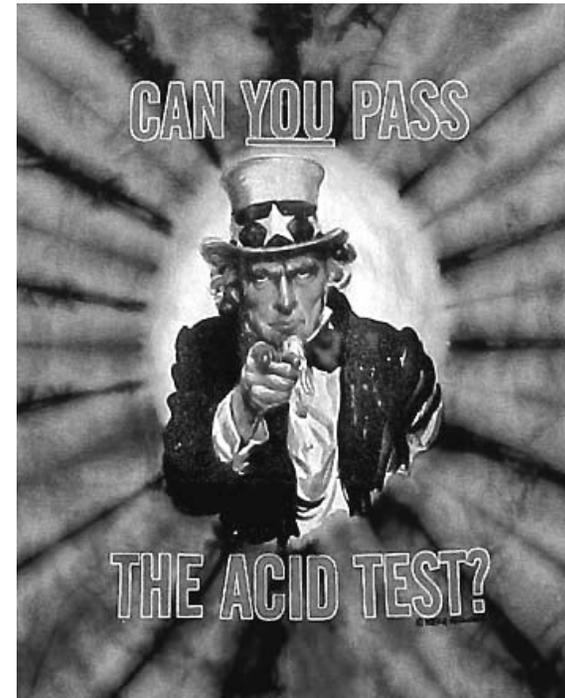


*A Fifth Anthology of Writings
about Psychedelics*

*edited by
Raymond Souland, Jr.*



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Number Twenty-nine

Can You Pass the Acid Test?
A Fifth Anthology of Writings about Psychedelics

Burning Man Books is
an imprint of
Scriptor Press
20 Milford Street
Plainville, Connecticut 06062
cenacle@mindspring.com
www.geocities.com/scriptorpress

This volume was composed
in the Lucida Bright and Freestyle fonts
in PageMaker 6.5 on the
Macintosh G4 computer

This volume is for the
SpiritPlants online community

*You know how I almost lost my mind?
I can't explain
Where I've been
You know how I almost lost my mind?
I can't explain
Where I've been
You know how I almost lost my mind?
I couldn't explain
What I've seen*

**The Chemical Brothers,
"The Test," 2002**

from
The Varieties of Religious Experience
by William James

ONE CONCLUSION WAS FORCED upon my mind at that time, and my impression of its truth has ever since remained unshaken. It is that our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation. No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. How to regard them is the question—for they are so discontinuous with ordinary consciousness. Yet they may determine attitudes though they cannot furnish formulas, and open a region though they fail to give a map. At any rate, they forbid a premature closing of our accounts with reality. Looking back on my own experiences, they all converge towards a kind of insight to which I cannot help ascribing some metaphysical significance. The keynote of it is invariably a reconciliation. It is as if the opposites of the world, whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles, were melted into unity. Not only do they, as contrasted species, belong to one and the same genus, but one of the species, the nobler and better one, is itself the genus, and so soaks up and absorbs its opposite into itself. This is a dark saying, I know, when thus expressed in terms of common logic, but I cannot wholly escape from its authority. I feel as if it must mean something, something like what the Hegelian philosophy means, if one could only lay hold of it more clearly. Those who have ears to hear, let them hear; to me the living sense of its reality only comes in the artificial mystic state of mind.

Do Drugs Have Religious Import?
by Dr. Huston Smith

The Journal of Philosophy,
Vol LXI, No. 18, September 17, 1964

UNTIL SIX MONTHS AGO, if I picked up my phone in the Cambridge area and dialed KISS-BIG a voice would answer, “Ifif.” These were coincidences: KISS-BIG simply happened to be the letter equivalents of an arbitrarily assigned telephone number, while I.F.I.F. represented the initials of an organization with the improbable name of the International Federation for Internal Freedom. But the coincidences were apposite to the point of being poetic. “Kiss big” caught the euphoric, manic, life-embracing attitude that characterized this most publicized of the organizations formed to explore the newly synthesized consciousness-changing substances, while the organization itself was surely one of the “iffy-est” phenomena to appear on our social and intellectual scene in some time. It produced the first firings in Harvard’s history, an ultimatum to get out of Mexico in five days, and “the miracle of Marsh Chapel” in which during a two-and-one-half hour Good Friday service ten theological students and professors ingested psilocybin and were visited by what they generally reported to be the deepest religious experiences of their lives.

