

St. Paul's Illuminating Vision Protected by the non-Christian Jewish king Agrippa II to make the Spread of Christianity Possible

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Abstract

This work used the methods of cosmological neuroscience to examine the illuminating vision of St. Paul and its protection by the Jewish king Agrippa II – two interrelated stories credibly recorded in the 1st century AD. Illuminating vision was defined as a complex perception less dependent on external sensory stimuli than on the emotionally hypercharged and motivationally signified neural streams emanating from the prefrontal cortical neural supercircuitry of Soul to overwhelm the entire cognitive system for a brief period with the truth of a life-changing recognition for the host. It was added that analogous illuminating visions – however differently – also occurred in other exceptional people from Muhammad and Joan of Arc to Tesla and Arundhati Roy. One important context of St. Paul's illuminating vision was also examined, namely, his interaction with the Jewish king Agrippa II, who did help Paul to lay down the groundwork for Christianity. The phenomenon of illuminating visions was considered as special to the human mind, an inimitable feature very difficult, if not impossible, to replicate in AI machineries.

Key Words: cosmological neuroscience, Soul, perceptions, memory, cognition, Jesus, AI

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Introduction

General neuroscience has clarified that healthy people know about the reality of their surrounding world because visual, auditory, somatosensory, olfactory and gustatory external inputs generate increasingly complex sensations in the people's corresponding primary and secondary sensory cortices with these sensations further

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processed to create integrated, emotionally charged perceptions in the association cortices in such a way that the significant ones are stored as memory engrams accessible to the cognitive system. Performing neuronal recordings from the brains of freely-behaving rats and monkeys – which were impossible to extend to human subjects at the time – even led this author suggest that the association cortical memory engrams may be chained together in the temporal order of their creation with regularly linked spatial reference engrams to provide a mechanism for representing the host's encountered space-time throughout life (Ludvig, 1999; Ludvig et al., 2004).

Clinical neuroscience has added to this picture the fact that in neurological and psychiatric patients the brain can generate perceptions without external stimulations (Cummings and Miller, 1987) – leading to simple or complex hallucinations, including repeated cinematographic hallucinations, in people with temporal lobe epilepsy (Nelson et al., 2016), schizophrenia and other brain disorders.

Cosmological neuroscience, nevertheless, also examines a third type of perceptions that has been experienced by some extraordinary people, including founders of religions, in history. Though this form of perception has already been analyzed with scientific sophistication (Lombroso, 1891; Boyer, 1994; Taves, 1999), expanding these analyses could enrich neuroscience and neurophilosophy.

Cosmological neuroscience is an interdisciplinary field aiming to study the nervous system in the context of cosmic laws, including the laws that made life on Earth possible and let it evolve to generate the nervous system and its increasingly more complex forms culminating into the appearance of the human Soul. The Soul itself is defined by cosmological neuroscience as a product of matter and energy in special nodes of space-time where the guided structural and dynamic complexity of the involved substances reaches such a high level that a distinct presence is born, the presence of Soul: neither matter nor energy yet inseparable from each while equips the meaning of both with purpose and the potential to transcend (Ludvig, 2022).

According to this interdisciplinary field, the mentioned third type of perceptions is neither normal nor abnormal as in healthy and diseased people, respectively, rather perceptions producing representations of the surrounding world beyond that world's ordinarily accessible reality. Such perceptions can be generated by the cognitive system of extraordinary people able to, at least occasionally, activate the mechanisms of illuminating visions – even if these activations are not under their conscious control. It seems that subconscious switching mechanisms – perhaps built by the neural representations of key moments in life – are needed to initiate and execute illuminating visions.

The present paper focuses on one of such illuminating visions: the one experienced by St. Paul (c.5 – 65 AD) as documented by Luke the Evangelist in the New Testament's Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 9, and recollected by Paul himself in Chapter 22. The paper places this event in the context of one of its most important results: the protection of Paul by the Jewish king Agrippa II who had nothing to do with Christianity yet made possible for Paul to continue spreading Jesus' system of teachings.



