

John Dossetor
Health Ethics
Centre



**JOHN DOSSETOR
HEALTH ETHICS CENTRE**

**2024-
2025
SERIES**

HEALTH ETHICS SEMINAR

A Gestalt Theory of Psychedelic Experience



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University of Alberta

Thursday, 19 September 2024

12:00 - 13:30 MDT

WEBINAR Presentation via Zoom application

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SCAN ME

In the qualitative arms of psychedelic clinical trials, an interesting paradox emerges in the subjective accounts of these experiences. Almost without exception, the subjective assessment of the meaningfulness of these experiences is remarkably high. However, when the same accounts are unpacked to consider the source of this meaning, there is predictably less impressive epistemic content. I feel that this paradox is often used to drive rhetorical arguments to reduce or dismiss the importance of the psychedelic experience, particularly by those who hope to dismiss the theoretical therapeutic function of the experience itself, particularly reductive drug models, which fail to account for the often immediate cessation of symptoms of depression, anxiety, and other negative emotions. I propose to explain how the Gestalt-Shift, a well-known psychological mechanism of cognition, can be applied very effectively to conceptually unravel the prima-facie paradox of the psychedelic experience. I will demonstrate how a gestalt theory can account for both the profound meaningfulness of the psychedelic experience and also help re-frame what kind of knowledge claims researchers might expect to be revealed in quantitative research. In addition, I will argue that having a paradox-free psychological account of the efficacy of psychedelics will provide a compelling reason to challenge the status quo of attempting to control for the subjective experience in ongoing drug-trial designs.

More information: please call 780-492-6676, e-mail dossetor.centre@ualberta.ca or visit [Dossetor Centre website](#)

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