

Noopoietics and Doxolysis

A Process-Oriented Vocabulary for Deliberately Altered Consciousness

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Abstract

The scholarly, legal, and regulatory discourse on deliberately altered states of consciousness lacks a neutral vocabulary: its inherited terms — *hallucinogen*, *psychedelic*, *entheogen* — each embed a verdict on the nature of the states they name, forcing a position before argument begins. This essay proposes two process-oriented terms to close the gap. *Noopoietics* (from νοῦς and ποίησις) designates the intentional, methodically structured bringing-forth of mental states, irrespective of method — pharmacological, contemplative, respiratory, ritual, or technological. *Doxolysis* (from δόξα and λύσις) designates the consensual loosening of sedimented belief-structures that such practices characteristically enable; consent and self-direction belong to its definition, distinguishing it categorically from manipulation. The essay provides etymology, scope, and exclusions for both terms, demarcates them from neighboring vocabulary (*noetic*, *autopoiesis*, *noopolitik*, *noosemia*, *practopoiesis*) and from the psycholytic tradition, and shows the work they do in two adjacent discourses: the legal debate on mental self-determination and cognitive liberty, and the emerging ethics of consciousness. Both terms are metaphysically austere, presupposing no theology, no depth-psychological doctrine, and no verdict on the veridicality or value of the states concerned.

Zusammenfassung

Dem wissenschaftlichen, rechtlichen und regulatorischen Diskurs über absichtsvoll veränderte Bewusstseinszustände fehlt ein neutrales Vokabular: Seine ererbten Begriffe — *Halluzinogen*, *psychedelisch*, *Entheogen* —

enthalten je ein Urteil über die Natur der benannten Zustände und erzwingen eine Positionierung, bevor die Argumentation beginnen kann. Dieser Essay schlägt zwei prozessorientierte Begriffe vor, um diese Lücke zu schließen. *Noopoietik* (von νοῦς und ποίησις) bezeichnet das absichtsvolle, methodisch-strukturierte Hervorbringen mentaler Zustände, unabhängig von der Methode — pharmakologisch, kontemplativ, atembasiert, rituell oder technologisch. *Doxolyse* (von δόξα und λύσις) bezeichnet die konsensuelle Lockerung sedimentierter Überzeugungsstrukturen, die solche Praktiken charakteristischerweise ermöglichen; Einwilligung und Selbstbestimmung gehören zu ihrer Definition und unterscheiden sie kategorial von Manipulation. Der Essay entwickelt Etymologie, Geltungsbereich und Ausschlüsse beider Begriffe, grenzt sie von der terminologischen Nachbarschaft (*noetisch*, *Autopoiesis*, *Noopolitik*, *Noosemie*, *Praktopoiesis*) sowie von der psycholytischen Tradition ab und zeigt ihre Leistungsfähigkeit in zwei angrenzenden Diskursen: der rechtswissenschaftlichen Debatte um mentale Selbstbestimmung und Cognitive Liberty sowie der entstehenden Bewusstseinsethik. Beide Begriffe sind metaphysisch enthalten: Sie setzen keine Theologie, keine tiefenpsychologische Doktrin und kein Urteil über Wahrheitsgehalt oder Wert der betreffenden Zustände voraus.

1 Introduction: The Terminological Problem

Fields in transition inherit their vocabulary from the battles of their past. The study of deliberately altered consciousness is such a field, and its inherited terms are not neutral instruments but sedimented verdicts. *Hallucinogen*, the preferred term of mid-century pharmacology and of the international treaty architecture, decides by definition that the states in question are perceptual error. *Psychedelic*, coined by Osmond (1957) in self-conscious opposition, decides in the other direction: the mind made manifest — a claim, not a description — and carries besides the accumulated connotations of the counterculture that adopted it, connotations that six decades of usage have made inseparable from the word. *Entheogen* (Ruck et al., 1979), proposed to escape both predecessors, escapes them into theology: the divine generated within. Each term was an intervention in a controversy; each smuggles its conclusion into its nomenclature; and whoever must choose among them is forced to take a position before the argument has begun.

