes apparent when considering addiction as fundamentally a disorder of excessive self-focus combined with distorted valuation. The addicted individual's mental life becomes increasingly dominated by drug-related thoughts, cravings, planning for acquisition and use, and defending access to the substance despite mounting evidence of harm. This constellation of self-centered concern reflects hyper-activity of self-referential processing mediated by the default mode network. Psychedelics, by disrupting this network and dissolving rigid self-concepts, create opportunities for perceiving oneself, one's life situation, and one's relationship to the addictive substance from radically new perspectives unconstrained by habitual thought patterns.

Clinical trials investigating psilocybin-assisted therapy for treatment of alcohol and tobacco addiction have reported striking results, with significant proportions of participants achieving sustained abstinence following one or several psychedelic sessions combined with psychological preparation and integration support. The magnitude of effect in some studies exceeds what has been observed with any conventional treatment, with benefits persisting for months or years after a single treatment episode. Qualitative reports from participants emphasize the importance of mystical-type experiences characterized by ego-dissolution, unity, sacredness, and profound positive mood, with the intensity of these experiences correlating with therapeutic outcomes.

The mechanism appears to involve not simply pharmacological effects on brain chemistry but rather the psychological and spiritual significance of the experience itself. Participants describe gaining new perspectives on their lives and addictions, recognizing the harm caused to themselves and others, connecting with values and priorities that had been obscured by compulsive use, and feeling profound motivation for change arising from insight rather than external pressure. The experience often involves confrontation with death, whether literal mortality or the death of the ego, producing what has been termed an existential reorientation in which concerns about sustaining addiction pale in comparison to more fundamental questions about meaning, purpose, and how to live in alignment with deeper values.

Importantly, the mystical experience facilitated by psychedelics appears to operate as what might be termed a better addiction, one that replaces destructive compulsions with orientation toward beauty, connection, and what the document under consideration terms cosmic love. Rather than simply removing addiction and leaving a void, the psychedelic experience can instill positive

motivations including enhanced empathy, reduced defensiveness and narcissism, increased feelings of connectedness to others and nature, appreciation for existence, and reduced fear of death. These shifts in perspective and emotion provide a foundation for recovery that draws the individual forward toward a meaningful life rather than simply restraining destructive impulses through willpower.

10. Virtual Reality and Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation: Technology-Mediated Transcendence States

The recognition that mystical experiences produce therapeutic benefits regardless of how they are induced raises the possibility that technologies might facilitate such states without requiring psychoactive substances.

Figure 7: Virtual Reality mediated Self-Transcendense in an Individual Setting

Virtual reality systems, which can create fully immersive sensory environments, have been engineered to produce experiences incorporating key features of psychedelic and mystical states including visual transformations, ego-dissolution, feelings of unity and connectedness, and encounters with seemingly transcendent dimensions.

The Isness program represents a pioneering example of this approach, using virtual reality to create a shared space in which participants are represented as diffuse clouds of light rather than human figures. Through carefully designed interactions including energetic coalescence in which participants merge their virtual forms until individual boundaries dissolve, the technology

produces subjective experiences remarkably similar to those reported during psychedelic sessions. Research comparing Isness experiences with psychedelic states using standardized measures of mystical experience, ego-dissolution, and communitas has found comparable scores, suggesting that virtual reality can indeed induce genuine mystical-type experiences without pharmacological intervention.

The Mechanisms Underlying Virtual Reality-induced Mental Transcendence involve several factors including sensory immersion that reduces external distractions and creates a sense of presence in the virtual environment, symbolic and archetypal content that speaks to unconscious dimensions of psyche, perceptual manipulations that challenge ordinary assumptions about reality and identity, and social contexts that foster vulnerability and authentic connection. The technology exploits the brain's capacity for neuroplasticity and its tendency to construct experience based on available information, creating conditions in which alternative modes of consciousness can emerge. **The potential advantages of virtual reality** approaches include safety profiles superior to psychedelics given the absence of pharmacological effects, greater control over the experience through programming of environment and duration, accessibility for individuals with medical contraindications to psychedelics, and scalability allowing larger numbers of people to access transformative experiences.

