

# OPENING WORDS

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“Although all knowledge  
begins with experience,  
it does not follow that  
all knowledge arises out of experience.”

*with these words, Immanuel Kant attempted to settle the debate between the Empiricists, who claim that all knowledge is based on sensation, and the Rationalists, who claimed that some knowledge is based on reason.*

*Kant believed that the human mind imposed an organization on sensation and that knowledge of that organization is based on reason and not on sensation.*

# UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

*by Gilbert Fargen*

*17 March 2019*

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# BACKGROUND

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- ✘ Many people claim to have spiritual experiences. These experiences can be as diverse as
  - + seeing a sunset,
  - + doing someone a kindness,
  - + achieving a deep meditative state,
  - + seeing a ghost,
  - + or talking with God.
- ✘ Some people also claim that these experiences are evidence of a reality beyond the natural world and of life after death (and, for some, of life before birth).



# SCOPE OF THIS TALK:

## ONE OF THE THREE TYPES OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

- ✘ **Universal (or Unprivileged)**  
*experiences shared by nearly all human beings*
- ✘ **Partially Privileged**  
*experiences shared by nearly all human beings who undergo specific training, ingest specific substances or have certain illnesses*
- ✘ **Fully Privileged**  
*experiences which are unique to certain individuals*

# SCOPE

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The central theme of this talk is that:

***A sentient mind must ADD  
a special type of element  
to Ordinary Experience  
in order for  
Universal Spiritual Experience to arise.***

Although Spiritual Experience begins with Ordinary Experience, it does not arise out of the Ordinary Experience.

# OBJECTIVES, 1

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*To provide answers to the following questions:*

1. What is the difference between an ordinary and a spiritual experience?
2. What is the difference between a universal and a privileged spiritual experience?
3. Are there different types of universal spiritual experience?
4. Are some universal spiritual experiences richer than others?

# OBJECTIVES, 2

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*To provide answers to the following questions:*

5. How are universal spiritual experiences developed?
6. What is spiritual growth? spiritual transformation?
7. What do universal spiritual experiences signify or mean?



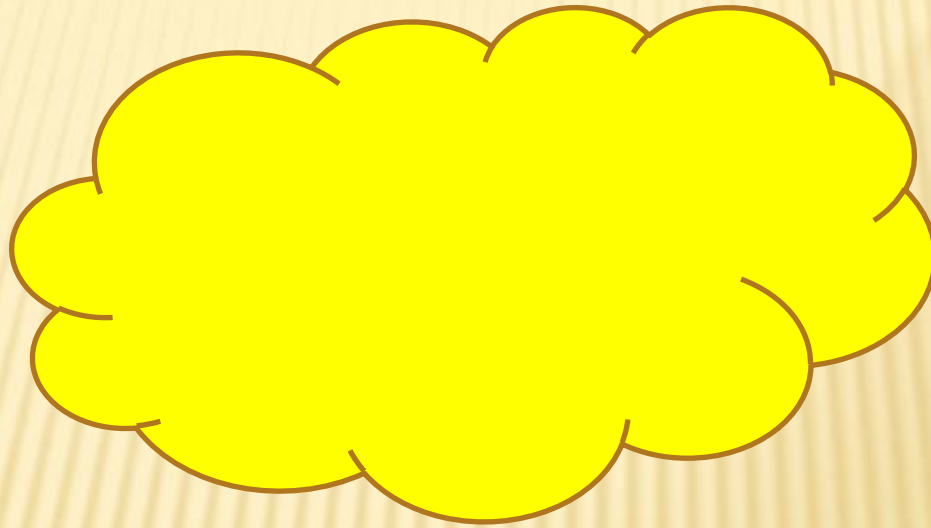
# ORDINARY VERSUS SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE



**ORDINARY EXPERIENCE**  
a Quick Survey

**ONE ORDINARY EXPERIENCE**  
**one simple perception**

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# ALL PERCEPTIONS ARE ORDINARY EXPERIENCES

## TYPES OF PERCEPTION

EXTERNAL	INTERNAL	POSITION & MOVEMENT	SENSORY MOTOR CONTROL
sight	pleasure	balance	breathe/sniff
sound	pain	position of a body part	gulp/suck/swallow
touch	thirst	speed of a body part	maintain balance / position
taste	hunger	acceleration of a body part	grasp / twist
smell	coldness / warmth		push / pull
	movement of internal organs		move a body part /walk /run