For most of the prohibition era this problem was tolerable, because so little of consequence was being decided. It is tolerable no longer. Clinical research programs, regulatory proceedings, state-level access models, and constitutional and human-rights litigation now require descriptions of the relevant practices that courts, ethics committees, and researchers of divergent metaphysical commitments can share. Simultaneously, an adjacent debate — on neurotechnology, mental privacy, and the right to mental self-determination — has begun to formulate the freedom of the mind in general terms (Bublitz, 2013; Ienca & Andorno, 2017; Farahany, 2023), and it encounters the same lexical gap from the other side: a jurisprudence of the mind needs a name for

what a person does when she deliberately alters her own consciousness, a name that does not decide in advance whether she is medicating, worshipping, hallucinating, or fleeing. The available vocabulary forces exactly these decisions. The result is visible across the literature: scholars who write “psychedelics (in the broadest sense)” and mean also breathwork; regulators who cannot state what unifies the practices they regulate beyond the historical accident of scheduling; ethicists who discuss “drug-induced belief change” and lack a term distinguishing the consensual process they mean to examine from the manipulation they mean to condemn.

This essay proposes two terms to close the gap, both built from Greek roots, both process-oriented rather than substance-oriented, and both deliberately austere in their commitments. *Noopoietics* names the intentional, methodically structured bringing-forth of mental states — pharmacological, contemplative, respiratory, ritual, or technological. *Doxolysis* names the loosening of sedimented belief-structures that such practices characteristically enable, defined so that consent and self-direction belong to the concept rather than trailing it as regulation. The first term individuates a genus of practices that current vocabulary scatters across unrelated categories; the second isolates the epistemic event on which the hardest ethical and legal questions converge. Neither term asserts anything about the ontological source, veridicality, or value of the states concerned: they are offered as instruments of description, so that such questions can at last be argued rather than settled by connotation.

The essay proceeds as follows. Section 2 defines noopoietics — etymology, scope, and exclusions. Section 3 does the same for doxolysis, including its demarcation from the psycholytic tradition whose insight it preserves and whose overreach it corrects. Section 4 demarcates both terms from the neighboring technical vocabulary with which they might be confused: *noetic*, *autopoiesis*, *noopolitik*, *noosemia*, and *practopoiesis*. Section 5 shows the work the terms do in two adjacent discourses — the legal debate on mental self-determination and the emerging ethics of consciousness. Section 6 states the proposal’s limits and the conditions under which it should be judged to have succeeded.

2 Noopoietics: Definition, Etymology, and Scope

I propose the term *noopoietics* (German: *Noopoietik*) to designate the intentional, methodically structured bringing-forth of mental states and configurations of consciousness. The term names a process and a practice, not a substance class and not a metaphysical claim. A noopoietic practice is any deliberate procedure — pharmacological, contemplative, respiratory, ritual, or technological — undertaken to generate a specific alteration in the state or structure of consciousness. *Noopoiesis* designates the generative process itself; *noopoietics* designates the systematic study and cultivated practice of such processes.

The etymology draws on two Greek roots whose combination is, to my knowledge, novel in this sense. *Nous* (νοῦς) denotes mind or intellect in its most encompassing signification — not discursive reasoning alone, but the faculty of direct apprehension as developed in the Platonic and Neoplatonic traditions (Plotinus, *Enneads* V.3). *Poiesis* (ποίησις) denotes bringing-forth in the strong ontological sense given to it in Plato's *Symposium*: every cause whereby anything passes from not-being into being (Plato, *Symposium*, 205b-c). Aristotle's distinction between *poiesis* and *praxis* (*Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.4) is instructive here: *poiesis* is activity that issues in a work beyond the activity itself. Noopoietic practice, on this reading, is precisely such a productive activity — its "work" is a transformed configuration of consciousness. I deliberately retain the spelling *-poietics* rather than *-poetics* in order to preserve this technical Greek sense and to forestall a merely aesthetic reading.

Three features define the scope of the term. First, noopoietics is method-agnostic. It encompasses psilocybin and holotropic breathwork, sustained meditative absorption and closed-loop neurostimulation, insofar as each is employed as a deliberate procedure for bringing forth mental states. The term thereby dissolves an artificial boundary that has distorted both scholarship and law: the segregation of pharmacological state-induction from all other induction methods, as though the means of generation rather than the process and its governance were the philosophically relevant variable. Second, noopoietics is process-oriented rather than substance-oriented. It directs attention to induction, navigation, and integration as phases of a structured undertaking, and thus supplies a vocabulary for questions of competence, preparation, consent, and craft — questions that substance-centered vocabularies systematically obscure. Third, noopoietics is normatively and metaphysically austere. The term asserts nothing about the ontological source of the states brought forth, nothing about their veridicality, and nothing about their value.