Despite the last of these phenomena and its numerous if less dramatic parallels, students of religion appear by and large to be dismissing the psychedelic drugs which have sprung to our attention in the sixties as having little religious relevance. The position taken in one of the most forward-looking volumes of theological essays to have appeared in recent years¹ accepts R. C. Zaehner’s *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* as having “fully examined and refuted” the religious claims for mescaline which Aldous Huxley sketched in *The Doors of Perception*. This closing of the case strikes me as premature, for it looks as if the drugs have light to throw on the history of religion, the phenomenol-

ogy of religion, the philosophy of religion, and the practice of the religious life itself.

1. Drugs and Religion Viewed Historically

In his trial-and-error life explorations man almost everywhere has stumbled upon connections between vegetables (eaten or brewed) and actions (yogic breathing exercises, whirling dervish dances, flagellations) which altered states of consciousness. From the psychopharmacological standpoint we now understand these states to be the products of changes in brain chemistry. From the sociological perspective we see that they tended to be connected in some way with religion. If we discount the wine used in our own communion services, the instances closest to us in time and space are the peyote of The Native American (Indian) Church and Mexico's 2,000-year-old "sacred mushrooms," the latter rendered in Aztec as "God's flesh" striking parallel to "the body of our Lord" in the Christian Eucharist. Beyond these neighboring instances lie the *soma* of the Hindus, the *haoma* and hemp, identical with and better known as marijuana, of the Zoroastrians, the Dionysus of the Greeks who "everywhere . . . taught men the culture of the vine and the mysteries of his worship and everywhere [was] accepted as a god,"² the *benzoin* of Southeast Asia, Zen's tea whose fifth cup purifies and whose sixth "calls to the realm of the immortals,"³ the *pituri* of the Australian aborigines and probably the mystic *kykeon* that was eaten and drunk at the climactic close of the sixth day of the Eleusinian mysteries.⁴ There is no need to extend the list, especially as Philippie de Felice's comprehensive study of the subject, *Poisons Sacrés, Ivresses Divines (Sacred Poisons, Divine Raptures)*, is about to appear in English.

More interesting than the fact that consciousness-changing devices have been linked with religion is the possibility that they actually initiated many of the religious perspectives which, taking root in history, continued after their psychedelic origins were forgotten. Bergson saw the first movement of Hindus and Greeks toward "dynamic religion" as associated with the "divine rapture" found in intoxicating beverages⁵; more recently Robert Graves, Gordon Wasson and Alan Watts have suggested that most religions arose from such chemically-induced theophanies. Mary Barnard is the most explicit proponent of this thesis. "Which. . .

was more likely to happen first," she asks in the autumn 1963 journal of *Phi Beta Kappa*: "the spontaneously generated idea of an afterlife in which the disembodied soul, liberated from the restrictions of time and space, experiences eternal bliss, or the accidental discovery of hallucinogenic plants that give a sense of euphoria, dislocate the center of consciousness, and distort time and space, making them balloon outward in greatly expanded vistas?" Her own answer is that "the [latter] experience might have had... an almost explosive effect on the largely dormant minds of men, causing them to think of things they had never thought of before. This, if you like, is direct revelation." Her use of the subjunctive "might" renders this formulation of her answer equivocal, but she concludes her essay on a note that is completely unequivocal: "Looking at the matter coldly, unintoxicated and unentranced, I am willing to prophesy that fifty theo-botanists working for fifty years would make the current theories concerning the origins of much mythology and theology as out-of-date as pre-Copernican astronomy."⁶

This is an important hypothesis, one which must surely engage the attention of historians of religion for some time to come. But as I am concerned here only to spot the points at which the drugs erupt onto the field of serious religious study, not to ride the geysers to whatever height, I shall not pursue Miss Barnard's thesis. Having located what appears to be the crux of the historical question, namely the extent to which drugs not merely duplicate or simulate theologically sponsored experiences but generate or shape theologies themselves, I turn to phenomenology.

2. Drugs and Religion Viewed Phenomenologically

Phenomenology attempts a careful description of human experience. The question the drugs pose for the phenomenology of religion, therefore, is whether the experiences they induce differ from religious experiences reached au nature and if so how.

Even the Bible notes that chemically induced psychic states bear *some* resemblance to religious ones. Peter had to appeal to a circumstantial criterion, the early hour of the day, to defend those who were caught up in the Pentecostal experience against the charge that they were merely drunk: "These men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day" (Acts 2:15); and Paul initiates the comparison when he admon-

ishes the Ephesians not to “get drunk with wine. . . but [to] be filled with the spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). Are such comparisons, paralleled in the accounts of virtually every religion, superficial? How far can they be pushed?