# ALL EMOTIONS ARE ORDINARY EXPERIENCES

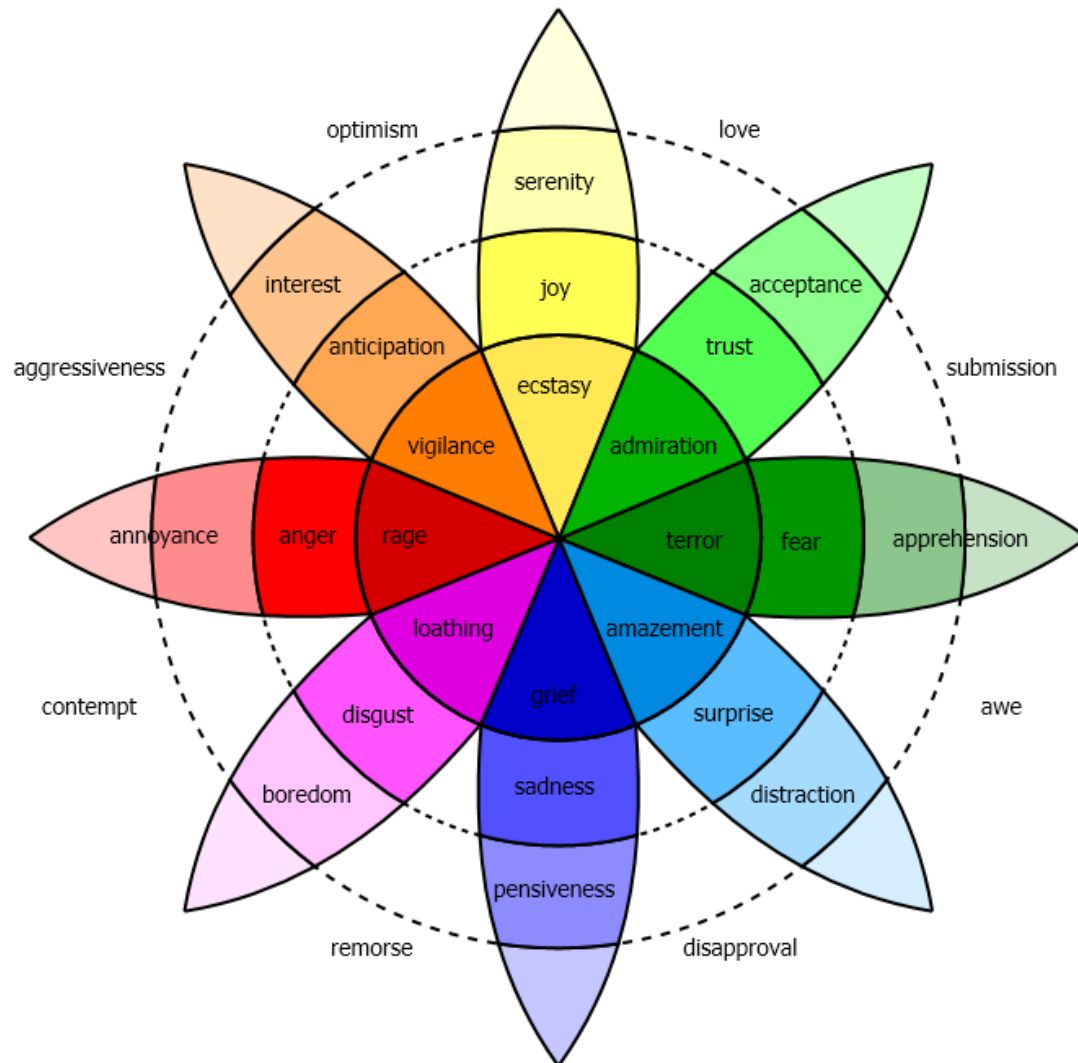
## ROBERT PLUTCHIK'S WHEEL OF EMOTIONS

### 8 PRIMARY EMOTIONS

- × Fear
- × Trust
- × Joy
- × Anticipation
- × Anger
- × Disgust
- × Sadness
- × Surprise

- × **Primary emotions vary in intensity.**
  - × *Example, terror, ordinary fear, apprehension are variations in fear.*
- × **Other emotions are combinations of primary emotions.**
  - × *Example, love = joy + trust.*

# ROBERT PLUTCHIK'S WHEEL OF EMOTIONS



# PERCEPTIONS AND EMOTIONS

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- ✘ Emotions can be added onto perceptions.
- ✘ A whole experience may consist of a perception plus an emotion attached to the perception.
- ✘ For example, the color yellow may induce joy in some people.



# SUMMARY OF ORDINARY EXPERIENCES

## *Ordinary experience consists of:*

Perception	States of the Self
Focus & Attention	Faces & Other Selves
Emotion	Behavior & Others' States
Sensory-Motor Control	Actions
Memory	Regularities
Dreams	Causes & Effects
Imagination	Purposes, Goals & Plans
Possibility	Actualizability
Concepts	Signs, Words & Language
Affordances	Abstractions
Objects & Space	Theories & Models
Events & Time	Explanation & Understanding

# ORDINARY EXPERIENCE CONSISTS OF MULTIPLICITIES OF SMALLER EXPERIENCES

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The total ordinary experience of a single sentient mind at any one time contains a multiplicity of smaller experiences:

1. of different modes (sight, sound, emotion, body position, conceptualization, understanding)
2. arrayed in different modal spaces (visual space, sound space, emotional space, conceptual space)
3. arrayed in different temporal sequences (a moving ball, a musical phrase, a plan to achieve a goal)

# WHERE IS THE SPIRITUAL?

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No matter how complex

No matter how rich these experiences are,  
they do not contain anything spiritual.

