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Theories on the Landscape

An Orthogonal Approach

Abstract: *Assessing theories of consciousness is a challenge. Normative scientific methodology, including falsification and prediction, is notoriously difficult when addressing phenomenal consciousness. For example, it is often less than obvious that the claimed predictions of theories reflect the actual essences of those theories. I suggest two ‘orthogonal’ approaches that, while not dispositive in principle, might be insightful in practice. The first is a comparison with other theories using what I call a ‘landscape of consciousness’ to discern commonalities and differences in their foundations, arguments, evidence, ways of thinking, and prospects of progress. The second is to explore the implications of theories with respect to big questions of sentience, including AI consciousness, virtual immortality, free will, meaning/purpose, and life after death. Of course, the implications of a theory, no matter what they are, cannot affirm or deny the veracity of that theory directly. However, just perhaps, the implications might offer insights indirectly. I apply both orthogonal approaches to superpsychism.*

1. Introduction

I love new theories of consciousness and I love new theories of quantum physics (and of cosmogenesis and of ‘nothing’). I’m kind of a ‘junkie’ in collecting radically diverse explanations of the biggest questions, cataloguing them (I try to make them universally

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exhaustive if not mutually exclusive), and then organizing them into what can only be simplistic taxonomies (Kuhn, 2024; 2007; 2013). So, how could I *not* love superpsychism, which proposes a radical new theory of consciousness and of quantum physics via their radical unification in a grand cosmic merger? I feature it proudly on the *Landscape of Consciousness* website (Kuhn, 2025).²

But I have a problem. While I am not too bad at collecting and organizing theories, I'm not too good at analysing and assessing them. I don't take this personally because I (secretly) think that *no one* is particularly good at evaluating theories of big questions, especially those of consciousness.

For example, it seems to me that the 'neurogeographic' debate between the 'front of the head' folks — global workspace (GWT) and higher-order theorists — and the 'back of the head' folks — integrated information (IIT) and recurrent processing theorists — while essential for a complete neurobiological correlation of consciousness (Block, 2023), is of only mild interest for an ontological explanation of consciousness. If GWT suddenly shifted to the back of the head, and IIT to the front, would the 'trading-places' inversion make much ontological difference? I'd be surprised if the basic principles of GWT, assigning consciousness to competition and brain-circuit broadcasting, and of IIT, as a system's intrinsic cause-and-effect structure (the maximally irreducible whole it forms), would need to change at all.

Sure, some theories of phenomenal consciousness can be falsified, but — to lay my cards face-up on the table — I am sceptical that traditional ways of thinking have the capacity to engender confidence that any one theory is the correct theory.

Now to superpsychism, a wonderfully novel idea, richly specified and unabashedly boundary-breaking, which, to its credit, sounds like it could be 'crazy enough' to make the first cut as a potential theory of consciousness. How to make progress, though?

I know just enough quantum theory to dissuade me from commenting on the radical physics. Still, in my more cynical moments, I'd think (but I'd never say), 'If you inject enough magic into fundamental stuff, you can manipulate it to do pretty much anything you want' (I'm cynical about all theories of consciousness, especially my own).

² <https://loc.closetotruth.com/>

That said, sure, prototime could be a profoundly resourceful way to explore the seemingly impenetrable conundrum of what happened ‘before’ space-time came into existence; and, sure, superconsciousness could be a kind of ultimate ‘hidden variable’ to solve all the paradoxes of quantum mechanics. But here I freeze: I do not know how to go further (I look to quantum physicists, especially those who take consciousness seriously, but I begin biased and still sceptical).

About consciousness, I know a little more. The first thing I know is that it’s challenging to imagine any normative scientific methodology usefully addressing superconsciousness/superpsychism. But here I do not freeze; I try to go further.

I suggest two orthogonal approaches that, while not dispositive in principle, might be insightful in practice. The first is a comparison with other theories, using what I call a ‘landscape of consciousness’ to discern commonalities and differences, including foundations, arguments, evidence, ways of thinking, and prospects for progress. The second is to explore the implications of theories of consciousness with respect to big questions, such as AI consciousness, virtual immortality, free will, meaning/purpose, and life after death. Of course, whatever the implications are, they cannot affirm or deny the veracity of a theory directly. Just perhaps, however, they might suggest insights indirectly. I apply both orthogonal approaches to superpsychism.