This austerity marks the term's decisive difference from its predecessors. *Entheogen* (Ruck, Bigwood, Staples, Ott, & Wasson, 1979) embeds a theological commitment — the generation of the divine within — that renders the term unusable for secular scholarship and prejudges the interpretation of the experiences in question. *Psychedelic* (Osmond, 1957) carries the depth-psychological freight of its coinage — the manifestation of psyche — and six decades of countercultural sedimentation besides. *Hallucinogen* pathologizes by definition what it purports to describe. Noopoietics claims none of their interpretive content. It states only that a mental configuration was deliberately brought forth, by a specifiable method, within a structurable process. Whatever else may be true of such states — their epistemic standing, their spiritual significance, their therapeutic worth — remains a further question, to be argued rather than smuggled in through nomenclature.

What the term does not cover requires equal precision. Noopoietics does not encompass unintended alterations of consciousness (delirium, accidental

intoxication, psychopathological states), since intentional structure belongs to its definition. It does not designate the states themselves, but the bringing-forth; a taxonomy of states is a separate undertaking. And it does not name a normative program: to identify a practice as noopoietic is not yet to endorse it. The demarcation from the neighboring technical vocabulary — *noetic*, *autopoiesis*, *noopolitik*, *noosemia*, *practopoiesis* — is treated systematically in Section 4.

3 Doxolysis: Definition, Etymology, and Scope

I propose the term *doxolysis* (German: *Doxolyse*) to designate the loosening or dissolution of sedimented belief-structures — the process by which convictions that have hardened into the unexamined architecture of a person's world lose their fixity and become available for revision. Where noopoietics names the deliberate bringing-forth of mental states, doxolysis names a specific transformation that such states characteristically enable. The two terms form a conceptual pair: the one generative, the other dissolutive; the one denoting the structured practice, the other its pivotal epistemic event.

The etymology again combines two Greek roots. *Doxa* (δόξα) denotes opinion or belief as distinguished from knowledge — the term Plato reserves for conviction that has not passed through examination (*Republic*, V, 476d–480a), and Parmenides for the way of mortal seeming as against the way of truth. This philosophical lineage is precisely what recommends the root: doxolysis operates on beliefs held in the mode of unexamined certainty, not on knowledge, perception, or cognitive capacity as such. *Lysis* (λύσις) denotes loosening, releasing, dissolution — a root long naturalized in scientific vocabulary (*hydrolysis*, *analysis* in its original sense of loosening-apart). Doxolysis is thus, literally, the loosening of opinion: the moment at which the grip of a belief relaxes sufficiently for the believer to hold it, rather than be held by it.

The term has an honorable half-predecessor that requires acknowledgment and demarcation. The European tradition of psycholytic therapy (Leuner and the continental schools; institutionally continued in the Swiss SÄPT) named its method “soul-loosening” — and thereby named too much. It is not psyche that the well-conducted process dissolves; it is doxa. The subject, the capacity for experience, the continuity of the person remain; what loosens is the fixity of a belief-structure. Doxolysis preserves the accurate insight of the psycholytic tradition while correcting its overreach: the object of the lysis is specified, and the specter of self-destruction that the older term inadvertently raised is dispelled by precision rather than reassurance. The term also converges, from the philosophical side, with a development in the empirical literature: the proposal that the signature action of certain pharmacological interventions is the relaxation of high-level priors or entrenched beliefs (Carhart-Harris & Friston, 2019). Doxolysis offers this convergence a name that is not confined to

pharmacology and not dependent on any particular neurocomputational framework.