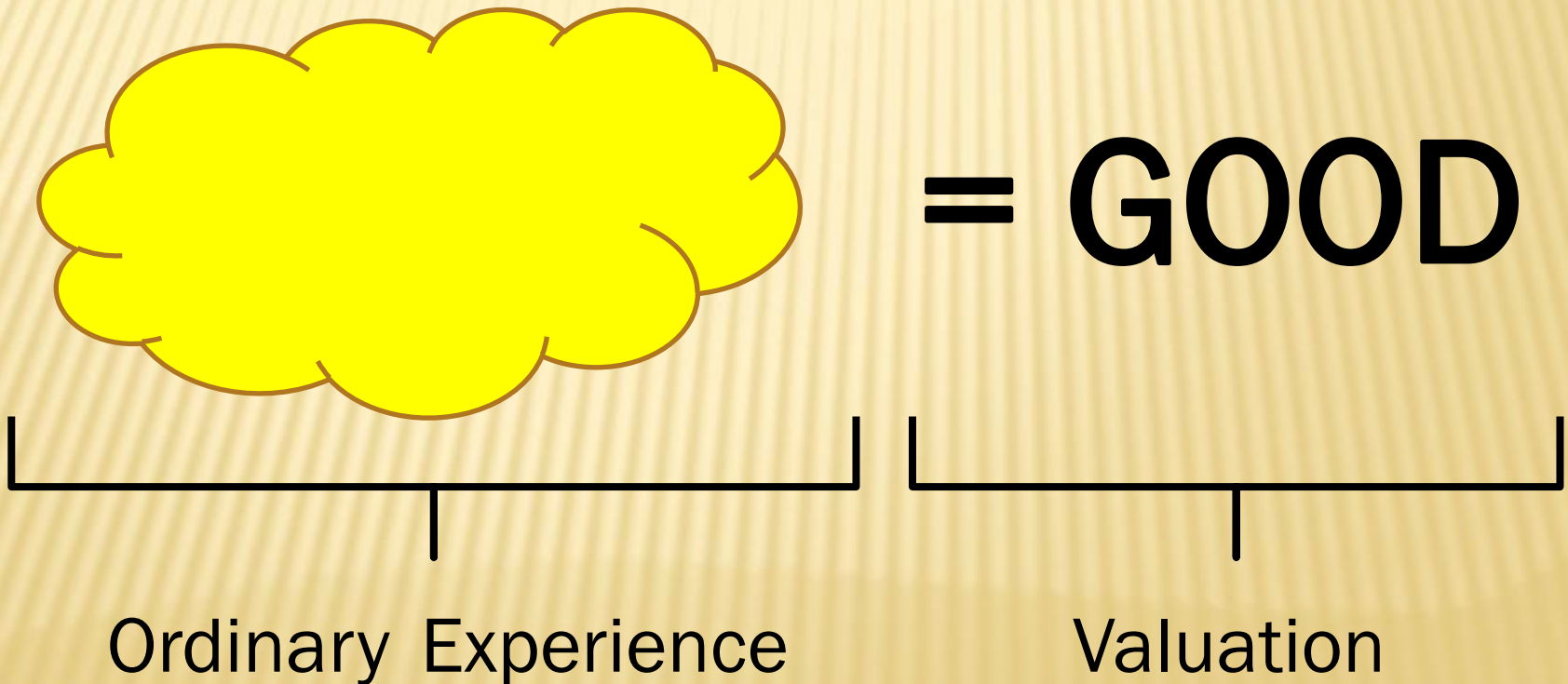


# UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

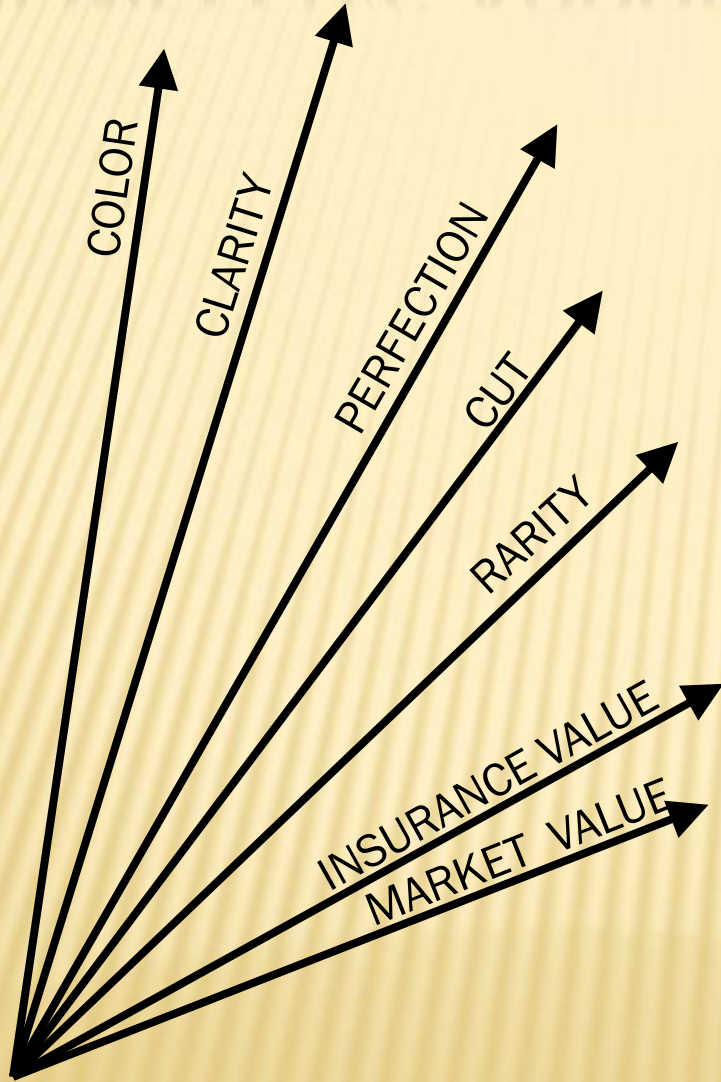
UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES  
RESULT FROM **APPRECIATION**