First, some background.

2. Landscape of Consciousness

Explanations of consciousness abound, and the radical diversity of theories is telling. Explanations, or theories, are said to work at astonishingly divergent orders of magnitude and putative realms of reality.

That’s how I begin ‘A Landscape of Consciousness: Toward a Taxonomy of Explanations and Implications’ (Kuhn, 2024). Of all the aphorisms on consciousness, Jerry Fodor’s is still my favourite. ‘Nobody has the slightest idea how anything material could be conscious. Nobody even knows what it would be like to have the slightest idea about how anything material could be conscious.’

The Landscape of theories ranges from the subatomic dance of quantum mechanics to the universal embrace of cosmic consciousness. Physicalist theories flow from quantum collapse, sub-neuronal organelles, neurons and synapses, neuronal nodes and local circuits, global circuits, brain-wide electromagnetic fields, to embodied,

enactive, and extended mind. Non-physical theories summon all manner of dualisms, panpsychisms, and idealisms. Then, monisms mingle the lot, while anomalous events and altered states inject heterodox or heretical ideas. A cavalcade of aspirants!

Landscape is the product of a lifetime. My PhD at UCLA's Brain Research Institute was in neurophysiology (thalamocortical evoked potentials). I created and host *Closer To Truth* (CTT), the long-running US public television series and web resource on science and philosophy (cosmos, life, mind, meaning). One-third of CTT focuses on mind/brain/consciousness topics; I've discussed consciousness with more than 200 scientists and philosophers.³ (CTT is co-created, produced, and directed by Peter Getzels.)

In the Landscape paper, I present approximately 225 theories of consciousness, organized within a framework spectrum from materialist/physicalist to non-materialist/non-physicalist. I describe each theory using the words of its author or adherents, with critique minimal and only for clarification. I make no attempt to judge or rank theories.

My stance must be humble: collect and categorize, not assess and adjudicate. Seek insights, not answers. Unrealistically, I want to get all the theories, at least all contemporary theories that are sufficiently distinct and have explanations that can surmount an arbitrary hurdle of rationality or conceivability.

To organize theories of consciousness, there are superb surveys and typologies, scientific and philosophical. David Chalmers uses six classes to structure the metaphysics of consciousness (Chalmers, 2003). In making a case for panpsychism, he assesses materialism, dualism, and monism as well as panpsychism (Chalmers, 2016). Anil Seth and Tim Bayne summarize 22 neurobiological theories seeking to explain the physical basis of consciousness. They intensify the mystery by observing, 'Notably, instead of ToCs [theories of consciousness] progressively being "ruled out" as empirical data accumulates, they seem to be proliferating' (Seth and Bayne, 2022). This seems telling.

I am less restrictive. My quasi-'Overton Window' of consciousness (Birch, 2023) — the range of explanatory theories I feel comfortable presenting, if not propounding — may be wider than those of others, whether physicalists or non-physicalists. One reason for my wider

³ See <https://clostertotruth.com/> and www.youtube.com/@CloserToTruthTV.

window is the unsolicited theories of consciousness that stream into *Closer To Truth*, some of which I find intriguing if not convincing.

Here's the Landscape backstory. The journal *Progress in Biophysics and Molecular Biology* (*PBMB*) invited me to contribute an overview paper on consciousness for an intended dedicated issue on quantum consciousness (I balked at first — sensing the looming obsession to come; even so, I wildly underestimated). In my first draft, I included, along with all the hard science, philosophical and theological explanations: complex philosophical theories (e.g. non-reductive physicalism, emergent dualism, panprotopsychism, cosmopsychism) and diverse religious views (Buddhist, Christian, Daoist, Hindu/Vedic (especially), Indigenous, Islamic, Judaic) — all with a similar degree of specificity and seriousness as for each of the many materialist/physicalist theories. The anonymous peer reviewer, while generously appreciative of the scientific theories (and offering helpful suggestions), recommended dropping the purely philosophical and theological theories, which, he said, *PBMB* readers would not much care about. I responded by agreeing that *PBMB* readers would likely not care, but that I surely did care, and because I was going to do this Landscape once in my life, I must make it as complete as I, in my idiosyncratic way, saw fit. Moreover, if *PBMB* did not want to publish it with all the theories, I'd totally understand and seek another venue. In fact, I've said, if I were the reviewer, I'd have rejected the paper for that reason. To *PBMB*'s credit, even though the quantum consciousness issue was postponed or not pursued, they agreed to publish Landscape, all of it, nothing cut.