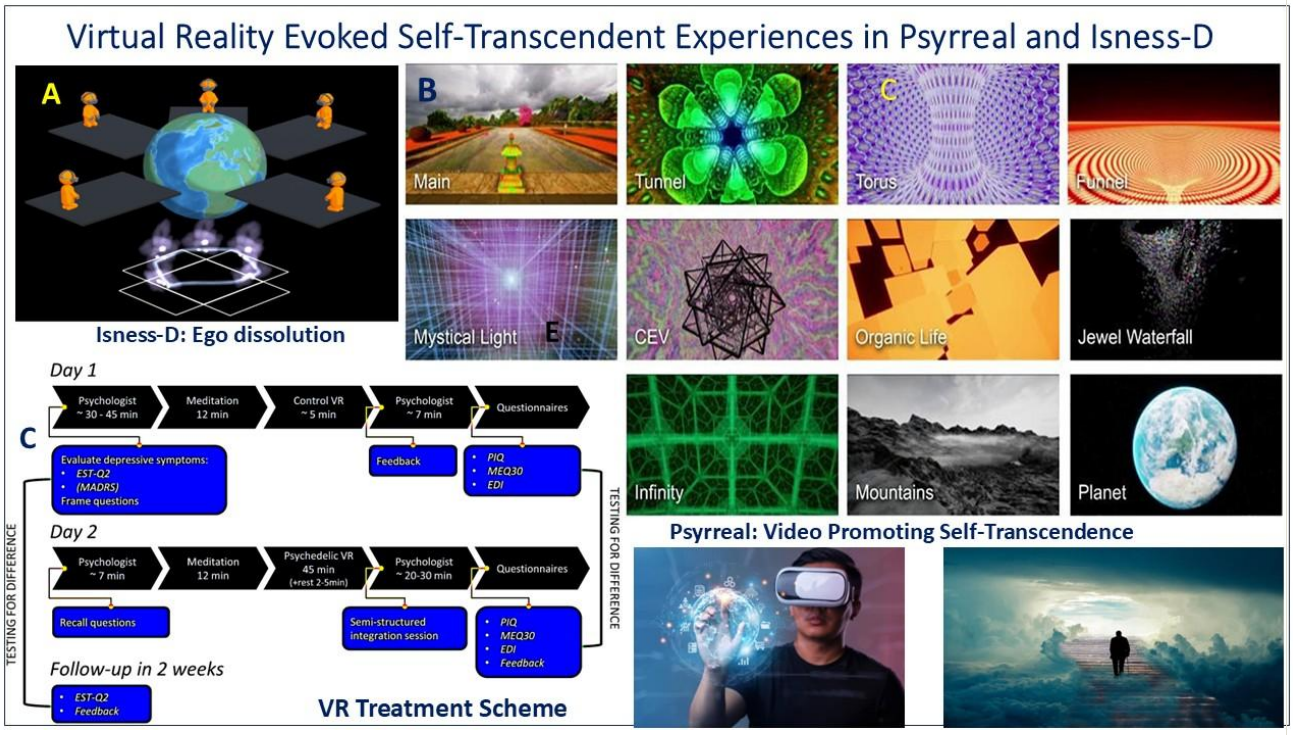

Figure 8: *Dissolution of the Four Participant Material Figures (B) in Cloud-like (diffuse) spots (A), with Mutual Thread-like Connections that Can Become Gradually United as Symbolized by the Yin/Yang Wave/Particle Constitution, depicted in C; D: Scheme of the Adopted Protocol; E: Different Dynamic Flow Video's used in Psyrreal*

The technology also offers opportunities for personalization based on individual needs, preferences, and therapeutic goals. However, questions remain about whether virtual reality experiences produce the same depth and durability of change as psychedelic sessions, given that virtual states are recognized at some level as technology-mediated rather than encounters with genuine alternate dimensions of reality.

Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation represents another non-pharmacological approach to inducing mystical states through direct modulation of brain activity. The technique uses magnetic pulses to depolarize neurons in targeted cortical regions, producing effects that can be excitatory or inhibitory depending on stimulation parameters. Applied to areas comprising the default mode network, particularly the medial prefrontal cortex and posterior cingulate cortex, transcranial magnetic stimulation can reduce activity in these self-referential processing hubs, potentially producing ego-dissolution and related experiences without requiring either substances or elaborate virtual environments.

Research investigating transcranial magnetic stimulation-induced mystical experiences remains in early stages, but preliminary findings suggest the approach can produce alterations in self-experience including reduced sense of boundaries, feelings of connectedness, and shifts in perspective. The mechanisms likely involve direct disruption of the neural circuits maintaining ordinary self-representation, with downstream effects on emotional processing, attentional focus, and cognitive flexibility. The advantages include precise targeting of specific brain regions, absence of systemic effects beyond the nervous system, and potential for repeated sessions with minimal risk of tolerance or dependence. However, questions about optimal stimulation parameters, protocols for therapeutic integration, and long-term efficacy remain to be addressed through systematic research.

11. Treating the Addiction to Power: Can Political Leaders Be Healed?

The recognition that power addiction operates through the same neurobiological mechanisms as other compulsive behaviors raises the provocative question of whether individuals in positions of political authority might benefit from treatments based on ego-dissolution. The prospect of administering psychedelics to presidents, prime ministers, and other leaders might seem fanciful or dangerous, yet the potential benefits warrant serious consideration given the catastrophic consequences of leadership pathology operating at global scales. The ego-dissolution experience directly contradicts the core features of power addiction by temporarily eliminating the sense of separation between self and other, revealing the suffering caused by domination and cruelty, and fostering empathy and concern for collective wellbeing. The mystical recognition that all beings are fundamentally interconnected, that the boundaries separating self from environment are permeable and ultimately illusory, and that love represents the deepest truth of existence stands

in stark opposition to the worldview of the power-addicted individual who perceives reality as zero-sum competition requiring constant vigilance and willingness to harm others for personal advantage.

Historical examples exist of leaders who underwent transformative experiences that altered their relationship to power and redirected their lives toward service rather than domination. The document mentions figures including Gandhi and Mandela who, through suffering, spiritual practice, or encounter with mortality, achieved perspectives that transcended narrow self-interest and enabled them to work for reconciliation and justice despite having experienced profound injustice themselves. While such transformations occurred without psychedelics or technology, they demonstrate the human capacity for fundamental change even among those who wielded or sought substantial power.

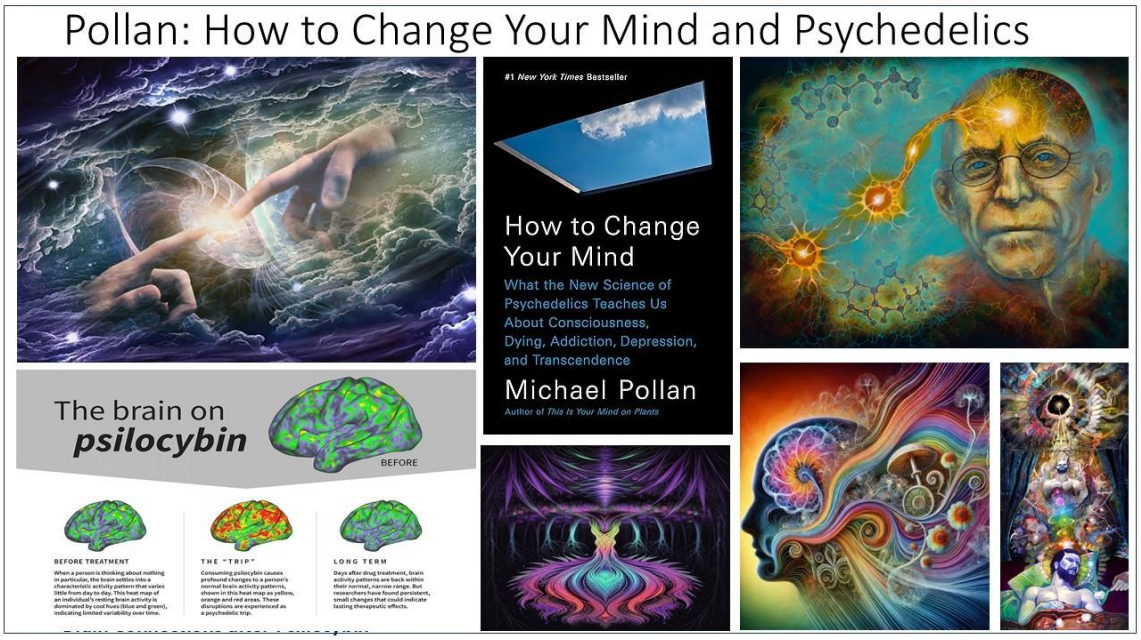

Figure 9: *The Transcendent Experiences as described in the book of Michael Pollan: "How to Change Your Mind", Inset Left bellow: Altered Brain Connections by Psilocybin with Acute Increased Brain Connective Activity, Ultimately Resulting in More Permanent Perturbations of Overall BrainConnections, Explaining the Therapeutic Effect of Psychedelic Treatment*

The practical challenges of implementing such interventions for current leaders are formidable. Power-addicted individuals typically lack insight into their condition, perceiving their behavior as strength and their accumulation of authority as deserved success. They surround themselves with enablers and eliminate critics, creating environments that reinforce rather than challenge their worldview. The suggestion that they require treatment would likely be received as insult or threat, provoking defensive reactions and possibly aggressive retaliation. Moreover, the voluntary nature

of psychedelic therapy, requiring surrender and openness to transformation, conflicts fundamentally with the controlling, defended stance of the addict.