# A SIMPLE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

The simplest spiritual experience is an ordinary experience + a valuation.



# A JEWELER'S APPRECIATION



- ✘ When a jeweler *appreciates* a gem, she assigns to it a value.
- ✘ This assignment is the result of evaluating multiple factors.



# APPRECIATION & VALUATION

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- ✘ When a mind appreciates any experience, the mind assigns the experience a value, that is, it makes a valuation.
- ✘ “Appreciation” refers to the act of making a valuation.
- ✘ “Valuation” refers to the result of an appreciation.

# TYPES OF VALUATION

	OF AN END	OF A MEANS
SINGULAR	This is good	This is a good way to achieve that end
COMPARATIVE	This is better than that	This way is a better way to achieve that end than that way

# APPRECIATION

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- ✘ Appreciations are the essential component of all universal spiritual experiences.
- ✘ Appreciations create value and meaning where there was none.
- ✘ The ability to appreciate is the most fundamental component of “human divinity” in the sense that it creates something out nothing.
- ✘ We share this value-creating divinity with all sentient beings, but we do not share all types of spiritual experience with all sentient beings.



**COMPLEXITY TYPES  
OF UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE**



# COMPLEXITY TYPES OF UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

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*Universal Spiritual Experiences, in order of complexity:*

1. Perceptual Appreciation
2. Passive Compassion
3. Active Compassion
4. Connection to Others
5. Connection to the Environment

UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE  
RESULTING FROM **PERCEPTUAL APPRECIATION**

# SIMPLE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

- ✘ Simple spiritual experiences are directed to objects and object level ordinary experiences.
- ✘ The appreciation of objects creates physical beauty.  
(*Beauty really is in the eye of the beholder.*)
- ✘ These experiences include appreciation of:
  - + groups of objects related in space (visual art)
  - &
  - + groups of objects related in time (auditory art / music).



# POSITIVE & NEGATIVE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

- ✘ Appreciations can be positive or negative.
- ✘ A positive appreciation creates physical beauty.  
and
- ✘ A negative appreciation creates physical ugliness.
- ✘ Both beauty and ugliness are created by and within spiritual experiences.



UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE  
RESULTING FROM **PASSIVE COMPASSION**

# PASSIVE COMPASSION

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- ✘ Passive compassion requires imagining (representing) how I would feel if I were in the situation in which others find themselves (that is, how I would appreciate it).
- ✘ Passive compassion requires a sentient mind to have a concept of self (that is, of one's self), which includes the ability to imagine how I would appreciate a variety of experiences.
- ✘ Passive compassion arises when I represent other selves as copies of my self.

# APPRECIATION OF PASSIVE COMPASSION

- ✘ Representations created by Passive Compassion are, in and of themselves, still Ordinary Experiences.
- ✘ It is only when these representations are evaluated as good or bad, that the representation + evaluation becomes a Spiritual Experience,
- ✘ *That is, it is still appreciation which is the essential component in creating spiritual experience based on passive compassion but the appreciation is not directed to an object but to a subject.*
- ✘ Passive Compassion generates the Golden Rule.



# THE GOLDEN RULE

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Taking action based on Passive Compassion is normally expressed in the **Golden Rule**:

Do unto others  
as you would have them  
do unto you.



UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE  
RESULTING FROM **ACTIVE COMPASSION**

# ACTIVE COMPASSION, 1

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- ✘ Active compassion requires imagining (representing) how other people feel in the situation in which they find themselves (that is, how they would appreciate it).
- ✘ Active compassion requires that a mind:
  - ✘ form concepts of other selves which are not copies of the concept of one's self,
  - ✘ build a general theory of other selves
  - ✘ and build models of individual other selves.

# ACTIVE COMPASSION, 2

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- ✘ It is only when these representations of active compassion are evaluated as good or bad, that the representation + valuation becomes a Spiritual Experience.
- ✘ That is, it is still appreciation which is the essential component in creating spiritual experience based on active compassion but the appreciation is directed to other subjects, rather than objects or myself as subject.
- ✘ Active Compassion generates the Platinum Rule.



# THE PLATINUM RULE

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Taking action based on Active Compassion is normally expressed in the **Platinum Rule**:

Do unto others  
as they would have you  
do unto them.