After Landscape was published, urgings for a book ensued. I'd scarcely sketched a proposal before realizing the futility: a tome obsolete upon release. Far wiser: a dynamic website, adding and updating theories in real time, and authenticated by the theorists themselves.

3. Landscape Structure

Nurtured for nearly a year, the Landscape of Consciousness website (<https://loc.closetototruth.com>) now charts about 400 theories in 10 categories (Figure 1, created by Alex Gómez-Marín). It is conceived as a one-dimensional typology with two-dimensional extensions, and, as such, it is inherently constrained, forcing arbitrary calls of inclusion, exclusion, classification, and sequence. I assembled the well-known theories and a curated set of lesser-known theories that possess

some combination of originality, rationality, coherence, and (well) charm. Theory lengths signal neither degree of veracity nor my idiosyncratic bias.⁴

Some theories track folk intuitions. Some do seem bizarre. All highlight humanity's restless quest to comprehend the mind and apprehend reality. My quixotic hope: whatever consciousness's ultimate explanation, it exists somewhere within this theoretical landscape — perhaps in several locations — even if we lack present or foreseeable capacity to identify it (my hope may be forlorn — perhaps consciousness is nowhere knowable — but my bet is that human capacity can identify the alternatives and bound the options).

My aim is gathering, not pruning; taxonomy, not verdict. Falsification or verification isn't on the agenda. I'm less concerned with theories' ontological truth than with what they are, where they sit, and how they relate.

I have two central theses:

- i. Understanding consciousness at this point cannot be restricted to approved or selected modes of thought or ways of knowing; instead, it should seek expansive yet rational diversity.
- ii. The profound questions of sentience (e.g. meaning/purpose, free will, personal identity, AI consciousness, virtual immortality, and life after death) cannot be fully understood except in the light of particular theories of consciousness.

Thus, the Landscape is not about how consciousness is measured, evolved, or operates — though many theories are — but about what consciousness *is* and what difference it makes.

Even as neurobiological knowledge deepens, the perennial question persists: will physical facts suffice to explain the essence of consciousness — even in principle — ever? Many affirm high confidence in their answer (yes or no, one way or the other); others (I among them) keep the question open.

⁴ Landscapes admit multiple renderings; mine claims no privileged perspective. That's why the paper was titled 'A' Landscape..., not 'The' Landscape...