Three demarcations define the scope. First, doxolysis is consensual and self-directed by definition. The deliberate destabilization of another person's belief-structure without their informed consent is not doxolysis but manipulation; the term is reserved for processes a person undertakes, or knowingly undergoes, as their own. This definitional restriction is not decorative — it builds the ethics of consent into the concept itself, rather than appending it as regulation after the fact. Second, doxolysis is dissolutive, not substitutive. It names the loosening of conviction, not the installation of a replacement conviction; a process that dissolves one certainty only to implant another is persuasion or indoctrination wearing a borrowed coat. What follows doxolysis — revision, reaffirmation, reconstruction — belongs to integration, and its outcome is not prescribed by the term. Third, doxolysis carries no epistemically nihilist commitment. To say that a belief loosened is not to say it was false, and nothing in the concept implies that all conviction is pathology. Some doxolytic episodes end in the examined re-adoption of the very belief that loosened — held now as knowledge of one's own position rather than as unexamined sediment.

Excluded from the term's scope are involuntary belief-collapse under trauma or psychosis (which lacks the definitional element of consent and structure), mere attitude change through argument or evidence (which proceeds within the doxastic register rather than loosening it), and coercive techniques of belief-destruction, whose superficial resemblance to doxolysis makes the definitional boundary a matter of practical urgency rather than scholastic tidiness.

4 Demarcation from Neighboring Vocabulary

A proposed term must state not only what it names but what it does not — and how it differs from the vocabulary a trained reader will already hear in it. Five terms require explicit demarcation on the noopoietic side; the doxolytic side, resting on older and less crowded ground, requires a briefer clarification.

4.1 *Noetic*

The root *nous* and its derivatives have a long career, from Plato and Aristotle through phenomenology to contemporary consciousness research. Most directly relevant is *noetic*, which James (1902) established to name the quality by which mystical states present themselves as states of knowledge rather than of mere feeling — a usage that remains active in empirical work operationalizing the “noetic quality” as an object of study (Wahbeh, Fry, & Speirn, 2022). The demarcation is categorical. *Noetic* is an adjective of quality: it characterizes what certain states are like — their felt authority of direct apprehension. *Noopoietics* names a practice: the intentional, methodically structured bringing-forth of mental states, whatever their character. The two terms do not stand in a relation of process to outcome. Nothing in the definition of noopoietics requires that the states brought forth bear the noetic quality, and

nothing in it prejudices whether states that do bear it are what they present themselves as being. A noopoietic practice may aim at insight, at consolation, at communion, or at play (cf. §6); whether any resulting state is noetic is a phenomenological question, and whether a noetic state is veridical is an epistemological one. The term takes a position on neither — that is its austerity, not its deficiency.

4.2 Autopoiesis

The suffix *-poiesis* carries strong associations, above all with *autopoiesis* (Maturana & Varela, 1980) and its descendants in systems theory. The resonance is not unwelcome: both terms share the intuition that certain realities are not simply given but continually brought forth. The differences are nonetheless threefold. First, autopoiesis names self-production as the constitutive and continuous operation of living systems — a cell does not undertake to produce itself. Noopoietic practice is intentional and episodic: an agent undertakes a specifiable procedure, within a structurable process, and could refrain from doing so. Second, autopoiesis is a concept of systemic organization; noopoietics is a category of practice, with the questions of competence, preparation, and consent that attach to practices and not to organizations. Third, no general theory of self-producing systems is here proposed: the term's scope is the deliberate generation of configurations of consciousness, nothing wider.

4.3 Practopoiesis

Nikolić's (2015) *practopoiesis* names a theory of the adaptive organization by which biological systems give rise to minds. It is an explanatory account of the genesis of mind; noopoietics is a descriptive category of practices and explains nothing. The two could coexist without contact: a practopoietic account of how nervous systems generate adaptive states would say nothing about the governance, ethics, or law of the practices by which persons deliberately bring forth states in themselves — which is the only terrain the present term claims.

4.4 Noopolitik

Arquilla and Ronfeldt's (1999) *noopolitik* names an information strategy of states grounded in knowledge and soft power. The domain is remote, but the demarcation is instructive rather than merely prophylactic: noopolitik operates on the minds of *others*, at the scale of populations, without their individuated consent. Noopoietic practice, as defined here, is undertaken by an agent upon her own consciousness, or knowingly undergone as her own process. The contrast thus falls precisely on the boundary that Section 3 builds into the definition of doxolysis and that Section 5 puts to doctrinal work: the difference between self-directed alteration and the manipulation of minds is not a matter of degree but the constitutive line of the proposed vocabulary.