Rembrandt's famous painting on St. Paul

Measurable data on St. Paul's illuminating vision

According to recent studies, more than 3,000 academic articles were published on St. Paul between 2000 and 2015 (Froese, 2015). This widespread published material has been continuously complemented with books on St. Paul, of which copies available on Amazon were estimated to be “in the number of thousands” by Google’s Gemini AI according to a search by this author on 11/23/2025. In a recent comprehensive book by N. T. Wright, the following was written:

“Paul might dispute the suggestion that he himself changed the world, – Jesus, he would have said, had already done that. But what he said about Jesus, and about God, the world, and what it means to be genuinely human, was creative and compelling – and controversial, in his own day and ever after. Nothing would ever be quite the same again.” (Wright, 2020, p.1)

Obviously, these articles and books heavily depended on the Acts of the Apostles and Paul’s Letters in the New Testament as the only verifiable sources on Paul’s life. This is because none of the prominent historians of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, thus neither Pliny the Younger, nor Suetonius or Tacitus, made any note on Paul’s life, probably considering him unimportant if they heard about him at all. Certainly, however superintelligent these scholars were they lacked the cognitive mechanism of illuminated visions.

As for Paul’s Letters in the New Testament, they were not just carefully written up to be documents for all times, but they were signed by Paul himself as if preventing any unnecessary debates on their origin. For example, his Second Letter to the Thessalonians, written in Greek, was finished with these words: *“Paul writes this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine.”*

Indeed, Jesus’ system of teachings – an advanced moral cosmology built on the Torah’s Genesis and Ten Commandments – was spread by Paul working like a genius Public Relations executive, however differently from his 21st century PR counterparts by keeping his freedom in thoughts and decency in actions, unpaid, even in the time of a tyrant like Nero.

According to the Acts of the Apostles, Paul, still Saul the Pharisee “breathing threats and murder” against the followers of Jesus and persecuting them in Jerusalem and Damascus – approving even Apostle Steven’s stoning to death -- experienced this illuminating vision:

“Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him... And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ And he said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.’ The

men who were traveling with him stood speechless... Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So, they led him by hand and brought him to Damascus. And for three days he was without sight and neither ate nor drank... Then he rose... and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus... And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues..." (Acts 9: 3–20)

Was this an experience of normal perceptions? It couldn't be, because normal perceptions unlikely include such incompatible sequences as a light coming "from heaven" followed by voices conversing about the deepest concerns of conscience while also affecting the subject's balance and spatial awareness with a subsequent 3-day loss of consciousness.

Then was it an experience of abnormal perceptions? It couldn't be either, because this episode renewed a person's life, transforming him from a hateful being to a man of compassion, someone whose pivotal service to Christianity is remembered by more than 2.6 billion people two thousand years later. Hallucinations in temporal lobe epilepsy or schizophrenia are not known to have such historic impacts – however Cesare Lombroso characterized many geniuses, including St. Paul and Muhammad, as epileptics (Lombroso, 1891). It took the comprehensive study of John Hughes to put this long prevailing diagnostic error to rest (Hughes, 2005).

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Thus, it makes sense to hypothesize that St. Paul's recorded, life-changing experience on the road to Damascus was based on a stream of neither normal nor abnormal perceptions. Instead, it was likely based on a stream of perceptions illuminating a reality of the surrounding world that is inaccessible to ordinary cognition. It is the reality associated with the realm of nature that Alfred Russel Wallace, co-discoverer of evolution of life on Earth, called as the "world of spirit" (Wallace, 1889). The author of this article considered this realm accessible to the cognitive circuitry for sensing God, a system complementing the prefrontal cortical supercircuitry of human Soul to help religious, administrative, engineering, scientific, philosophical and artistic creativity (Ludvig, 2023).