MATERIALISM									
Philosophical		Eliminative/Reductionism		Neurobiological		Electromagnetic		Computational & Functionalism	
(overview)	Churchlands	(overview)	Searle	(overview)	Hunt/Schoder	(overview)	computational	(overview)	predictive
	Frankish		Edelman		brain waves		Blums		embodied
	Humphrey		Crick/Koch		Pocket		Demmett		Friction
	Blackmore		Chalmers		McFadden		Aguiar y Arcas		Virella
	Kim		He		Wass		Bostrom		Chaitin
	Rapaport		Paragut		Pinke		Goswami		entropic
	13 questions		Bach		Finke/Kurts		Wass		Bolton
	Goldstein		circuits/cycles		Ames/McGregor		complex/adaptive		Deacon
	Herdicette		Nortoff		Ames/McGregor		complex/adaptive		Petria
	Soljar		Bunge		Zhang		Philippien/Michals		Merchett
	Webberg		free agents		Ames/McGregor		Philippien/Michals		Merchett
			Hirstein		Zhang		mathematical		Prezel-Wilson
									Holmes
									Glennakopoulos
NON-REDUCTIVE PHYSICALISM		QUANTUM & DIMENSIONS		INFORMATION		PANPSYCHISMS		MONISMS	
(overview)	Ellis	(overview)	Penrose/Hameroff	(overview)	Toront	(overview)	micropsychism	(overview)	Russellian
	Maxwell		Hameroff		critiques		panpsychism		Davidson
	Van Inwagen		Doim		Chalmers		panpsychism		Swanson
	Sperry		Chalmers/McQueen		Heal		qualia force		Pekkinghorne
	Melissos		Forman		Doim		qualia		Amund
	Chalkin		Kaufman		Boyd		Starr		Starr
			Car		Bech		Starr		Goff
	Sartre		Kepler		Bech		Starr		Yee
	Wortoff		Pickaren		Bech		Starr		Schneider/Baley
			Kepler		Bech		Starr		A Harris
			Kepler		Bech		Starr		Starr
			Kepler		Bech		Starr		Starr
			Kepler		Bech		Starr		Starr
			Kepler		Bech		Starr		Starr
			Kepler		Bech		Starr		Starr
ANOMALOUS & ALTERED STATES		IDEALISMS		DUALISMS		RELATIONAL		FIRST-ORDER	
(overview)	Isaac	(overview)	Jung	(overview)	Indian	(overview)	Latou	(overview)	Lau
	McGinn		Schitz		Indian		Latou		Latou
	Shimmer		Schitz		Indian		Latou		Latou
	Shimmer		Schitz		Indian		Latou		Latou
	Shimmer		Schitz		Indian		Latou		Latou
	Shimmer		Schitz		Indian		Latou		Latou
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	Shimmer		Schitz		Indian		Latou		Latou
	Shimmer		Schitz		Indian		Latou		Latou
	Shimmer		Schitz		Indian		Latou		Latou
CHALLENGE		HIGHER-ORDER		LANGUAGE RELATIONSHIPS		PHYSIOGENETIC/ EVOLUTIONARY		ADDITIONAL	
(overview)	Isaac	(overview)	Jung	(overview)	Indian	(overview)	Latou	(overview)	Lau
	McGinn		Schitz		Indian		Latou		Latou
	Shimmer		Schitz		Indian		Latou		Latou
	Shimmer		Schitz		Indian		Latou		Latou
	Shimmer		Schitz		Indian		Latou		Latou
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	Shimmer		Schitz		Indian		Latou		Latou
	Shimmer		Schitz		Indian		Latou		Latou
	Shimmer		Schitz		Indian		Latou		Latou



<https://loc.closetotruth.com/>

Figure created by Alex Gomez-Marin

Figure 1. Landscape of Consciousness.

4. Categories and Theories

As noted, my focus in Landscape is narrow and ontological: what spawns or births our inner subjectivity, our felt experience? The theories skew contemporary and scientific, yet I engage humanity's wider wisdom across times and cultures. I am no 'consciousness practitioner': I don't meditate; I've never taken psychedelics; I've had no mystical experience (for these three omissions, I am criticized; I tell my critics I play intense table tennis; they say it doesn't count).

In grouping the ~400 theories of consciousness into 10 categories, I array the first eight roughly from physicalist to non-physicalist: *Materialism*. *Non-Reductive Physicalism*. *Quantum & Dimensions*. *Information*. *Panpsychisms*. *Monisms*. *Dualisms*. *Idealisms*. Materialist theories have physicalist, science-based views, while non-materialist theories encompass various degrees of non-physicalist perspectives that fall outside the ambit of current science, and in many cases they are not subject to the scientific method at all. Then, *Anomalous & Altered States* theories recruit extrasensory perception (ESP), out-of-body experiences (OBEs), near-death experiences (NDEs), meditation, and psychedelics to inform (or misinform) theories of consciousness. *Challenge* theories argue that explaining consciousness is beyond human capacity or demand radically novel frameworks (see Figure 1).

Of the ten consciousness categories, Materialism houses the largest number of theories by far. No surprise. There are more ways to explain consciousness with physical models than with non-physical models. Moreover, because the materialist requirement remains acute — how do brain states yield mental states? — innovation abounds.