4.5 Noosemia

Noosemia (De Santis & Rizzi, 2025) names the attribution of intentionality in human-generative-AI interaction. The domain is sufficiently removed that confusion is unlikely; the term is noted because it confirms that the *nous* root remains generative across disciplines. The distinction can be stated in one sentence: noosemia concerns how minds are perceived in artifacts; noopoietics concerns how states of mind are brought forth in persons.

4.6 The doxolytic neighborhood

Doxa is firmer ground. Its Platonic and Parmenidean weight carries the definition in Section 3; its most influential modern deployment is Bourdieu's (1977), for whom *doxa* denotes the unexamined, implicit consensus of a social field — that which “goes without saying because it comes without saying” (p. 167). Doxolysis extends this lineage with one deliberate shift of level: Bourdieu's *doxa* is a property of fields, whereas the sedimented belief-structures on which doxolysis operates are the deposit of such fields in a single biography. The field supplies the sediment; the lysis is undergone by a person, and — by definition — with her consent. Two further clarifications. The theological sense of *doxa* (“glory,” preserved in *doxology* and *orthodoxy*) is excluded: the term draws exclusively on the epistemic meaning. And the suffix *lysis*, heavily used in the life sciences, carries no biochemical content here; its morphology is in fact native to this field's own tradition, since Osmond, in the same 1957 address in which he proposed *psychedelic*, weighed and discarded *psychelytic* — “psyche-loosening” (Osmond, 1957). What doxolysis corrects in the loosening-vocabulary of the psycholytic tradition — that the object of the lysis is *doxa*, not *psyche* — is developed in Section 3 and not repeated here.

4.7 Summary of the demarcation

In every case the demarcation has the same form. The neighboring terms name qualities of states (*noetic*), the organization of systems (*autopoiesis*, *practopoiesis*), strategies directed at the minds of others (*noopolitik*), the perception of mind in artifacts (*noosemia*), or the structure of unexamined belief (*doxa*). The proposed terms name practices and processes: the deliberate bringing-forth of mental states, and the consensual loosening of sedimented belief-structures. The claim is not that the phenomena are unnamed, but that their practical and processual dimension has lacked a precise vocabulary — and that supplying one opens questions the state-oriented terms cannot pose.

5 The Work the Terms Do: Mental Self-Determination and the Ethics of Consciousness

A proposed vocabulary earns its place by the work it does in adjacent discourses. I will indicate that work for two of them: the legal debate on mental self-determination, and the emerging philosophical program of an ethics of consciousness.

The legal discourse first. The case for a right to mental self-determination — developed most rigorously by Bublitz (2013; Bublitz & Merkel, 2014) and carried into the Anglophone mainstream as cognitive liberty (Boire, 2000; Sententia, 2004; Farahany, 2023) — construes sovereignty over one’s own mind as encompassing both the freedom to alter one’s mental states with the help of available means and the freedom to refuse such alteration. This twofold structure has lacked a term for its object. What exactly does the right-holder do when she exercises the positive limb of the right? “Taking drugs” is too narrow and imports the wrong frame; “altering consciousness” is too diffuse to individuate the protected activity. Noopoietic practice names the object of the positive limb with the required generality and the required precision: a deliberate, structured procedure for bringing forth mental states, whatever its method. The method-agnosticism of the term is here not a philosophical elegance but a doctrinal necessity. A right that protected pharmacological self-alteration but not contemplative or technological self-alteration — or the reverse — would draw its boundary along a line that has no normative significance; the jurisprudence of neurotechnology and the jurisprudence of psychoactive substances are, on the noopoietic description, chapters of one right, not neighbors in an accidental federation (cf. Ienca & Andorno, 2017).

Doxolysis, in turn, does its legal work on the negative limb — and at the concept’s most contested boundary. The strongest objection to a robust liberty of self-alteration has always been the specter of manipulation: if minds may be altered, what distinguishes protected practice from the “crimes against minds” that Bublitz and Merkel (2014) have argued the law must learn to name? The doxolytic vocabulary answers definitionally. Because consent and self-direction belong to the definition of doxolysis, the distinction between doxolytic practice and manipulative belief-destruction is not a gradation along one scale but a difference in kind, marked in the concept itself. The term thereby gives the law what regulative discourse chronically lacks: a description of the protected activity under which the abuse is not a stronger dose of the same thing, but a different thing. One consequence deserves explicit statement: on this vocabulary, the state’s blanket prohibition of a consensual noopoietic practice cannot be justified by pointing to the existence of non-consensual manipulation, any more than the criminalization of surgery could be justified by the existence of assault.