Not all the way, students of religion have thus far insisted. With respect to the new drugs, Professor R. C. Zaehner has drawn the line emphatically. “The importance of Huxley’s *Doors of Perception*,” he writes, “is that in it the author clearly makes the claim that what he experienced under the influence of mescaline is closely comparable to a genuine mystical experience. If he is right. . . the conclusions. . . are alarming.”⁷ Zaehner thinks that Huxley is not right, but Zaehner is mistaken.

There are, of course, innumerable drug experiences which haven’t a religious feature; they can be sensual as readily as spiritual, trivial as readily as transforming, capricious as readily as sacramental. If there is one point about which every student of the drugs agrees, it is that there is no such thing as the drug experience per se—no experience which the drugs, as it were, merely secrete. Every experience is a mix of three ingredients: drug, set (the psychological makeup of the individual) and setting (the social and physical environment in which it is taken). But given the right set and setting, the drugs can induce religious experiences indistinguishable from ones that occur spontaneously. Nor need set and setting be exceptional. The way the statistics are currently running, it looks as if from one-fourth to one-third of the general population will have religious experiences if they take the drugs under naturalistic conditions, meaning by this conditions in which the researcher supports the subject but doesn’t try to influence the direction his experience will take. Among subjects who have strong religious inclinations to begin with, the proportion of those having religious experiences jumps to three-fourths. If they take them in settings which are religious too, the ratio soars to nine out of ten.

How do we know that the experiences these people have really are religious? We can begin with the fact that they say they are. The “one-fourth to one-third of the general populous” figure is drawn from two sources. Ten months after they had had their experiences, 24 percent of the 194 subjects in a study by the California psychiatrist Oscar Janiger characterized them as having been religious.⁸ Thirty-two percent of the 74 subjects in Ditman and Hayman’s study reported that in looking back on

their LSD experience it looked as if it had been “very much” or “quite a bit” a religious experience; 42 percent checked as true the statement that they “were left with a greater awareness of God, or a higher power, or ultimate reality.”⁹ The statement that three-fourths of subjects having religious “sets” will have religious experiences comes from the reports of sixty-nine religious professionals who took the drugs while the Harvard project was in progress.¹⁰

In the absence of (a) a single definition of a religious experience acceptable to psychologists of religion generally, and (b) foolproof ways of ascertaining whether actual experiences exemplify any definition, I am not sure there is a better way of telling whether the experiences of the 333 men and women involved in the above studies were religious than by noting whether they seemed so to them. But if more rigorous methods are preferred, they exist; they have been utilized and confirm the conviction of the man in the street that drug experiences can indeed be religious. In his doctoral study at Harvard University, Dr. Walter Pahnke worked out a typology of religious experience (in this instance of the mystical variety) based on the classic cases of mystical experiences as summarized in Walter Stace’s *Mysticism and Philosophy*. He then administered psilocybin to ten theology students and professors in the setting of a Good Friday service. The drug was given “double-blind,” meaning that neither Dr. Pahnke nor his subjects would know which ten were getting psilocybin and which ten placebos to constitute a control group. Subsequently the reports the subjects wrote of their experiences were laid successively before three college-graduate housewives who, without being informed about the nature of the study, were asked to rate each statement as to the degree (strong, moderate, slight, or none) to which it exemplified each of the nine traits of mystical experience as enumerated in the typology of mysticism worked out in advance. When the test of significance was applied to their statistics, it showed that “those subjects who received psilocybin experienced phenomena which were indistinguishable from, if not identical with. . . the categories defined by our typology of mysticism.”¹¹

With the thought that the reader might like to test his own powers of discernment on the question being considered, I insert here a simple test I gave to a group of Princeton students following a recent discussion sponsored by the Woodrow Wil-

son Society.

Below are accounts of two religious experiences. One occurred under the influence of drugs, one without their influence. Check the one you think was drug-induced.

I

Suddenly I burst into a vast, new, indescribably wonderful universe. Although I am writing this over a year later, the thrill of the surprise and amazement, the awesomeness of the revelation, the engulfment in an overwhelming feeling-wave of gratitude and blessed wonderment, are as fresh, and the memory of the experience is as vivid, as if it had happened five minutes ago. And yet to concoct anything by way of description that would even hint at the magnitude, the sense of ultimate reality. . . this seems such an impossible task. The knowledge which has infused and affected every aspect of my life came instantaneously and with such complete force of certainty that it was impossible, then or since, to doubt its validity.

II

All at once, without warning of any kind, I found myself wrapped in a flame-colored cloud. For an instant I thought of fire. . . the next, I knew that the fire was within myself. Directly afterward there came upon me a sense of exultation, of immense joyousness accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination impossible to describe. Among other things, I did not merely come to believe, but I saw that the universe is not composed of dead matter, but is, on the contrary, a living Presence; I became conscious in myself of eternal life. . . . I saw that all men are immortal: that the cosmic order is such that without any peradventure all things work together for the good of each and all; that the foundation principle of the world. . . is what we call love, and that the happiness of each and all is in the long run absolutely certain.