Nevertheless, the urgency of addressing leadership pathology at a time when such individuals command weapons of mass destruction, control information ecosystems reaching billions, and make decisions affecting planetary habitability argues for creative approaches.

Perhaps candidates for high office could be offered the opportunity for such experiences as part of preparation for leadership responsibilities, framed not as treatment for pathology but as development of wisdom, perspective, and moral clarity necessary for exercising power wisely.

Cultural shifts that recognize ego-dissolution as a valuable dimension of human development, rather than something to be feared or stigmatized, might eventually create contexts in which leaders could voluntarily seek such experiences without political cost. The broader application of these technologies to populations beyond clinical patients might address addiction at a cultural level by shifting collective values away from consumption, domination, and narrow self-interest toward connection, sustainability, and concern for future generations. If substantial proportions of populations experienced ego-dissolution and the associated shifts in values and priorities, political systems would face pressure to align with these transformed perspectives rather than continuing to serve the addictions of the powerful few. This democratic application of consciousness technologies might represent humanity's best hope for rapid evolution of the collective wisdom necessary to navigate converging crises.

12. The Principle of Cosmic Love: Replacing Destructive Addictions with Connection

The therapeutic potential of ego-dissolution extends beyond simply eliminating problematic behaviors to fostering positive orientations that pull individuals toward health, connection, and meaning. The concept of cosmic love, as articulated in the provided document, refers to a felt sense of fundamental interconnectedness, a recognition that all beings participate in a unified field of consciousness and that love represents the basic organizing principle of reality rather than an optional emotion or sentiment. This perspective, while potentially appearing mystical or metaphorical, receives support from quantum physics through phenomena including entanglement, which demonstrates that particles once in contact remain correlated across arbitrary distances, and from cosmological models suggesting that consciousness may be a fundamental rather than emergent property of the universe.

The experience of cosmic love during mystical states involves dissolution of the boundaries ordinarily separating self from other, producing recognition at a visceral rather than merely intellectual level that harming others harms oneself and that the wellbeing of all beings is

intimately interconnected. This revelation can be profoundly transformative, replacing the addicted individual's narrow focus on personal gratification with orientation toward collective flourishing. The shift is not achieved through moral exhortation or rational argument but through direct experience that reorganizes perception and motivation from the ground up.

The articles of **Meijer, 2025 a;b** , propose that cosmic love operates as a force field, drawing parallels to physical forces including gravity, electromagnetism, and the quantum forces governing particle interactions. While this formulation remains speculative and extends beyond current scientific consensus, the metaphor captures important features of how love can organize behavior, redirect energy, and create coherent patterns across scales from individuals to societies. The recognition that love is not simply a subjective feeling but potentially a fundamental aspect of reality's structure provides philosophical foundation for orienting civilization around values of compassion, cooperation, and stewardship rather than competition, exploitation, and domination.

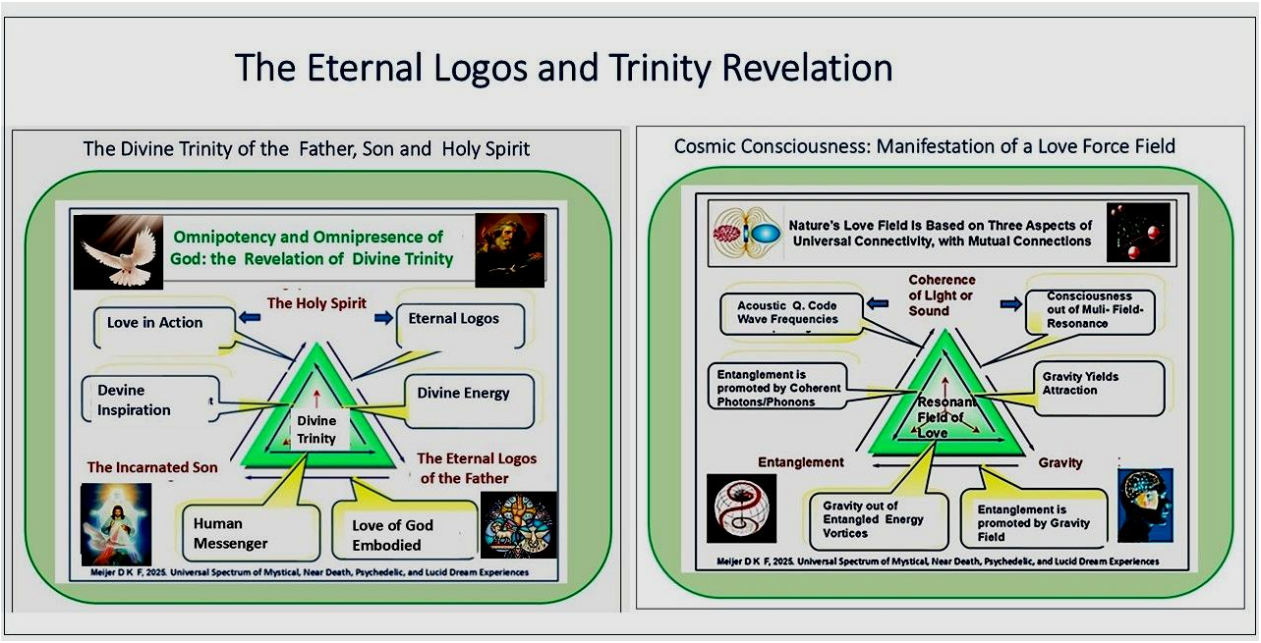

Figure 10: *The Supposed Trinity Relation in Christianity (Left), and the Potential Physical Manifestation of a Love Force Field (Right)*

Replacing addiction to substances, power, and cruelty with addiction to cosmic love represents what might be termed substituting a beneficial dependency for a harmful one. Rather than striving for complete elimination of all attachment and desire, the approach recognizes that humans are inherently relational beings whose happiness depends on connection and meaning. The question becomes not whether to be motivated by something but rather what orientations serve individual and collective thriving. An individual deeply committed to reducing suffering, fostering beauty, and protecting life exhibits qualities that might superficially resemble addiction in terms of preoccupation and devotion, yet the consequences differ radically from those of destructive

compulsions. **The neurobiological mechanisms supporting this transformation** involve the same reward circuits implicated in pathological addiction but redirected toward prosocial goals and experiences of connection rather than narrow self-gratification. Helping others, experiencing gratitude, engaging in acts of generosity, and contributing to purposes larger than oneself all activate dopaminergic reward pathways, demonstrating that the brain can derive profound satisfaction from behaviors aligned with cosmic love. The challenge lies in establishing these patterns with sufficient strength to outweigh competing impulses toward immediate gratification, status seeking, and accumulation.

