

MEANING QUOTIENT INSTITUTE

# Consciousness Research Lab

Research Program — Our Approach

## 1 Purpose

This document defines the research program of the Consciousness Research Lab (CRL), the second pillar of the Meaning Quotient Institute. Where the *School* (Pillar I) teaches consciousness studies and *Collaborative Initiatives* (Pillar III) turn ideas into impact, the Lab exists to produce new understanding: inquiry, publications, and funded projects that advance how consciousness, meaning, and intelligence are understood.

The program is built on a deliberate two-tier distinction. **Context** is the Lab's declared ground — the map it hands a newcomer and the stance it takes; it orients but does not itself generate findings.

**Research** is active inquiry that produces claims. Keeping these apart prevents the most common failure of consciousness centres: mistaking a literature survey, or the restatement of a worldview, for research.

## 2 Design Principle: Committed Pluralism

The Lab is pluralistic, but not neutral. It distinguishes **committed pluralism** — plural traditions taken seriously as genuine inputs, each given a fair hearing, followed by a declared conclusion — from **neutral pluralism**, which admits many views but forbids taking a position. Feigned neutrality merely hides its priors; a Lab that declares its stance and then earns it in the open is more accountable, not less.

The Lab's argued position is *syncretic idealism*. Declaring this is not a departure from pluralism — the pluralism lives in the **inputs** (the traditions and frameworks seriously engaged) and in the **survey** (honest, before any argument begins), while the **conclusion** is owned rather than hidden.

**Integrity condition.** The account of competing frameworks must be done to a standard their own advocates would endorse *before* the argument for syncretic idealism begins. Steelman, then argue. The failure mode is not having a thesis; it is letting the thesis pre-shape the survey so that rivals arrive already defeated. This condition is what separates committed pluralism from motivated reasoning, and every research stream below is bound by it.

## 3 Context — The Lab's Declared Ground

*Orientation, not inquiry. These three sections state where the Lab stands; they are the frame within which the research streams operate.*

### 3.1 Competing Frameworks

A static map of the live metaphysical options, characterised fairly and without polemic: physicalism and eliminativism; substance and property dualism; panpsychism and cosmopsychism; neutral and dual-aspect monism; and the idealisms, including Kastrup's analytic idealism. This map orients learners and situates the Lab's own position; it is reference material, not a research output. (Its

*dynamic* counterpart — asking where these frameworks actually diverge and what would distinguish them — is Stream 4.2.)

### 3.2 The Lab's Stance

The committed-pluralism declaration of §2, stated for the record: the frameworks the Lab treats as serious interlocutors, the argued position it holds (syncretic idealism), and the integrity condition that governs how it moves from survey to argument. This is the Lab's epistemic constitution.

### 3.3 Modes of Knowing

The epistemic toolkit the Lab admits as evidence about consciousness:

- **Third-person:** neuroscience and cognitive science — neural correlates, information-theoretic and predictive-processing models.
- **First-person:** phenomenology and disciplined introspection — subjectivity treated as data rather than as a nuisance to be explained away.
- **Second-person / contemplative:** trained contemplative expertise from the wisdom traditions — Advaita, Buddhist, Taoist, Sufi, Kabbalistic — as a distinct and rigorous source of knowledge. This is the structural home of the Eastern perspective the Lab's co-direction brings.

Admitting these modes is a *context* decision. Actively *advancing how to integrate* them is a research ambition — see the stretch stream (4.5).

## 4 Research Streams

*Active inquiry that produces claims. Each stream states its motivation, its core questions, and the outputs it can realistically deliver.*

### 4.1 Psychedelic Research — Empirical Flagship

The Lab's concrete, fundable testbed, where abstract metaphysics meets measurable data. Psychedelic states present genuine anomalies for production models of mind — richer, more structured experience arising alongside *reduced* cortical activity — making them the sharpest available empirical pressure point between competing frameworks. The stream also recovers a history the Western paradigm suppressed.

#### *Core questions*

- What do psychedelic states reveal about the relation between brain activity and the structure of experience — and how far do they strain a purely productive model of consciousness?
- How should ego-dissolution and noetic, ontology-disclosing experiences be interpreted across frameworks: as constructed hallucination, or as genuine epistemic access?
- What did Western science lose by suppressing this line of inquiry, and what is recoverable now — historically, neuroscientifically, and metaphysically?

#### *Candidate outputs*

- Review and position papers on the metaphysics of psychedelic experience.

- Collaborations with established psychedelic-research centres and funded neuroscience partners.
- A monograph or paper series bridging phenomenology, neuroscience, and metaphysics; anchor projects for the MQ Research Fellowship.

## 4.2 Comparative Frameworks & the Refinement of Syncretic Idealism

The Lab's central engine, and deliberately a *single coupled* stream rather than two. The comparative work is the honest account demanded by the integrity condition; the refinement of syncretic idealism is the argument that account feeds. Designed together, they enact committed pluralism directly: rivals are steelmanned, then the Lab's position is sharpened against them — including where it is currently underspecified.