The philosophical discourse second. Metzinger (2023) has argued that a society’s manner of dealing with its members’ need for altered states — how much autonomy it grants, how it minimizes the attendant risks — is a direct expression of its achieved culture of consciousness, and that current drug legislation constitutes a domain marked by ideological irrationality and conceptual crudeness, awaiting an empirically informed, morally reflective ethics of consciousness. The present proposal is offered as infrastructure for precisely that program. An ethics of consciousness requires, before any normative principle, a descriptive vocabulary in which its questions can be posed without prejudice: noopoietics supplies the genus of practices such an

ethics must evaluate, and doxolysis isolates the epistemic event around which its hardest questions — consent to self-transformation, the value of examined over sedimented conviction, the line between education and manipulation — actually cluster. That the terms are metaphysically austere is, in this context, their qualification: they presuppose no theology, no depth-psychological doctrine, and no verdict on the veridicality of the states in question, and are therefore usable by naturalist and non-naturalist alike.

Two honest limitations remain. The terms individuate practices and processes; they do not by themselves settle thresholds — which noopoietic practices carry which risks, where immaturity or acute crisis defeats consent, what competence their guidance requires. Those are substantive questions for law and ethics, and a vocabulary that pretended to resolve them would be doing ideology, not conceptual work. And the terms will meet resistance precisely where the older vocabulary retains constituencies: *entheogen* among those for whom the theological content is the point, *psychedelic* where six decades of usage have built institutional capital. The proposal is not that these words disappear, but that scholarship, law, and policy acquire an instrument that does not decide by connotation what should be decided by argument.

6 Limits, and the Conditions of Success

A terminological proposal should state the terms of its own failure. Three limits deserve explicit acknowledgment, and one criterion of success.

The first limit is normative. Noopoietics and doxolysis individuate practices and processes; they settle no substantive question about them. Which noopoietic practices carry which risks; where youth, acute crisis, or impaired capacity defeats the consent that doxolysis presupposes; what competence the guidance of such processes requires and how it should be credentialed; how a legal order should weigh the liberty these concepts describe against the protections it owes — all of this remains to be argued, and must be argued in the vocabulary rather than by it. A conceptual instrument that quietly answered the questions it was built to pose would repeat the very fault this essay diagnoses in its predecessors.

The second limit is descriptive. The pair does not exhaust its field. Between the bringing-forth of states and the loosening of convictions lies a rich phenomenology — of navigation, of resistance, of integration — for which these two terms provide anchors but not a map. Nor does every noopoietic process culminate in doxolysis, and nothing here implies that it should: a taxonomy of noopoietic aims (consolation, insight, communion, play) is a further undertaking, deliberately left open. The proposal is a beginning of precision, not its completion.

The third limit is historical. Terms do not win by argument alone; they win by use, and use is governed by constituencies, institutions, and accident. *Entheogen* will persist where its theological content is the point; *psychedelic*

commands the institutional capital of journals, centers, and statutes and will not — and need not — yield it. The present proposal competes with neither on its home ground. It addresses the contexts where both fail: the courtroom that needs to name a protected activity without adopting a metaphysics; the ethics committee that must distinguish a consensual process from its coercive counterfeit; the scholarship that would speak of contemplative and pharmacological practice in one sentence without apology. If the terms find no work in such contexts, they will deserve their obscurity.

And this yields the criterion of success, which is not the author's to secure. A proposed concept succeeds at the moment it appears without its proposer — cited without genealogy, used without defense, inflected into forms its coinage did not anticipate. The measure of noopoietics and doxolysis will be reached, if it is reached, in sentences written by others for purposes not envisioned here: a brief that names the right at stake, a protocol that specifies the process it structures, a critique that turns the terms against a use their author would have endorsed. Vocabulary offered to a discourse becomes the property of that discourse; these pages are, in the strict sense, an act of cession. What is proposed here will have succeeded when it no longer needs proposing.

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