Integration and Future Directions

The emergence of treatments based on mystical experience and ego-dissolution represents a genuinely novel paradigm in addiction medicine and psychiatry more broadly. Rather than attempting to manage symptoms through incremental behavior change or suppress neural activity associated with craving, these approaches facilitate fundamental transformations in consciousness, identity, and values that address addiction at its existential roots. The evidence accumulated thus far suggests remarkable potential, yet many questions remain regarding optimal protocols, mechanisms of action, patient selection, risk management, and integration with other therapeutic modalities.

The question of how to prepare individuals for ego-dissolving experiences and support integration of insights into daily life appears crucial for maximizing benefit and minimizing risk. Psychedelic therapy protocols typically include extensive preparation sessions exploring intentions, addressing fears, building therapeutic alliance, and establishing frameworks for understanding experiences that may challenge ordinary assumptions about reality and identity. Similarly, integration work following sessions helps participants make sense of often ineffable experiences and translate insights into concrete changes in behavior, relationships, and life circumstances. The role of set and setting, recognized since the earliest days of psychedelic research, emphasizes that context profoundly shapes the nature and outcomes of consciousness-altering experiences. Supportive environments characterized by safety, beauty, and skilled guidance facilitate positive, therapeutic experiences, while chaotic, threatening, or unsupportive contexts increase risk of psychological distress and trauma. This principle applies equally to virtual reality and brain stimulation approaches, requiring careful attention to environment, preparation, and therapeutic relationship.

The potential for adverse effects, while appearing lower than for many conventional treatments, nonetheless requires acknowledgment and management. Psychedelic experiences can produce psychological distress including anxiety, paranoia, and traumatic reactions, particularly in vulnerable individuals or poorly managed contexts. Virtual reality can induce cybersickness, disorientation, and in rare cases precipitate dissociative episodes or psychotic symptoms.

Transcranial magnetic stimulation carries risks including seizure induction in susceptible individuals. These concerns necessitate careful screening, informed consent, monitoring, and access to crisis intervention when needed. The question of accessibility and equity requires attention as these treatments develop. Psychedelic therapy currently remains largely available only to research participants or wealthy individuals able to access services in jurisdictions with legal frameworks permitting such treatment. The cost of trained therapists, medical oversight, and extended session times creates barriers that could limit access to privileged populations, reproducing existing health disparities. Virtual reality technologies, while potentially more scalable, also require substantial investment in equipment and software development. Ensuring that treatments reach communities most affected by addiction, including low-income populations and racial and ethnic minorities who face disproportionate substance use disorder prevalence and inadequate access to conventional treatment, represents both ethical imperative and practical necessity for public health impact.

The regulatory frameworks governing these interventions continue to evolve, with increasing recognition of therapeutic potential balanced against concerns about safety and potential for misuse. The designation of psilocybin as a breakthrough therapy for treatment-resistant depression by regulatory authorities in several nations signals shifting attitudes, while cities and states implementing decriminalization or regulated access create laboratories for policy innovation. The development of evidence-based guidelines, training standards for practitioners, and quality assurance mechanisms will support responsible expansion of access while protecting patient safety.

The cultural and spiritual dimensions of mystical experience-based treatments raise questions about how to honor the depth and meaning of these phenomena within medical contexts that may not readily accommodate experiences of transcendence, encounters with apparent non-ordinary dimensions of reality, and transformations of worldview and identity. Indigenous traditions that have worked with psychedelic plants for millennia emphasize sacred contexts, ritual structures, and cosmologies that integrate such experiences into comprehensive frameworks for understanding self, community, and cosmos. Western medical models, rooted in materialism and focused on symptom reduction, may struggle to fully appreciate and support the spiritual aspects of healing while remaining accessible to secular individuals uncomfortable with religious language and frameworks.

The question of how ego-dissolution treatments might be applied beyond clinical populations to address the broader addiction epidemic manifesting in cultural values, political systems, and economic structures represents both opportunity and challenge. If mystical experiences can shift individual consciousness toward connection, empathy, and concern for collective wellbeing, might widespread access to such experiences catalyze cultural transformation? The provided document suggests this possibility, proposing that a critical mass of individuals who have experienced cosmic

love might create political and social pressure for systems that embody rather than exploit or ignore such values. The practical implementation of such a vision faces substantial obstacles including the aforementioned regulatory barriers, cultural resistance, questions of voluntariness and informed consent, and the danger of co-optation by forces seeking to use consciousness technologies for manipulation rather than liberation. The history of psychedelics includes periods of irresponsible promotion, cavalier disregard for set and setting, and politicization that contributed to suppression and stigmatization. Learning from these mistakes while remaining open to radical possibilities requires wisdom, humility, and willingness to proceed carefully while maintaining vision of transformative potential.

13. Finding an Answer to Fascism Through Mysticism

Introduction: The Problem of Powerlessness

The following section summarizes a recent article in the Dutch periodical :"The Correspondent" of ***Bregje Hofstede***.

Nearly daily, a sense of powerlessness grips us when confronted with disturbing global developments. What meaningful action can be taken? The following inquiry led to an examination of historical thinkers whose resistance can be understood as fundamentally spiritual in nature. This may appear counterintuitive, suggesting resistance emerging from detachment from material reality. However, such a characterization fundamentally misrepresents spirituality. The central question becomes: how can one establish firm moral ground without spiritual foundation?

This consideration possesses a certain poignancy, functioning as a talisman against evil. It resembles contemporary preparations such as purchasing iodine tablets against potential nuclear conflict, gestures that remain largely symbolic despite their practical intention. The fundamental question persists: beyond demonstrations, voting, and signing petitions, what additional meaningful action can be taken against the encroachment of authoritarian ideologies? The sole domain over which individual agency appears possible is one's internal psychological and spiritual space. This raises critical questions: can this internal domain provide opportunities for meaningful resistance? Can there exist such a phenomenon as moral rearmament? Is such rearmament perhaps necessary in an era of advancing fascism?