I give Materialism 12 subcategories. *Philosophical* (e.g. epiphenomenalism, functionalism, emergence, identity theory). *Eliminative/Illusionism* (in the former, consciousness is a myth; in the latter, a ruse). *Neurobiological* (e.g. neural correlates of consciousness, global workspace theory). *Electromagnetic Field* (brain-wide waves and currents in the 3D neural web). *Computational & Functionalism* (mind as computation; mental states defined by roles, not substrates; many assume both: computational functionalism). *Homeostatic & Affective* (bodily regulation, affect/emotions; predictive and free-energy/active inference models). *Embodied & Enactive* (cognition shaped by body and enacted via world engagement; neurophenomenology). *Relational* (subject/object, organism/environment). *First-*

order (world-directed intentional states). *Higher-order* (second-order thoughts about first-order sensations, a representation of a representation). *Language* (enriches content; few theories centre on it). *Phylogenetic/Evolutionary* (actualizes many theories; it's even stronger in several).

Some theories and theorists appear twice: for example, Epiphenomenalism in Materialism *and* Dualism; Functionalism in Philosophical *and* Computational; Daniel Dennett in Eliminative/Illusionism *and* Computational & Functionalism. Overlapping and crosscutting traits blur boundaries. Non-Reductive Physicalism, Quantum & Dimensions, and perhaps even Information and Panpsychisms, could arguably be Materialism subcategories — requiring nothing beyond fundamental physics (current or extended). I grant them their own categories because each has its own independence, prominence, and adherent credibility, and because each diverges meaningfully from classic materialism, as pinned to contemporary physics and neurobiology.

Here's a classification case study: science philosopher/writer Amanda Gefter, responding to my summary of her 'Enactive QBist Engagement' theory, notes (quoted with her permission):

I don't consider my view, or enaction in general, to fall under materialism. But it's not idealist or dualist either. Materialism and idealism require an absolute subject-object split... By rejecting that split, enaction (and QBism) doesn't operate within those categories. It's not all first person (idealism) or all third person (materialism), but something like second person, where the split is enacted in a participatory way... By enacting itself, the body functions as both subject and object, and doesn't fit squarely in either.

I joked that if, instead of a 2D grid, I had Hilbert space, I'd do a better job. My own criterion for Materialism is ontological and framed in the negative: if a theory posits nothing beyond physics, it's Materialism. Enactivists insist there's nothing spooky or non-physical in their accounts (QBism, by contrast, I'd not place under Materialism). I carve out Non-Reductive Physicalism and Quantum & Dimensional — still physicalist at base — because they re-inscribe 'the physical' in radical ways. But no, I cannot claim a logically precise demarcation where materialist theories end and non-materialist theories begin.

A special interest: Identity Theory. Not the vintage mind-brain identity theory, but because the identity form of explanation is more pervasive than commonly realized. Any theory that offers itself to be sufficient and complete in explaining consciousness must, at bottom,

be a kind of identity theory. I mean identity in the strong sense, such that whatever ‘something’ the theory claims is consciousness, if you remove that something, you lose consciousness — as surely as removing the Morning Star loses the Evening Star, because both are Venus (Papineau, 2020). The crux: some immutable ‘consciousness identity’ occurs in every sentient creature. Something just *is* consciousness.

5. Implications

Landscape is not a collector’s cabinet; it is a taxonomist’s (not a taxidermist’s) table and a field-lab for exploring the implications or consequences of theories of consciousness for questions of sentience. In the Landscape paper, I began with four: meaning/purpose (if any), AI consciousness, virtual immortality, and survival beyond death. Here, I also take a first pass at free will. To come: personal identity, what things are conscious, value. My point: these questions cannot be understood — much less answered — apart from particular theories of consciousness. A landscape offers perspective.

Take AI consciousness (AIC), a matter of public policy and a stress-test for theories. I cannot imagine how science could ever distinguish super-AI’s actual from apparent inner awareness, even in principle. But this underdetermination does not render the question irrelevant. It remains maximally relevant.

Here’s how each category of consciousness theories could affect AI consciousness.

Materialism (all subcategories): AIC is certain; it cannot be forbidden; it is inevitable. But views split along the fault line of life. If embodiment is required, build the body.

Non-Reductive Physicalism: AIC is likely; but if strong emergence and/or top-down causation are required, engineers must control them.

Quantum: AIC is almost certain, provided quantum states can be manipulated; moreover, quantum computers could make quantum theories the leader for AIC.