# THE GOLDEN AND PLATINUM RULES

Golden Rule:

Do unto others  
as you would have them  
do unto you.

Platinum Rule:

Do unto others  
as they would have you  
do unto them.

UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE  
RESULTING FROM **CONNECTION TO OTHERS**

# CONNECTION TO OTHERS, 1

- ✘ The concept of a connection to others is formed when a mind conceives it's self as a member of a group also containing other selves.
  
- ✘ The self is thereby connected to the other selves within the group.
  
- ✘ This conception of a connection to others has prerequisite conceptual requirements:
  - + the concept of a group,
  - + the concept of membership in a group,
  - + concepts of various roles/obligations with a group,
  - + the concept of group action,
  - + the concept of participation in group action.



# CONNECTION TO OTHERS, 2

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## ✘ Another view sees:

- + a group as an organism, a self and an agent
- + and being a member of a group is the same as being a part of the group, in the same way that my brain, heart and lungs are a part of me.

## ✘ Still another view sees:

- + being a member of a group as belonging to a group.



# SOCIAL JUSTICE

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- ✘ When one participates in group action, there are questions about who bears the costs and risks of the action and who, within the group, receives the benefits of the action.

*That is, there are the “economic” questions of production and distribution.*

- ✘ As well, there are questions about what is to be done with those who don't meet their obligations to act or to refrain from acting.

*That is, there are questions about crime and punishment.*

- ✘ **Connection to Others results in Spiritual Experiences concerned with Social Justice.**

**UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE  
RESULTING FROM  
CONNECTION TO THE ENVIRONMENT**

# CONNECTION TO THE ENVIRONMENT

- ✘ The concept of a connection to the environment is formed when a mind conceives it's self as a subsystem of a *self-sustaining* and *self-regulating* system containing other subsystems, including other selves.
  
- ✘ The self is thereby connected to the other subsystems within the overall system.
  
- ✘ This conception of a connection to the environment has prerequisite conceptual requirements:
  - + the concepts of a system and a subsystem,
  - + the concept of a system interaction,
  - + concepts of various roles / functions within a system, including self-regulating roles / functions,
  - + the concept of system impacts of individual and group actions, including self-sustaining impacts.



# ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

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- ✘ When one is a part of a self-regulating and self-sustaining system and participates in group action, there are questions about which parts of the system bear the costs and risks and which parts receive the benefits.
- ✘ That is, questions arise concerning beneficial and detrimental impacts to the system and all subsystems.
- ✘ **Connection to the Environment results in Spiritual Experiences concerned with Environmental Justice.**

**UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE**  
**SUMMARY OF TYPES OF COMPLEXITY**

# SUMMARY - TYPES OF COMPLEXITY IN UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

SOURCE	PROVIDES ANSWERS TO	EXPRESSED AS
Perceptual Appreciation	What do I want / desire?	Artistic Love / Love of Beauty
Passive Compassion	What can I do for another if he / she were me?	Self Love / Narcissistic Love
Active Compassion	What can I do for another as they are?	True Love / Love of Others
Connection to Others	What can I do with others for ourselves?	Concern for Social Justice / Love of Human Kind / Love of Animal Kind
Connection to the Environment	What can I do with others for ourselves and the environment that sustains us?	Concern for Environmental Justice / Love of the World