On the occasion referred to, twice the number of students (46) answered incorrectly as answered correctly (23). I bury the correct answer in a footnote to preserve the reader's opportunity to test himself.¹²

Why, in the face of this considerable evidence, does Zaehner

hold that drug experiences cannot be authentically religious? There appear to be three reasons:

1. His own experience was "utterly trivial." This of course proves that not all drug experiences are religious; it does not prove that no drug experiences are religious.

2. He thinks that the experiences of others which appear to be religious to them are not truly so. Zaehner distinguishes three kinds of mysticism: nature mysticism in which the soul is united with the natural world; monistic mysticism in which the soul merges with an impersonal absolute; and theism in which the soul confronts the living, personal God. He concedes that drugs can induce the first two species of mysticism, but not its supreme instance, the theistic. As proof, he analyzes Huxley's experience as recounted in *The Doors of Perception* to show that it produced at best a blend of nature and monistic mysticism. Even if we were to accept Zaehner's evaluation of the three forms of mysticism, Huxley's case, and indeed Zaehner's entire book, would prove only that not every mystical experience induced by the drugs is theistic. Insofar as Zaehner goes beyond this to imply that drugs do not and cannot induce theistic mysticism, he not only goes beyond the evidence but proceeds in the face of it. Professor Slotkin reports that the peyote Indians "see visions, which may be of Christ Himself. Sometimes they hear the voice of the Great Spirit. Sometimes they become aware of the presence of God and of those personal shortcomings which must be corrected if they are to do His will."¹³ And G. M. Carstairs, reporting on the use of psychedelic bhang (marijuana) in India, quotes a Brahmin as saying, "It gives good bhakti. . . . You get a very good bhakti with bhang," bhakti being precisely Hinduism's theistic variant.¹⁴

3. There is a third reason why Professor Zaehner might doubt that drugs can induce experiences that are genuinely mystical. Professor Zaehner is a Roman Catholic, and Roman Catholic doctrine teaches that mystical rapture is a gift of grace and as such can never be reduced to man's control. This may be true; certainly the empirical evidence cited does not preclude the possibility of a genuine ontological or theological difference between natural and drug-induced religious experiences. At this point, however, we are considering phenomenology rather than ontology, description rather than interpretation, and on this level there is no difference. Descriptively, drug experiences cannot be dis-

tinguished from their natural religious counterpart. When the current philosophical authority on mysticism, Dr. W. T. Stace, Professor Emeritus at Princeton University, was asked whether the drug experience is similar to the mystical experience, he answered, "It's not a matter of its being *similar* to mystical experience; it *is* mystical experience."

What we seem to be witnessing in Zaehner's *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* is a reenactment of the age-old pattern in the conflict between science and religion. Whenever a new controversy arises, religion's first impulse is to deny the disturbing evidence science has produced. Seen in perspective, Zaehner's refusal to admit that drugs can induce experiences descriptively indistinguishable from those which are spontaneously religious is the current counterpart of the seventeenth century theologians' refusal to look through Galileo's telescope or, when they did, their persistence in dismissing what they saw as machinations of the devil. When the fact that drugs can trigger religious experiences becomes incontrovertible, discussion will move to the more difficult question of how this new fact is to be interpreted. The latter question leads beyond phenomenology into philosophy.

3. Drugs and Religion Viewed Philosophically

Why do people reject evidence? Because they find it threatening, we may suppose. Theologians are not the only professionals to utilize this mode of defense. In his *Personal Knowledge*, Michael Polanyi recounts the way the medical profession ignored such palpable facts as the painless amputation of human limbs, performed before their own eyes in hundreds of successive cases, concluding that the subjects were impostors who were either deluding their physician or colluding with him. One physician, Esdaile, carried out about 300 major operations painlessly under mesmeric trance in India, but neither in India nor in Great Britain could he get medical journals to print accounts of his work. Polanyi attributes this closed-mindedness to "lack of a conceptual framework in which their discoveries could be separated from specious and untenable admixtures."