Etty Hillesum: Spiritual Resistance Without Hatred

Confronted with Nazism, Etty focused on a fundamental question: *how does one respond to pervasive hatred without contributing to its proliferation?* Hillesum refused to hate "the Germans" categorically, reasoning that as long as even one decent person existed among them, that individual deserved her compassion. Through her determined cultivation of her interior world, her diaries convey not powerlessness but remarkable strength. Though aware of rumors regarding

poison gas in Poland, Hillesum maintained that nothing could truly harm her or other Jews provided they could preserve their souls intact through this suffering. She wrote: "They can do nothing to us, they really can do nothing to us." She maintained sovereignty over her interior space, which remained as limitless as ever, regardless of the progressive restriction of her physical freedom. Conversely, she believed that should she surrender to hatred, she would be truly lost, even if physically unharmed.

She declined opportunities to go into hiding, reasoning that if she did not go to the camps, another person would have to go in her place. She voluntarily reported to Westerbork transit camp to serve as "a balm on many wounds." She was ultimately murdered in Auschwitz. We could ask the question question whether Hillesum's stance should be condemned as passive, whether she too readily submitted to Nazi persecution. The initial response concerns character: perhaps Hillesum was simply not constituted for armed resistance. Later reflection revealed what we should have articulated. Etty Hillesum engaged in spiritual resistance against hatred. Perhaps it is unreasonable, or at minimum unrealistic, to expect physical combat in addition to this spiritual struggle. One cannot demand a comprehensive response to a massive fascist system from a single individual. Hillesum's form of resistance was essential and profoundly practical, though this required clearer articulation. The question remained compelling: what constitutes meaningful resistance against fascism, and what role does spirituality play in such resistance?

Carl Schmitt and the Fascist Critique of Liberalism

Subsequently, we should attend the human rights lawyer **Bo Tarenskeen's** theatrical production "Against the Law," which stages a dialogue between a human rights lawyer embodying liberal progressive values and the Catholic legal theorist Carl Schmitt, termed "the crown jurist of the Third Reich." Schmitt earned this designation through his role in drafting the 1933 Enabling Act that dismantled German democracy, providing Hitler with unrestricted authority. He also contributed to legislation that stripped Jews of their rights, thereby rendering their annihilation legally sanctioned. The human rights lawyer attempts to compel Schmitt to acknowledge his fundamental moral error, but fails. Schmitt considers himself innocent, misunderstood. Hannah Arendt wrote marginally in her copy of Schmitt's work: "Poor Schmitt. The Nazis cried: Blood and Soil, he understood: Soil, but they meant only: Blood."This represented Schmitt's preferred self-conception: as a misunderstood defender of foundational order. He claimed merely to seek order in the latent civil war of the Weimar Republic, where political murders occurred weekly and society was fundamentally polarized. Order could only be achieved through law, state authority, and foundational structures.

In **Tarenskeen**'s dramatization, Schmitt challenges his liberal interlocutor: you liberals fixate myopically on the individual. You denigrate the collective while romanticizing individual self-actualization, failing to recognize that the individual would not exist without protective legal frameworks. The law, he argues, determines existence, protection, and the right to exist. Law

exists solely through the state, which enforces it through authority. In this sense, the individual constitutes an effect of the state, a consequence, an outcome, not the reverse. The state is primary. He continues: upon what foundation does the liberal belief that "the individual is the basis" actually rest? What grounds the intrinsic value of human life? Can this be explained without recourse to divine authority? Certainly not through natural sciences. Human dignity cannot be discovered beneath stones, within brain tissue, under electron microscopes, or in particle accelerators.

A human being who is neither profitable nor productive and in no way exceptional: why is such a person valuable? The liberal sits speechless. The audience shifts uncomfortably. In that audience, we long to hear the liberal to respond with passion and conviction, yet he remained paralyzed by excessive reflexivity. Only the Catholic Schmitt could access the register of enthusiasm, with his mystical conceptions of spiritual fusion, collectivity, law, and state. "Enthusiasm" derives from the ancient Greek enthousiázein: to be in divine rapture.

"Against the Law" proves compelling because it seduces the viewer into engaging intellectually with someone positioned on the wrong side of history, yet whose arguments possess undeniable force. Contemporary people, Schmitt contends, are shadows who limp to work, understanding everything, relativizing everything, denying themselves mysteries and spiritual exuberance. He charges the liberal: "Your generation has attempted to neutralize politics, to reduce it to accounting. You have robbed politics of its existential dimension." Politics fundamentally concerns the question: "May I exist or may I not exist? Who is my friend and who is my enemy?" It addresses questions of the right to exist and meaning: "You are obsessed with eliminating boundaries and limitations, offering nothing in their place. In the name of efficiency, you economize away your own spirit and your own right to exist. You have fallen through the floor." The foundation. There it is again.

Simone Weil: The Necessity of Roots

Another thinker during this period contemplated foundations in a fundamentally different manner: Simone Weil, who as a Jew fled her native France during World War II and understood deeply the human need for rootedness. She wrote "The Need for Roots" from London, where she worked for General de Gaulle's Free French government. The Germans had conquered France with extraordinary speed, and Weil believed their advantage was substantially spiritual in nature. Hitler's soldiers possessed a form of ersatz religion, with specialized groups like the SS spiritually conditioned to display suicidal courage. To provide Allied forces with equally powerful inspiration, Weil proposed deploying special battalions of nurses in the front lines. Such battalions of caring women would capture imaginations through their courage, allowing Allied troops to witness directly the values for which they fought.

De Gaulle declared Weil mad. Yet she persisted in seeking "a method to inspire a people." By this she did not mean propaganda. "Propaganda creates no inspiration: it closes it off, sealing all openings through which inspiration might enter." She meant inspiration as in enthousiázein. The very first task France and the free West must undertake, "the most important problem of this time," she wrote, was determining which things are essential for the life of the soul. The Free French government expected Weil to write about practical matters such as labor conditions, given her experience working in a factory purely to understand the worker's condition. How should the postwar world be structured?