Examination of the mental phenomenon of illuminating visions

It is important to prove that St. Paul's illuminating vision was not an isolated neurophysiological event, but the operation of a very high-level cognitive system also working – however rarely and differently – in other extraordinary individuals. **Table 1** presents some supporting data for the occurrence of illuminating visions in other religion-driven people, as well as some geniuses of innovative engineering and quality literature.

Definition

Illuminating visions can be defined as complex perceptions less dependent on external sensory stimuli than on the emotionally hypercharged and motivationally signified neural streams emanating from the prefrontal cortical neural supercircuitry of Soul to overwhelm the entire cognitive system for a brief period with the truth of a life-changing recognition along with the host's awareness of his or her cosmically relevant destiny.

The term “emotionally hypercharged” here means the synaptic linkage of the ongoing visual and auditory perceptions to the neural representations of such highly amplified feelings as fervor, extasy, awe, enchantment and others in this neuropsychological category.

The term “motivationally signified” here means the synaptic linkage of the ongoing visual and auditory perceptions to the neural representations of such highly amplified inner drives as challenging a hostile environment when needed or devotion to the highest human aims even when they are battered. The “prefrontal cortical neural supercircuitry of Soul” refers to the neural network hypothesized to represent the deepest essence of the host's existence, that is, his or her Identity, Mission, Conscience and Will (Ludvig, 2022).

At least this is how cosmological neuroscience interprets the documented vision of St. Paul and of those listed in **Table 1**, however different these visions were ranging from religious experiences through engineering insights to artistic inspirations. This interpretation is compatible with Alfred Russel Wallace's suggestion on the role of a “world of spirit” in the evolution of “the existence in man of number of his most characteristic and noblest faculties” (Wallace, 1889) – including those empowering the human species to become “... a physically improved, morally reborn and intellectually advanced spacefaring race... worthy of its origin and destiny...” (Ludvig, 2023).

What the figure specifically tells about St. Paul's vision is that it illuminated to him (1) the need of expanding his Identity to be more than a persecuting Pharisee, (2) that the most devoted service for Jesus' cause is his now-confirmed Mission, (3) that his Conscience will be satisfied only with accepting this double command, and (4) that his strengthened Will is now ready to power these mental changes.

Table 1. Some recorded examples of illuminating visions. The Table purposely lists geniuses from widely different fields to show that however their visions differed those visions still reflected the same – infinitely complex yet single – cosmically programmed Truth they all served.

Geniuses with illuminating visions	Passages of the records of illuminating visions	References
Muhammad	<i>“... He [Muhammad] doesn’t speak out of his fancy. This is a revelation inspired. He is taught by one [angel Gabriel] who is powerful and mighty... He stood on the uppermost horizon; then, drawing near he came down within a two bows length or even closer, and he revealed to His servant [Muhammad] that which He revealed.”</i>	The Koran, Surah 53, The Star (N. J. Dawood’s translation)
Joan of Arc	<i>“... She declared further that when she was thirteen, she heard a voice from God helping her to behave. And at first she feared greatly... She heard a voice on her right, toward the church, and she seldom hears it without light... She also said that the voice told her to come to France and not to stay where she was any longer... The voice told her that she must raise the siege of the city of Orleans.”</i>	Hobbins (2005) p. 53-54
Nikola Tesla	<i>“In Budapest... One afternoon, which is ever present in my recollection, I was enjoying a walk with my friend in the City Park and reciting poetry... One of these was Goethe’s “Faust”... “Alas, the wings that lift the mind no aid / Of wings to lift the body can bequeath me...” As I uttered these inspiring words the idea came like a flash of lightning and in an instant the truth was revealed. I drew with a stick on the sand the diagrams shown six years later in my address before the American Institute of Electrical Engineers, and my companion understood them perfectly... I told him: “See my motor here...”</i>	Tesla (1919) p. 59-61
Sarah Young	<i>“I first experienced the presence of God in a... tiny Alpine village in France... One night I found myself... to walk alone in the snowy mountains... After a while... I became aware of a lovely presence with me... a relationship with the Creator of the universe...”</i>	Young (2004) p. VI - VIII
Arundhati Roy	<i>“The God of Small Things” first came to me as an image: two young children, a pair of twins... their faces pressed upon against the window of a sky-blue Plymouth with the sun in its tail fins... They are stuck at a railway crossing... One morning without prior notice the railway level crossing opened and the sky-blue Plymouth with the sun in its tail fins sailed through... The architecture of the novel I was writing revealed itself for me.”</i>	Roy (2025) p. 197-198