**RICHNESS  
OF UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE**

# RICHNESS OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

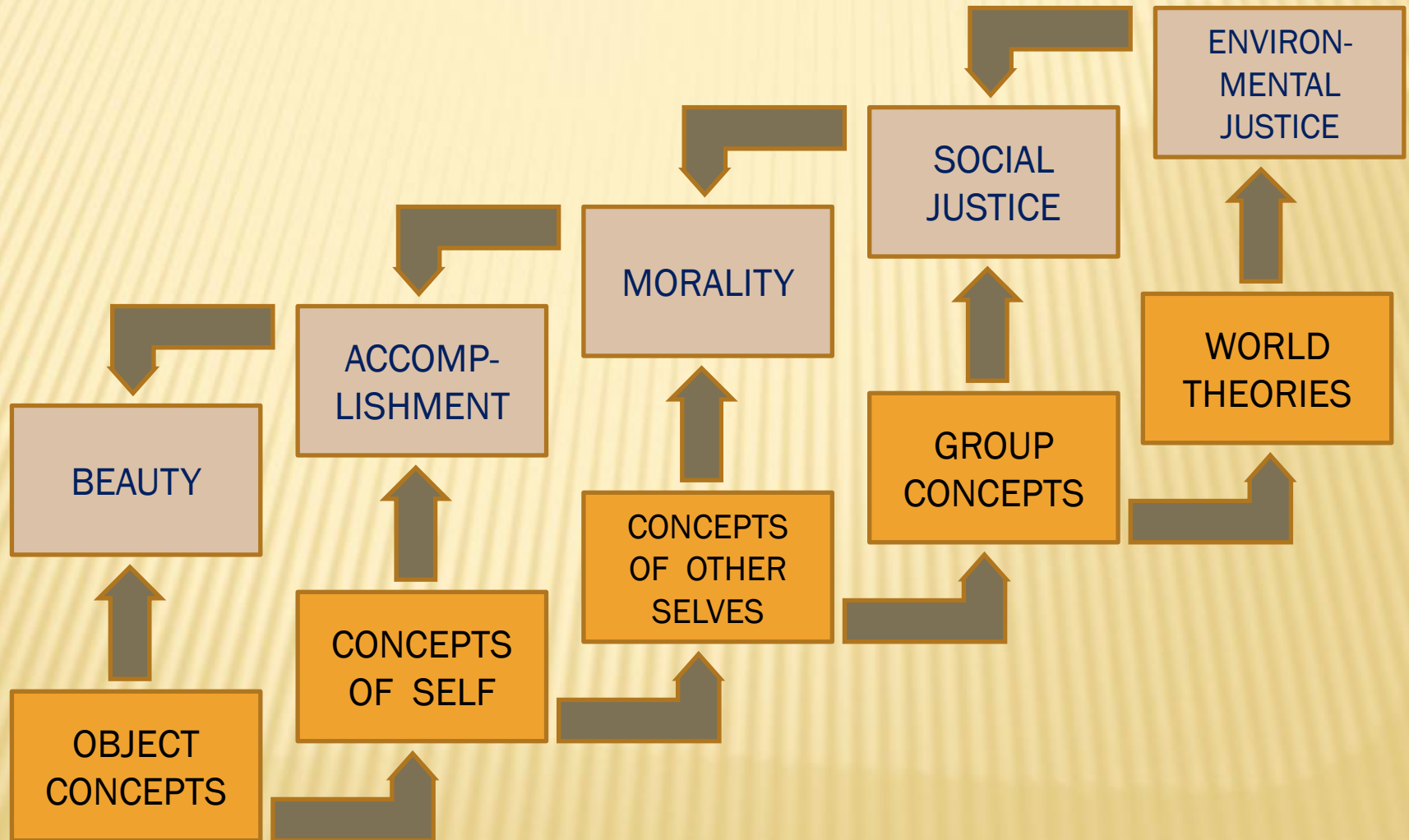
- ✘ Ordinary Experience exhibits a manifold richness.
- ✘ Because Universal Spiritual Experience begins with Ordinary Experience, it exhibits a comparable richness.
- ✘ This richness is derived from the richness of the underlying Ordinary Experience and the myriad opportunities offered by Spiritual Experience to appreciate what underlies the Ordinary.

# SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

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# STAGES OF SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT



# SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT, 1

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- ✘ Spiritual Development follows the stages of Ordinary Development.
- ✘ As each stage of Ordinary Development is secured, a corresponding stage of Spiritual Development is made possible.
- ✘ Each stage of Ordinary Development provides the resources and prerequisites for the corresponding stage of Spiritual Development.

# SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT, 2

- ✘ Just as the stages of Ordinary Development modify their previous stages, each stage of Spiritual Development also modifies its previous stages.
- ✘ In Ordinary Experience, when we develop the concepts of other selves, they modify and expand our concept of our self.
- ✘ In Spiritual Experience, when we develop moral concepts, they modify and expand our concept of our accomplishments.



# SPIRITUAL GROWTH

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# WHAT IS SPIRITUAL GROWTH? - 1

When we speak of *Spiritual Growth*,  
we are really speaking of the  
*Growth of Spiritual Knowledge*,  
and not of the  
*Growth of Spiritual Experience* in general.

# WHAT IS SPIRITUAL GROWTH? - 2

- ✘ *Spiritual Knowledge* is a special type of *Spiritual Experience*.
- ✘ A simple Spiritual Experiences requires merely of the making of a valuation.
- ✘ But when we recall a simple Spiritual Experience, we can re-evaluate, we can assign a different valuation, we can recognize the first valuation as a mistake.
- ✘ Just as the Growth of Ordinary Knowledge requires the recognition of factual mistakes, the Growth of Spiritual Knowledge requires the recognition of valuational mistakes.
- ✘ Whereas, simple Spiritual Experiences are direct and immediate, Spiritual Experiences which count as Spiritual Knowledge are reflective and mediated by additional experiences.



# WHAT IS SPIRITUAL GROWTH? - 3

- ✘ The Growth of Spiritual Knowledge begins with the recognition of spiritual mistakes. But that is just the beginning.
- ✘ But the Growth of Spiritual Knowledge is also about increasing the organization, explanation and understanding of those past valuations and past mistakes.
- ✘ This organization of Spiritual Knowledge can take forms such as Commandments, Principles, Moral Codes and many other forms. In each case, one makes generalizations about valuations.

# EXAMPLES OF SPIRITUAL GENERALIZATIONS

- ✘ The Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
- ✘ The Platinum Rule: Do unto others as they would have you do unto them.
- ✘ Old Testament: Do what is pleasing to the Lord
- ✘ New Testament: Love others as you love yourself.
- ✘ Epicureanism: Seek pleasure and avoid pain.
- ✘ Stoicism: Do your duty, no matter what the consequences.
- ✘ Utilitarianism: Act to produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number.
- ✘ Kantianism: Act as you could will everyone to act.
- ✘ Marxism: From each according to his ability; to each according to his need.