Weil maintained that this question cannot be answered without addressing the underlying question: what possesses value? She rejected both popular answers. It centers neither on the collective, as Schmitt argues in "Against the Law," nor on the individual, as liberals prefer. Given her experience as a Jewish woman, she placed limited faith in rights-based frameworks. But upon what foundation does one base a society? What argument prevents people from destroying one another? Upon what must one focus to avoid sliding toward fascism? What constitutes the foundation of a good society?

Listening to contemporary political discourse, we may perceive a fundamental lack of understanding. Even those with good intentions lack clarity. What is audible consists of patchwork and panic responses, shuffling of budgets, finger-pointing, reactions to reactions to morning controversies. Regarding existential questions: each individual may resolve these in non-existent free time. Those in political power do not know what possesses value, or why, or how to protect it; they are momentarily occupied with the latest polls. Meanwhile, citizens are advised to stockpile emergency supplies and purchase iodine tablets. Now that the notion of rights is no longer inviolable as a foundation for global coexistence, given that these rights cannot even prevent genocide, Weil's work appears contemporary. A right that is not respected possesses little substance; obligations, however, exist whether fulfilled or not. Hence Weil's proposal for a "declaration of human duties.", rather than “”declaration of human rights”’.

When assigning duties to individuals, the question arises: why does each human being owe obligations to others? Not because all are uniquely valuable, as the liberal worldview maintains. Quite the opposite, actually. "It is impossible," Weil writes, *"to feel equal respect for things that are unequal, unless that respect is given to something identical in all of them.* Human beings are, without exception, unequal in their relationships with worldly matters. The only identical element in all people is the presence of a link to transcendent reality. All humans are absolutely identical when viewed as a center, consisting of an unquenchable longing for the good, surrounded by a mass of psychological and physical matter."

In brief: there exists no visible ground for the intrinsic value of a human being within this world. Therefore, the first sentence of Weil's "declaration of human duties" states: "There is a reality outside the world." Beyond space and time, inaccessible to our senses, another reality exists,

according to Weil. "As our world is the sole basis of facts, so is that world the sole basis of the good." One might envision a Platonic realm of ideas, a heaven, a deity, a mathematical abstraction; regardless, each person is connected to it because in the depths of their heart they possess "the longing for the good" and the expectation "that one will be treated well, not badly." This interior bridge to the good is sacred and deserves respect."This is the only possible motivation for universal respect for all people," according to Weil. "Whatever belief or disbelief a person subscribes to, as long as their heart tells them they must feel respect for other people, they in fact acknowledge a reality different from that of this world."

Respect means providing for someone's essential needs: the basic needs of the body such as food, shelter, and medical care, and the basic needs of the soul. Whoever neglects this obligation is criminal, Weil states. Perhaps one resists the idea that a "reality outside the world" is necessary as the foundation of ethics. But Weil sees no alternative. Certainly, one might attempt to base respect for others on their personality, but this foundation is unstable. After all: "If I gouge out someone's eyes, that person has not a bit less personality." So why leave those eyes in their sockets? Weil's answer: we owe respect to each human being entirely independent of their personal characteristics, but precisely for the sake of the impersonal. One might say: the soul, that inherent reaching toward the good. Violence harms a person's soul, and thereby this reaching. Besides serving as a foundation for respect, the soul, or our impersonal connection to the good, constitutes a source of strength. It was this connection that enabled Etty Hillesum to remain morally and physically upright, and moreover to support others. Friedrich Weinreb, a fellow prisoner at Camp Westerbork, testified: "And so Etty Hillesum walked with a leather bag over her shoulder past the beds, bending over each sick person and asking: 'Can I perhaps do something for you?'"

Weil wrote: "If he knows how to root himself in the impersonal, so that he can draw energy from it, then he is capable of exercising, without any external help and against any group whatsoever, a small but real force." Yes, a group can protect the individual against violence from others, but this remains protection based on brute force. If one wishes to escape the logic of might makes right, this is the only exit. Hence Weil's urgent recommendation to De Gaulle: after the war, he and his government should create conditions under which both body and soul could flourish. One might term this moral rearmament, not through a chapel with Virtues in the forest, but structurally. In Weil's view, such thorough care for the soul is necessary. It constitutes the essential foundation beneath all superstructures of politics and economics; without such a foundation, any intervention a government might undertake remains a loose shot.

The tangible cannot flourish without the intangible. Between these two things, there exists no real distinction. The collective therefore possesses, according to Weil, a dual function in caring for a healthy soul: practically, through decent infrastructure including schools, healthcare, and fair justice; and spiritually, because it is the group, or the people, or the culture, that forms the only possible connection with the dead, with the past and with the future. Heritage constitutes the

accumulated insight of earlier thinkers and spiritual leaders, and each person requires this layer of humus for rootedness; it nourishes the soul. Therefore uprooting, the destruction of a group, a collective, a homeland, is so criminal, Weil writes: it is a crime against the soul. Conversely, she also states: a collective that does not nourish souls but uproots and devours them deserves not protection but destruction.

James Baldwin: Spirituality as Contact With Reality

Weil was not alone in viewing spirituality as an essential component of resistance against tyranny. American writer and activist James Baldwin also wrote in "Letter From a Region in My Mind" (1962) about its crucial practical and political importance. "The political institutions of a nation," Baldwin stated, "are always menaced and ultimately controlled by the spiritual state of that nation. We are controlled here by our confusion, far more than we know, and the American dream has therefore become much more closely related to the American nightmare than we can wish." Humanity makes a mess of things, God has failed or become obsolete, and no one knows what should replace him. We need change, Baldwin writes, not on the surface but in the depths. This renewal does not concern visions or prophets, but something quite tangible. One might state it even more strongly: this renewal consists of making the world around us tangible again. For Baldwin, as for Weil, spirituality is not unreal or detached from reality; it is precisely a precondition for contact with reality. Therefore he is so irritated by ecclesiastical taboos on sensuality: sensuality is a necessity for spiritual life.

"To be sensual," Baldwin writes, "means to me: to respect and celebrate the force of life, life itself, to be present in everything you do, from your efforts to love to the breaking of bread. It would actually be a great day for America if we began eating real bread again, and not that blasphemous and tasteless rubber we now take for it. And I am not joking. Something very sinister happens to the inhabitants of a country when they so profoundly distrust their own responses as they do here, and become as joyless as they are here." In Baldwin's view, Americans, particularly white Americans, are so insecure and so poorly able to quench their thirst "at the source of their own lives" that one can hardly discuss with them anymore. After all: "Whoever distrusts themselves has no touchstone for reality—that touchstone can only be yourself. Such a person places between themselves and reality a labyrinth of opinions." In other words: whoever cannot draw from an interior source becomes susceptible to misinformation and propaganda.