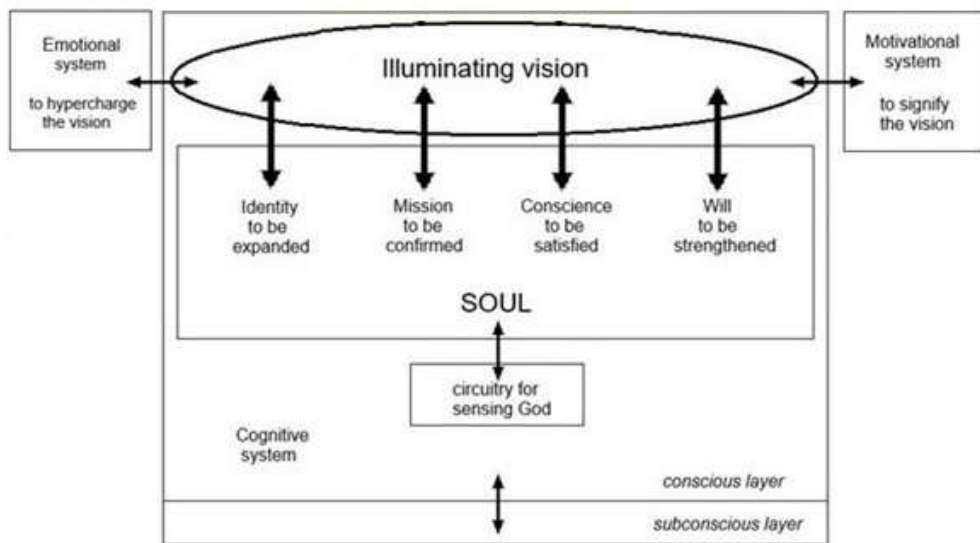


Figure 1. Schematic outline of the neural system in brain that may be able to generate the illuminated visions examined in this article. The figure extends the author's described architecture of the human Soul with its four likely domains and synaptic connections with the rest of the conscious and subconscious layers of the cognitive system, including its circuitry for sensing God, all interacting with the brain's emotional and motivational systems (Ludvig, 2023, 2025).

Protection of St. Paul's illuminating vision by king Agrippa II

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If Paul's illuminating vision was a pivotal event in understanding the historic significance of Jesus' life, it was followed some years later with another, not less significant event when none else than the reigning Jewish king, Agrippa II, opened up the way for Paul to not just getting out of the prison where his enemies had placed him two years before but to continue his spreading of Jesus' teachings.

Agrippa II (27 – 100 AD) was the son of king Agrippa I (10 BC – 44 AD), whose grandfather, Herod the Great, ordered the massacre of all infants in Jesus' birthplace Bethlehem. Further, it was the uncle of Agrippa I, Herod Antipas, who sent Jesus back to Pontius Pilate to die. So Agrippa II, grown up with the awareness of this family history in Jesus' life, was surely conflicted when the Roman governor Festus invited him to Caesarea to advise him about whether to keep Paul further in prison in Caesarea or let his relentless accusers take him to Jerusalem to be tried for death sentence.

After offering Paul to defend himself and hearing from him that he was just "not disobedient to the heavenly visions" he had seen, Agrippa II said to Festus: "This man could have been set free..." And with this noble courage and insight in history – not unlikely also affected by the vision he heard from Paul – he convinced Festus to let Paul go out of prison and continue to lay down the groundwork of Christianity.