Information: AIC is possible. But if an irreducible ‘qualia space’ (e.g. IIT) is required, technological mastery boggles the imagination.

Panpsychism: AIC is likely, because consciousness is woven into the fabric of reality. But can technology transform micro-experiences into macro-mind?

Monism: AIC is almost certain, almost by definition, because everything everywhere is the same fundamental stuff.

Dualism: AIC is almost impossible. A radically separate, non-physical substance would bar AIC, regardless of how super the AI. An extreme exception: ‘emergent dualism’, where ethereal psychophysical laws generate non-physical substances from physical complexity.

Idealism: AIC is almost certain. If reality is all and only consciousness, then anything could be conscious. But how to isolate the individual/personal from the collective/cosmic?

Anomalous & Altered States: AIC is possible. If something beyond materialism is required, it must be tech-tractable.

Challenge: AIC is unlikely. If consciousness is truly beyond the human capacity to understand, then how could we engineer it?

Materialist views on AI consciousness bifurcate, using life as the touchstone. Some say life is a prerequisite. Embodied and enactive theories also privilege life and its interactions with the environment. Most materialists, and almost all AI experts, disagree and argue that life is not in any way special, and it is certainly not necessary for consciousness. Their view, computational functionalism, is that the brain and its outputs, including consciousness, are computational in nature, and that if the function is reproduced precisely, so is the output, irrespective of the substrate in which the function is carried out — consciousness being no exception.

Ultimately, there is no difference in the materialist outcome: AI will become conscious. The only difference is the steps involved and the timeline they require. If computational functionalism is correct, it’s a matter of finding the functions, and the timeline is shorter (but not, I suspect, short). If life is required, then AI consciousness is a two-step process: first, life must be artificially created and manipulated, then the special requirements of consciousness added — a longer timeline.

But materialism, critically, is not the only category competing to be the final explanation of consciousness.

6. Virtual Immortality, Free Will, Life After Death

The same principles can be applied to other questions of sentience.

Virtual Immortality. For each category of consciousness theories, virtual immortality (VI) is at least one step more difficult and more remote than AI consciousness. I contend that AIC is a necessary but

not sufficient condition for VI. AIC would produce innumerable entities with varying qualities, but VI must produce one entity with innumerable, precise qualities.

Free Will (in the libertarian sense that prior states or laws do not determine some human choices — the agent is the ultimate source and genuinely could have done otherwise). Materialism: unlikely. Non-Reductive Physicalism: likely. Quantum: likely. Information: likely. Panpsychism: likely. Monism: possible. Dualism: almost certain. Idealism: almost certain. Anomalous & Altered states: likely. Challenge: possible.

Meaning/Purpose (in the grand cosmic sense of transcendent meaning/purpose, way beyond the ‘meaning/purpose’ we make for ourselves). Materialism: almost impossible. Non-Reductive Physicalism: likely. Quantum: possible. Information: possible. Panpsychism: likely. Monism: possible. Dualism: certain. Idealism: almost certain. Anomalous and Altered States: likely. Challenge: unlikely.

Life After Death. Materialism: almost impossible, with remote quasi-exceptions for virtual immortality and a four-dimensional block universe. Non-Reductive Physicalism: unlikely (religious certainty: resurrection). Quantum: unlikely (even if so, it could be in formal, abstract ways of uncertain meaning). Panpsychism: unlikely. Monism: unlikely. Dualism: certain, with first-person consciousness preserved. Idealism: almost certain, with first-person consciousness blurred or banished. Anomalous and Altered States: likely. Challenge: unlikely.

Table 1 summarizes these implications of the theories in a grid: each of the 10 categories of theories is scored for each of the five implications on a 0 to 6 scale — 0 = Impossible; 1 = Almost Impossible; 2 = Unlikely; 3 = Possible; 4 = Likely; 5 = Almost Certain; 6 = Certain. I claim no secret sources: no voices spoke to me; I had no revelations. In fact, each time I reviewed the grid, I tweaked it here and there (in both directions). I happily welcome other views on these scorings. Much depends on precise definitions and nuanced assumptions. I think the exercise sharpens perspective by forcing tighter definitions and more explicit assumptions.