Implicit in this is, in my assessment, the assumption that this interior source about which Baldwin writes, a source to which only you yourself can access through your own power, simultaneously provides common ground for conversation. The source is within you, but also within everyone; it is both completely private and universal. It is Weil's interior bridge to the good. Baldwin wrote this in 1962. Are we present today in what we do? Does our world feel real? Generation Z reports finding their online life more meaningful than their physical existence. In times of deepfakes and alternative facts, an additional screen has been lowered between the physical world and the

interior touchstone about which Baldwin spoke. We believe that many people feel the needs about which Baldwin wrote: the taste of real bread, ground beneath the feet. Not coincidentally, we are so enamored with authenticity, with tradition; we are proud of farmers and want, depending on our social group, sourdough bread or reality television. However, just as in the time of Simone Weil and Hitler, it is today primarily the extreme right that dares to take these needs seriously and delve deeper into them.

The Mystical Dimension of Contemporary Far-Right Movements

Globally, the extreme right is permeated with mystical currents. Steve Bannon, for example, Trump's former strategist, openly expresses his mystical, quasi-religious ideas. One might search for traditionalism or vitalism, or the Q Shaman phenomenon. Often these currents seek return to a pre-Christian, elemental, primitive, masculine worldview, such as pagan rituals with blood sacrifices led by figures like Andrew Tate. In Germany, the far-right AfD discusses "the connection of humans with their land and their cultural roots" and the necessity of re-rooting. These are the terms of the Jewish philosopher Simone Weil, but deployed as a neo-Nazi weapon.

In the Netherlands as well, the extreme right plays upon spiritual hunger far more than the left does. Roxane van Iperen coined the term "wellness-right." Followers of Thierry Baudet distinguish themselves through relatively high needs for spirituality, or as one researcher wrote: "It appears as though they find the current world too cold and too rational and are searching for a new enchantment." Not coincidentally, Baudet speaks of "cultural and spiritual emptiness" and "metaphysical foundations."

This constitutes fascism's greatest advantage: unlike liberalism, it is not handicapped by great fear of the mystical, metaphysical, spiritual, or impassioned. It presents a false version thereof, but a highly inspiring one. The collective, or the people, with which fascism is infatuated, is an almost perfect doppelganger of the universal or spiritual: something that you are, but which also transcends you. The collective, or the mass, functions easily as a counterfeit God: the people are, like a God, much greater than you are, yet you are it yourself. Hannah Arendt wrote that especially lonely and isolated individuals are susceptible to fascism. Being loose in the void is unbearable for a human being. What progressives or leftists today often reflexively do, dismissing all things spiritual, is therefore both shortsighted and dangerous. We need not embrace the macho-mysticism of the right, but surely we can create better forms of connection? A better and less deadly adhesive?

Toward Moral Rearmament: Addressing Existential Questions

The idea of moral rearmament is not absurd, provided we understand it not as Christian or Nationalistic propaganda, but as creating space for essential questions, seeking ground in which the soul can root. This is work that each of us personally can and must do, but the more power or

prestige one possesses, the greater the obligation. We want to hear politicians and political figures thinking aloud, publicly, about the questions that Schmitt, Weil, and Baldwin posed, and that the extreme right also poses. For what does the soul hunger? What is the essence of a human being? What makes a human being valuable? What is the value of a human being who is not productive and in no way exceptional?

Currently, the world provides a clear answer: that value is nil, unless one belongs to the right group, namely wealthy white people. We do not say this, but this is how we act. This is what we collectively communicate to, for example, disposable workers in sweatshops, or to the people in Gaza and everyone who observes their annihilation. And no, we cannot dismiss this as individualism or liberal values or meritocracy: these imply the dismissal of everyone who does not visibly or measurably excel. Whoever believes that it should not be solely power, meaning money and violence, that determines the value of a life must now offer a better answer. A more inspiring answer. A foundation upon which all other matters, all practical interventions and all political decisions, can be firmly based.

We need not begin from zero. We have Baldwin, Weil, Arendt, to name but a few thinkers. But it is time that we continue where they left off, and allow our practical and political conclusions to follow from this foundation. Anti-fascist resistance always touches upon the essential question of what possesses value and why, and thereby it is necessarily also spiritual. Perhaps this sounds counterintuitive: resistance emerging from detachment? How can one take a firm stand while detached? But we misunderstand spirituality if we call it detachment. *It is the reverse: how can one take a firm stand without spiritual grounding, without metaphysical foundation?*

In the present previous work (**Meijer, 2019; 2025b**), the personal inner core of a believe in the existence of a phenomenon of the Good was related to being aware that all of us are part of something much larger than ourselves: a Universal Consciousness, as the eternal source of all there is, an idea that fundamentally rejects the separability of the human individual. And in our recent work on potential harmonizing of Human and Artificial Intelligence (**Dobson, Keizer and Meijer, 2025**), we proposed the use of meditative (bio-feedback based) workstation that should provide a human/Ai-friendly and shared domain for communication. This represents a principle of resonant coherence, bridging cognitive and cosmic scales (**Meijer, 2024**, while connecting these elements to the ethical challenges of planetary-scale decision-making. The result is an ethical AI architecture that addresses alignment and safety not in isolation but as part of a dynamic, globally coordinated intelligence system.

14. Conclusion: From Destructiveness to Healing

Humanity stands at a threshold moment in which the accumulated consequences of addictive patterns operating across scales from individual to civilization threaten to overwhelm the adaptive capacities that enabled our species to achieve its current dominance.

The same reward systems that motivated our ancestors to seek food, mates, and status now drive consumption of substances and pursuit of power that undermine individual health, social cohesion, and planetary habitability. The acceleration of these destructive patterns through technological amplification of supernormal stimuli and the concentration of power in the hands of individuals whose addictions to domination and wealth accumulation operate unchecked by empathy or concern for consequences creates a situation of profound peril.

Yet the emergence of treatments based on ego-dissolution and mystical experience offers grounds for hope precisely because these interventions address addiction at its existential roots rather than merely managing symptoms. By temporarily dissolving the boundaries separating self from other and revealing the fundamental interconnectedness of all beings, such experiences can catalyze rapid transformations in consciousness, values, and behavior that appear to exceed what conventional treatments can achieve. The convergence of ancient wisdom traditions emphasizing transcendence of ego with contemporary neuroscience revealing the brain mechanisms underlying such states with cutting-edge technologies enabling increasingly sophisticated induction and support of mystical experiences suggests that humanity may be developing tools adequate to the magnitude of the challenge.