### Core questions

- Where do the leading integrative frameworks — analytic idealism, cosmopsychism, panpsychism, neutral and dual-aspect monism — genuinely converge, and where do they diverge?
- What, if anything, would distinguish them conceptually or empirically? Can “empirical metaphysics” be cashed out as discriminating criteria?
- Where is syncretic idealism itself underspecified — the combination problem, the transceiver/receiver mechanism, the admission of genuine hierarchy (evolution of consciousness, theophany) — and how does it answer the strongest objections?

### Candidate outputs

- Comparative papers that steelman each rival framework to its advocates' own standard.
- A refined, objection-tested statement of syncretic idealism; the planned volume as the home of the argued synthesis.
- Symposia and structured debates convening framework advocates (Kastrup and others) as interlocutors.

## 4.3 Dissecting the Western Paradigm

The research-grade form of the Lab's civilizational critique. As a question rather than a verdict, it can host both the critique and its critics — which is what keeps it pluralistic. It asks what the modern scientific paradigm actually commits to regarding consciousness, whether its exclusions are genuine blind spots or defensible choices, and how subjectivity came to be treated as taboo.

### Core questions

- What are the constitutive commitments of the modern Western paradigm about mind — the view from nowhere, third-person exclusivity, the objectivity ideal — and how load-bearing are they?
- Are its exclusions genuine lacunae, or defensible methodological discipline? (The stream must host the critics of the critique, not only its champions.)
- What is the genealogy by which subjectivity became scientifically illegitimate, and what are the civilizational consequences of that move?

### Candidate outputs

- Critical-historical and philosophical papers engaging McGilchrist, Vervaeke, Tarnas and their critics.
- An argued essay linking the metaphysics of the paradigm to the contemporary polycrisis.
- Public-facing pieces translating the diagnosis for a general audience.

#### 4.4 Actionability — Scientific Spirituality & Self-Help

The applied stream: what actually follows, in lived terms, from taking consciousness as fundamental. “Self-help” is the deliverable framing — concrete, evaluable practice — rather than the looser “re-enchantment.” The challenge is to ground transformative practice without collapsing into either reductionism or credulity, and to feed practical curricula back to the School.

##### *Core questions*

- What practical, lived consequences follow from a consciousness-first metaphysics — and how are they distinguished from wishful thinking?
- Can contemplative and transformative practices be grounded and evaluated on their own terms — a genuine “scientific spirituality”?
- Which practices measurably help people re-order their relation to the world, and how would such effects be assessed?

##### *Candidate outputs*

- Practice-oriented publications and curricula that bridge into the School of Consciousness Studies.
- Pilot studies evaluating specific interventions.
- Accessible self-help material carrying the Lab's research into public use.

#### 4.5 Integrating Modes of Knowing — Neurophenomenology (Stretch)

A higher-ambition stream, flagged as optional and phase-dependent. The Lab can simply *adopt* existing first- and third-person methods (a context decision, §3.3), or it can try to *improve* how they are integrated — Varela-style neurophenomenology and contemplative-science protocols. The latter is a distinct research undertaking and a significant claim to methodological leadership; it should be adopted only if resourcing allows.

##### *Core questions*

- Can first- and third-person data be systematically integrated rather than merely juxtaposed?
- What protocols let trained contemplative report function as reliable scientific data?
- Does the Lab adopt existing methods, or commit to advancing them?

##### *Candidate outputs*

- Methods papers and reusable research protocols.
- Collaborations with contemplative-science and neurophenomenology labs.

## 5 Outputs & Vehicles

Across streams, the Lab's work reaches the world through a consistent set of vehicles:

- **Publications:** peer-reviewed papers, position pieces, monographs, and public-facing writing (books and publications are already an active, ongoing component of Pillar II).
- **MQ Research Fellowship:** the personnel engine — fellows anchored to specific streams, funded through grants, institutional partners, or collaborative projects.
- **Collaborations & funding:** universities, research institutes, and foundations. Potential partners noted in the Institute's vision include the Consciousness Foundation and the Galileo Foundation, alongside psychedelic-research centres for Stream 4.1.

## 6 Open Design Decisions

Three choices remain to be settled before the program is finalised:

- **Ambition of the methods stream.** Adopt existing modes of knowing (context only), or commit resources to advancing their integration (activate Stream 4.5)?
- **Sequencing.** Which streams launch first? Psychedelic research (4.1) and the comparative engine (4.2) are the natural anchors; the applied and critique streams can follow.
- **Boundary discipline.** Competing Frameworks (3.1, static map) and Comparative Frameworks (4.2, dynamic inquiry) share a subject and must be kept doing different jobs — orientation versus finding — or they will blur.