For example, comparing Virtual Immortality with Life After Death, two putative ways of ‘survival’, reveals an inverse relationship with respect to theories of consciousness. Comparing AI Consciousness with Free Will distinguishes what must be created from what already exists. All highlight the vast gulf between the absolutisms of Materialism and Dualism, and how other theories, being less definitive in their implications, are situated between these extremes.

Although the five implications are entirely different questions of sentience, the similar mapping of the theories onto the implications reinforces the explanatory power of particular theories of consciousness.

Of course, the implications of a theory, no matter what they are, cannot affirm or deny the veracity of that theory directly. However, just perhaps, the implications might suggest insights indirectly.

Feedback is appreciated. The Landscape of Consciousness is a work in progress, permanently.

	AI Consciousness	Virtual Immortality	Free Will	Grand/Cosmic Meaning/Purpose	Life After Death
Materialism	6	4	2	1	1
Non-Reductive Physicalism	4	3	4	4	2
Quantum & Dimensions	5	3	4	3	2
Information	4	3	4	3	2
Panpsychisms	4	3	4	4	2
Monisms	5	3	3	3	2
Dualisms	1	0	5	6	5
Idealisms	5	3	5	5	5
Anomalous & Altered State	3	2	4	4	4
Challenge	2	1	3	2	2

Table 1. 0 = Impossible; 1 = Almost Impossible; 2 = Unlikely; 3 = Possible; 4 = Likely; 5 = Almost Certain; 6 = Certain.

7. Superpsychism

I try applying this orthogonal approach to superpsychism. First, I locate it on the Landscape,⁵ and then assess its implications for questions of sentience. In other words, if superpsychism were true (or roughly true), what would follow for AI consciousness, virtual immortality, free will, meaning/purpose, and life after death? I do not suggest that any of this will yield actionable evidence for evaluation.

⁵ <https://loc.closetotruth.com/theory/schneider-and-bailey-s-entangled-superpsychism>

My modest hope is that it may stimulate new ways of thinking about theories of consciousness in general.

On the Landscape, as a panpsychism theory, superpsychism shares the benefits of avoiding brute emergence. Experience is (or is in) the base; it is the ultimate given, brute fact writ large. Emergence organizes, rather than conjures, consciousness.

Superpsychism distinguishes itself by boldly posing mechanisms linked to fundamental physics (radical to be sure). It shifts ontological weight downward to sub-space-time coherence and recruits a maximally extended entangled resonance. But are we not still left with that uncomfortable identity claim: why should *that* (e.g. coherence/resonance) be *felt*?

Regarding subject individuation, does superpsychism face an even bigger problem than does traditional panpsychism, in that a maximally coherent totality may over-connect, over-unify, and even ossify experience? This block-solid cosmic experience elicits the obvious question: how do independent, circumscribed, first-person perspectives arise? What fixes the boundaries of subjects? (This is idealism's primary problem.) Say, localized decoherence carve-outs? Motivated by what? It's hard to imagine a mechanism that does more than reframe the question.

Now, on to implications. A reminder — implications are guestimates, not truth tests. That a theory fits or favours certain big-question stances does not make it veridical. However, implications may reveal what kind of world a theory (e.g. superpsychism) may inhabit, and there may be an outside chance that our intuition about such a world could count in favour of, or against, that world being the actual world.

AI Consciousness. Possible. Superpsychism is substrate-neutral, but coherence-demanding and resonance-requiring. The engineering challenges seem immense, far greater than for materialist theories or even for 'normal' panpsychism theories, because superpsychism's locus of consciousness resides far deeper. If these deepest elements are already embedded and structured into higher-level entities, AI consciousness would be facilitated. If manipulations were needed to go sub-space-time, that would render AI consciousness, in principle, impossible.

Virtual Immortality. Unlikely. If personal identity is pattern-persistence under decoherence constraints, then digital emulation that reinstantiates the right coherence relationships could, in principle, continue a person. Yet if participation in prototime coherence requires special kinds of coupling not attainable through manipulations, then

copying without coupling would seem phenomenally empty. Superpsychism thus raises the bar: not only functional equivalence, but also coherence equivalence.