The path forward requires integration of multiple approaches including continued development and refinement of psychedelic therapies, virtual reality and brain stimulation technologies, traditional practices of meditation and breathwork, and therapeutic modalities supporting preparation and integration. It demands expansion of access beyond privileged populations to ensure that communities most affected by addiction can benefit from these innovations. It necessitates cultural shifts that recognize ego-dissolution as a valuable dimension of human development rather than something to be feared, that honor the spiritual significance of such experiences while maintaining accessibility for secular individuals, and that create social contexts supporting the integration of mystical insights into daily life.

Most radically, addressing addiction at the levels of power and culture requires willingness to question the fundamental organizing principles of contemporary civilization including the glorification of competition, accumulation, and domination, the assumption that humans are separate from and superior to nature, and the belief that consciousness is an epiphenomenal byproduct of neural activity rather than a fundamental dimension of reality. The recognition that love may be not simply a sentiment but a physical force organizing reality at quantum and cosmic scales challenges materialist assumptions while providing philosophical foundation for radically different ways of being in the world.

Meijer, 2025 a;b, proposes that mystical experiences can replace destructive addictions with what it terms addicti on to cosmic love, characterized by enhanced empathy, reduced defensiveness

and self-centeredness, increased prosocial orientation, and diminished fear of death. This formulation captures the insight that humans require orientation toward something beyond narrow self-interest, that meaning and purpose are not optional luxuries but existential necessities, and that the question is not whether to be devoted to something but rather what deserves devotion. An individual deeply committed to reducing suffering and fostering flourishing, while potentially appearing single-minded in dedication to these goals, operates from fundamentally different motivations and produces radically different consequences than one addicted to power, substances, or cruelty.

The urgency of this work intensifies as the window for addressing planetary crises narrows and the destructive consequences of collective addiction become increasingly apparent. Climate destabilization, ecological collapse, rising authoritarianism, growing inequality, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction all reflect failures to transcend addictive patterns and align human activity with biophysical reality and genuine wellbeing. The fact that many of these crises are driven or exacerbated by individuals exhibiting clear signs of addiction to power and wealth makes addressing leadership pathology particularly crucial, yet also particularly difficult given the defensive, grandiose, and controlling nature of such individuals.

The vision articulated in the source document of a humanity transformed through widespread access to ego-dissolving experiences, operating from recognition of fundamental interconnectedness rather than illusions of separation, organized around principles of love rather than domination, may seem utopian or naive given the depth of current dysfunction. Yet the alternative trajectory leads toward collapse, conflict, and catastrophic suffering for billions of beings. The choice, such as it exists within the constraints of path dependence and systemic momentum, involves mustering the courage to attempt genuinely transformative interventions rather than incrementally managing decline. The metaphor of addiction to cosmic love captures something essential about the nature of recovery and transformation. Rather than white-knuckling abstinence through sheer willpower or resigning oneself to managing a chronic disease through indefinite maintenance treatments, the ego-dissolution approach offers the possibility of fundamental reorientation such that destructive pursuits lose their appeal because something better has been discovered. The individual who has directly experienced the reality of interconnection, who has felt the truth of cosmic love not as abstract concept but as lived reality, finds that previous compulsions pale in significance and that life reorganizes naturally around values and behaviors aligned with that deeper truth.

Whether humanity will seize this opportunity, whether these technologies and approaches will reach sufficient scale and penetrate deeply enough into power structures to alter trajectory before cascading crises overwhelm adaptive capacity, remains uncertain. What appears clear is that incremental adjustments within existing paradigms, while necessary, are unlikely to prove sufficient. Something more fundamental is required, a transformation in consciousness and

culture that these interventions appear uniquely positioned to facilitate. The road from destructive addiction to healing through ego-dissolution represents not a comfortable middle path but a radical leap into unknown territory, requiring courage, wisdom, and willingness to surrender illusions of separation and control. It is a leap that the evidence increasingly suggests may be not only possible but necessary for the future of life on Earth.

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Appendix: Recent Academic References on Contemporary Fascism

Stanley, J. (2018). *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them*. Random House. This work analyzes the mechanics of fascist politics in contemporary democracies, examining propaganda techniques, anti-intellectualism, and the exploitation of victimhood narratives that characterize modern authoritarian movements.

Traverso, E. (2019). *The New Faces of Fascism: Populism and the Far Right*. Verso Books. Traverso examines post-fascism in Europe and North America, analyzing how contemporary right-wing movements differ from classical fascism while maintaining core authoritarian and exclusionary elements.

Renton, D. (2022). *Prophets of the Apocalypse: White Nationalism and the American Far Right*. Pluto Press. This recent study examines the ideological foundations and organizational strategies of contemporary white nationalist movements in the United States, including their use of digital platforms and conspiracy theories.

Albright, M. (2018). *Fascism: A Warning*. Harper. Former Secretary of State Albright provides analysis of global fascist tendencies, drawing parallels between historical and contemporary authoritarian movements and offering strategies for democratic resilience.

Ben-Ghiat, R. (2020). *Strongmen: Mussolini to the Present*. W.W. Norton & Company. This comparative historical analysis examines authoritarian leaders from the twentieth century to the present, identifying patterns in their rise to power and maintenance of control through propaganda, corruption, and violence.

Finchelstein, F. (2020). *A Brief History of Fascist Lies*. University of California Press. Finchelstein traces the evolution of fascist propaganda from Mussolini through contemporary populist movements, analyzing how authoritarian regimes weaponize disinformation and alternative facts.

Paxton, R.O. (2021). *"I've Hesitated to Call Donald Trump a Fascist. Until Now*." *Newsweek*, January 11, 2021. This essay by a leading fascism scholar represents a significant intervention in debates about labeling contemporary political movements, examining Trump's attempted coup through the framework of fascist political violence.

Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2018). *How Democracies Die*. Crown Publishing. The authors analyze democratic backsliding globally, identifying warning signs of authoritarian consolidation and examining how democratic norms erode before formal institutions collapse.

Applebaum, A. (2020). *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism*. Doubleday. This work examines why educated, wealthy individuals in stable democracies embrace authoritarianism, analyzing the psychological and ideological appeal of anti-democratic movements among elites.

Mason, P. (2019). *Clear Bright Future: A Radical Defence of the Human Being*. Allen Lane. Mason argues for renewed humanism as resistance to fascist ideology, examining how neoliberalism's erosion of social solidarity creates conditions for authoritarian movements and proposing alternative frameworks for human flourishing and collective organization.