Indeed, illuminating visions, however produced in single brains, always have much wider impacts than their carriers' lives – like creating the Muslim world in Muhammad's case; giving back pride and faith to France in Joan of Arc's case; opening the people's eyes to the power of electricity in Tesla's case; proving that the sense of divine presence is a gift to be experienced in Sarah Young's case, and showing the world that commercial success can also be achieved with the highest-minded books in the case of Arundhati Roy.

Significance

The rare and extremely complex neural mechanism of the illuminating visions of St. Paul (**Figure 1**) and some exceptional people (**Table 1**) make this mental phenomenon almost impossible to replicate in AI machineries. Thus, even if humankind chooses to shape the evolution of AIs toward the existence of a “truly beneficial, noble cosmic friend”, as discussed recently (Ludvig, 2025), human intelligence will still have the unique potential of illuminating visions: this inimitable feature of the species' 6-million-year evolution of biological intelligence. For it must have been the illuminating vision of a member of an *Australopithecus afarensis* clan that convinced the rest to explore that faraway savanna; it must have been the illuminating vision of a *Homo erectus* man to ignite and stop fire; it must have been the illuminating vision of someone at the bank of the Nile to use its water for irrigation; it must have been an illuminating vision for Giordano Bruno to grasp the infinity of the universe and its infinite number of worlds. This millions of years of progress in one of the highest functions of biological intelligence is an immense, if not even more than immense, challenge for AI evolution.

The character of St. Paul itself is worthy of non-religious psychological studies. He never lied about his sinful past, as he said this to Agrippa II: “I not only locked up many of the saints in prison... but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them...”. While knowing that Jesus didn't even answer the questions of Herod Antipas, he responded to the inquiry of Agrippa II with the highest respect: “I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today...” His life as a follower of Jesus was full of accusations and death threats against him, arrests and imprisonments, escaping from one place to another – in the possibly sharpest contrast with his prior successful career as a Pharisee before his illuminating vision. Yet no complaint about this change of fate was ever heard from him. He deserved the renowned Jewish scholar Alan Segal's judgement: “Paul is also important for Jewish history... Paul should be treated as a major source in the study of first-century Judaism”. (Segal, 1990). Indeed, the Nobel Laureate James D. Watson also asked us to think about St. Paul:

“I may not be religious, but I still see much in scripture that is profoundly true. In the first letter to the Corinthians, for example, Paul writes: ‘And though I... understand all mysteries and all knowledge... so that I could remove mountains, but have not love I am nothing.’ Paul has in my judgement and proclaimed rightly the essence of our humanity.” (Watson et al., 2017, p. 439-440.)

Conclusions

This paper examined the mental phenomenon of illuminating vision, a neither normal nor abnormal type of perception that is processed by the human Soul to temporarily overwhelm the entire cognitive system to generate a life-changing recognition for the host along with the sudden awareness of his or her fate’s true destiny. Some details of this phenomenon were described via the illuminating vision of St. Paul while noting that analogous phenomena were also observed, however rarely, in other exceptional – though very differently creative – people like Muhammad, Tesla or Arundhati Roy. One important context of St. Paul’s illuminating vision was also examined, namely, his interaction with the Jewish king Agrippa II, because this king, despite his family history with Jesus, helped Paul to get out of prison and continue to lay down the groundwork for Christianity. The phenomenon of illuminating visions was considered as special to the human mind, an inimitable feature impossible to replicate in AI machineries – at least for a long time.

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AI use

This paper was conceived and its every sentence written up by this author except the included quotations by others indicated with quotation marks. Consistent with the digitally enhanced complex thinking of cosmological neuroscience, the paper’s database was compiled with the use of personal collections, physical library materials and data accessed via both regular and AI-assisted Google searches.

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