Free Will. Possible. If entanglement structures extend across what we call ‘past’ and ‘future’, and if prototime contains global constraints, cosmic determinism may be on offer. However, if prototime affords consciousness greater degrees of freedom, the prospects for free will are enhanced. Superpsychism could allow compatibilism: free will as agent-level, coherence-shaping classical outcomes during decoherence. However, libertarian free will would require an open joint at decoherence boundaries, a concept conceivable but not confirmable.

Meaning/Purpose. Almost certain. If all reality is deeply connected, fundamentally through bottom-level cosmic consciousness and quantum entanglement, then cosmic meaning/purpose seems just about sure. The reason is that connectedness itself is, by definition, a kind of transcendent meaning/purpose.

Life After Death. Unlikely. Superpsychism does not entail post-mortem persistence. It allows two options: (i) dissipation: when the organism’s decoherence-bounded structure collapses, local subjectivity ends; (ii) re-coupling: if some non-classical coherence persists or is assimilated into larger prototime structures, a form of survival is conceivable. The theory may be metaphysically permissive, but it is conceptually challenged.

To reiterate, each implication item neither proves nor disproves the theory; each presents consequences that may shape a superpsychism world.

At the very least, superpsychism is exhilarating, stretching the boundaries of what it means to explain consciousness, which, I suspect, is the singular, most consequential datum by which to assay all reality.

8. Reflections

I have come to love this storm of consciousness — this blizzard of theories — because, as I say, I take consciousness to be the central question of existence as well as of sentience, regardless of its ultimate answer. If ultimate reality hinges on the take-no-prisoners battle between physicalism and non-physicalism, consciousness likely determines which way the world turns. That is why, for now, I refuse to

over-constrain either its potential mechanisms or its speculative implications.

How to progress? For each theory on the Landscape, standardize issues/questions, including foundational assumptions, distinguishing ideas, open issues or challenges, and next steps.

I've learned from many. David Chalmers and John Searle (together on *Closer To Truth* in 1999, separately in 2007 and 2014); then more with Dave, his frameworks, and of course the 'hard problem'. Colin McGinn's mysterianism (1989) rekindled my engagement. Dan Dennett was a treasure; although I resisted his deflationary consciousness, I relished our exchanges. Christof Koch's neural correlates and nuanced open-mindedness. Ned Block's incisive distinctions. Pat Churchland's neurophilosophy. Ray Tallis's neuromania. Galen Strawson's 'real materialism' (panpsychism). Bernardo Kastrup's analytic idealism. Richard Swinburne's dualism. Philip Goff's ambitious speculations. John Leslie's infinite minds.

Landscape's myriad theories are accessed via five digital lenses: Landscape Grid;⁶ Landscape Categories;⁷ All Landscape Theories;⁸ Landscape Map;⁹ and Interactive Visualizations,¹⁰ plus Search and AI. Each lens refracts inter-theory relationships from different angles.¹¹

Here's what caught me by surprise. In retrospect, I should not have been surprised, but I was. As we witness on *Closer To Truth*, passion for consciousness convenes people who otherwise share little (and may be at odds): nationality, religion, race, ethnicity, age, gender, education, and income. Ultimate questions unite us human beings.

To end, a confession. If I'd be telling that my lifelong pursuit of consciousness has been motivated entirely by hard-nosed science or cool-coated philosophy, I'd be telling a fib. A *sub rosa* driver has been an ever-haunting teenage thought, which I put into my first paper, 'The Human Mind' (1969). The thought is not scientific, nor is it entirely rational. But it endures.

⁶ <https://loc.closertotruth.com/consciousness-theories>

⁷ <https://loc.closertotruth.com/all-consciousness-categories-and-subcategories>

⁸ <https://loc.closertotruth.com/all-consciousness-categories-subcategories-and-theories>

⁹ <https://loc.closertotruth.com/map>

¹⁰ <https://loc.closertotruth.com/interactive>

¹¹ Collaborators: physicist/neuroscientist Alex Gómez-Marín on vision, mapping, novel entries; digital strategist D.J. Smith on architecture; concept designer Deniz Cem Öndügu on visualizations; Sean Slocum and Sandra Derksen, editors.

Should a being who can perceive eternity be denied it?

But I won't fool myself.

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