# SPIRITUAL GROWTH AS FINDING A BALANCE

- ✘ The Greek philosopher, Aristotle, argued that a virtue is always a mean between two vices.
  - + Bravery is a mean between cowardice and foolhardiness.
  - + Generosity is a mean between Stinginess and Spendthriftiness.
  - + Friendliness is a mean between Coldness and Effusiveness.



# BALANCING COMPETING SPIRITUAL DEMANDS

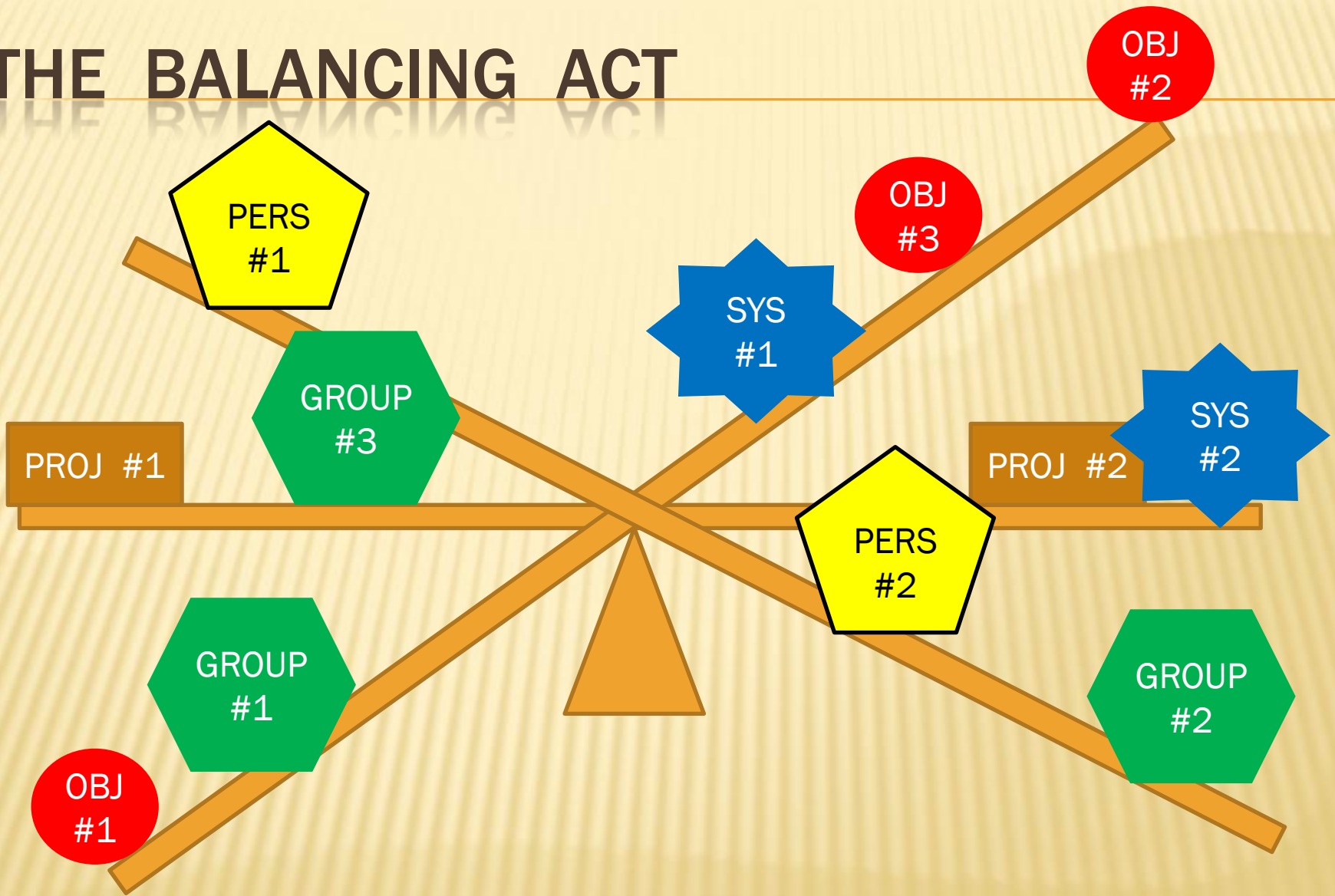
Given that we have five general sources of valuation:

perception, passive compassion, active compassion, social justice and environmental justice,

and many times five of specific sources (for example, belonging to multiple groups with multiple goals),

Spiritual Growth requires balancing the demands originating from all of these sources.

# THE BALANCING ACT



# SPIRITUAL GROWTH - A SUMMARY

- ✘ Spiritual Growth is not about finding certainty.
- ✘ Spiritual Growth is about making new mistakes and not repeating old ones!
- ✘ Spiritual Growth is about making generalizations about how one should act and revising the generalizations as a result of new experiences,
- ✘ Spiritual Growth is about balancing and rebalancing all that you hold valuable.

# SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

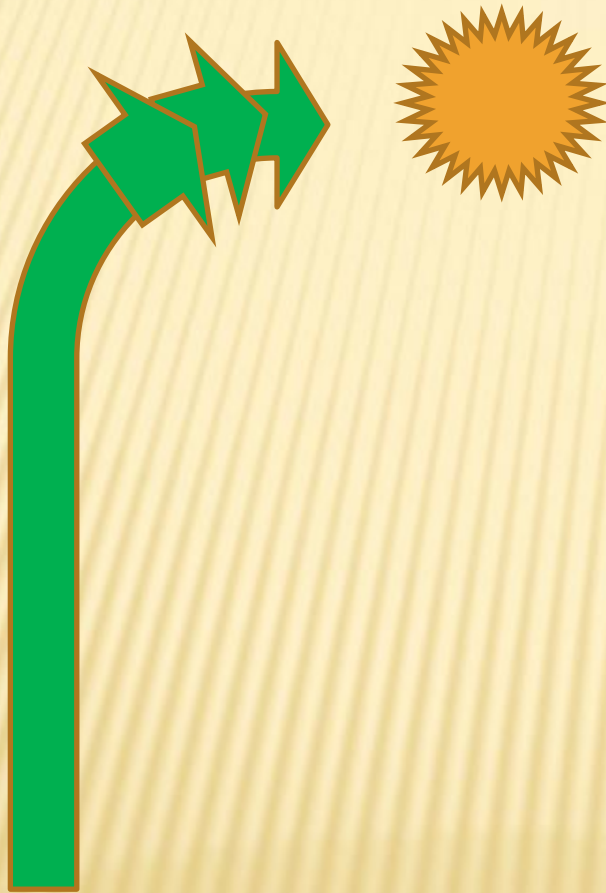
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# TRANSFORMATIVE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

- ✘ The historian of science, Thomas Kuhn, distinguished between Normal Science and Revolutionary Science.
- ✘ Likewise, we can distinguish between:
  - + Normal Spiritual Experiences
  - + Revolutionary Spiritual Experiences
- ✘ In a revolutionary experience, a new representation of some part of the world replaces our normal representation of that part of the world.

# A TRANSFORMATIVE ORDINARY EXPERIENCE



- × **WHY DOES A PLANT GROW TOWARD THE SUN?**
- × **First answer:**  
because the plant wants or needs light, so it grows toward the sun to get more light.
- × **Right answer:**  
because plant growth is governed by a hormone which is destroyed by light, so the cells opposite the sun grow bigger than those directly exposed to the sun, causing the plant to bend to the light.

# A TRANSFORMATIVE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

- ✘ A child is told by her parents that there is a Santa Claus.
- ✘ She learns from her “sophisticated” friends that there is no Santa Claus.
- ✘ The child learns that her parents are capable of lying to her and some trust is lost.
- ✘ *This experience transforms her world view that parents are completely trustworthy to a world view where parents are somewhat less exalted.*

**WHAT DO  
UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES  
SIGNIFY OR MEAN?**



# WHAT DO UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES SIGNIFY OR MEAN? - 1

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- ✘ The central feature in all Universal Spiritual Experiences is that they exercise the ability to assign value, either positive or negative, to any Ordinary Experience.
- ✘ Thus the question really becomes “What does the ability to assign value signify or mean?”
- ✘ The most obvious answer is that this ability signifies human (or sentient) divinity, in the sense of an ability to create value and meaning where there was none before.

# WHAT DO UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES SIGNIFY OR MEAN? - 2

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- ✘ One can then ask the further question “What is the source of human divinity?”
- ✘ Is it a natural ability, created by the process of evolution?  
OR
- ✘ Is it an ability of supernatural origin, a gift given to human (and sentient?) kind?
- ✘ No examination of Universal Spiritual Experience itself will answer this question.

# WHAT DO UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES SIGNIFY OR MEAN? - 3

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- ✘ There are two *types* of answer to the question of the source of our divinity:
  - + The naturalistic answer: the creation of valuations is a *biological function* used to select between alternative ordinary experiences based on evolutionary advantage. All values are conferred.
  - + The non-naturalistic or deontic answer: the creation of valuations results from a *moral or spiritual sense* (for example, conscience) which recognizes values as properties, independent of factual properties. All values are inherent.



# WHAT DO UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES SIGNIFY OR MEAN? - 4

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- ✘ Both types of answer present theories of the origin of our ability to create valuations.
- ✘ Universal Spiritual Experience itself provides no evidence supporting either type of theory.



# WHAT DO UNIVERSAL SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES SIGNIFY OR MEAN? - 5

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- ✘ The *most one can infer* from possession of Universal Spiritual Experiences is that they signify the divinity within us which allows us to create value and meaning out of nothing.
- ✘ Concerning the nature of the source of that divinity, we must look outside experience to find our answer.
- ✘ – *but that is another talk for another time.*

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

[www.scientificnaturalism.org](http://www.scientificnaturalism.org)

**THE END**

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# CLOSING WORDS

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“Whatever has value in our world now  
does not have value in itself, according to its  
nature - nature is always value-less,  
  
but has been given value at some time,  
as a present - and it was we who gave  
and bestowed it.”

*Friedrich Nietzsche...*