The "untenable admixture" in the fact that psychotomimetic drugs can induce religious experience is their apparent implicate: that religious disclosures are no more veridical than psy-

chotic ones. For religious skeptics, this conclusion is obviously not untenable at all; it fits in beautifully with their thesis that *all* religion is at heart an escape from reality. Psychotics avoid reality by retiring into dream worlds of make-believe; what better evidence that religious visionaries do the same than the fact that identical changes in brain chemistry produces both states of mind? Had not Marx already warned us that religion is the "opiate" of the people? Apparently he was more literally accurate than he supposed. Freud was likewise too mild. He "never doubted that religious phenomena are to be understood only on the model of the neurotic symptoms of the individual."¹⁵ He should have said "psychotic symptoms."

So the religious skeptic is likely to reason. What about the religious believer? Convinced that religious experiences are not fundamentally delusory, can he admit that psychotomimetic drugs can occasion them? To do so he needs (to return to Polanyi's words) "a conceptual framework in which [the discoveries can] be separated from specious and untenable admixtures," the latter being in this case the conclusion that religious experiences are in general delusory.

One way to effect the separation would be to argue that despite phenomenological similarities between natural and drug-induced religious experiences, they are separated by a crucial *ontological* difference. Such an argument would follow the pattern of theologians who argue for the "real presence" of Christ's body and blood in the bread and wine of the Eucharist despite their admission that chemical analysis, confined as it is to the level of "accidents" rather than "essences," would not disclose this presence. But this distinction will not appeal to many today, for it turns on an essence-accident metaphysics which is not widely accepted. Instead of fighting a rear-guard action by insisting that if drug and non-drug religious experiences can't be distinguished empirically there must be some trans-empirical factor which distinguishes them and renders the drug experience profane, I wish to explore the possibility of accepting drug-induced experiences as religious in every sense of the word without relinquishing confidence in the truth claims of religious experience generally.

To begin with the weakest of all arguments, the argument from authority: William James didn't discount *his* insights which occurred while his brain chemistry was altered. The paragraph

in which he retrospectively evaluates his nitrous oxide experiences has become classic, but it is so pertinent to the present discussion that it merits quoting again.

One conclusion was forced upon my mind at that time, and my impression of its truth has ever since remained unshaken. It is that our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation. No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. How to regard them is the question—for they are so discontinuous with ordinary consciousness. Yet they may determine attitudes though they cannot furnish formulas, and open a region though they fail to give a map. At any rate, they forbid a premature closing of our accounts with reality. Looking back on my own experiences, they all converge toward a kind of insight to which I cannot help ascribing some metaphysical significance.¹⁶

To this argument from authority, I add two that try to provide something by way of reasons. Drug experiences that assume a religious cast tend to have fearful and/or beatific features, and each of my hypotheses relates to one of these aspects of the experience.

Beginning with the ominous, “fear of the Lord,” awe-ful features, Gordon Wasson, the New York banker-turned-mycologist, describes these as he encountered them in his psilocybin experience as follows: “Ecstasy! In common parlance. . . ecstasy is fun. . . . But ecstasy is not fun. Your very soul is seized and shaken until it tingles. After all, who will choose to feel undiluted awe . . . ? The unknowing vulgar abuse the word; we must recapture its full and terrifying sense.” Emotionally the drug experience can be like having forty-foot waves crash over you for several hours while you cling desperately to a life raft which may be swept from under you at any minute. It seems quite possible that such an ordeal, like any experience of a close call, could

awaken rather fundamental sentiments respecting life and death and destiny and trigger the “no atheists in foxholes” effect. Similarly, as the subject emerges from the trauma and realizes that he is not going to be insane as he had feared, there may come over him an intensified appreciation like that frequently reported by patients recovering from critical illness. “It happened on the day when my bed was pushed out of doors to the open gallery of the hospital,” reads one such report.

I cannot now recall whether the revelation came suddenly or gradually; I only remember finding myself in the very midst of those wonderful moments, beholding life for the first time in all its young intoxication of loveliness, in its unspeakable joy, beauty, and importance. I cannot say exactly what the mysterious change was. I saw no new thing, but I saw all the usual things in a miraculous new light—in what I believe is their true light. I saw for the first time how wildly beautiful and joyous, beyond any words of mine to describe, is the whole of life. Every human being moving across that porch, every sparrow that flew, every branch tossing in the wind, was caught in and was a part of the whole mad ecstasy of loveliness, of joy, of importance, of intoxication of life.¹⁷

If we do not discount religious intuitions because they are prompted by battlefields and *physical* crises; if we regard the latter as “calling us to our senses” more often than they seduce us into delusions, need comparable intuitions be discounted simply because the crises that trigger them are of an inner, *psychic* variety?

Turning from the hellish to the heavenly aspects of the drug experience, *some* of the latter may be explainable by the hypothesis just stated; that is, they may be occasioned by the relief that attends the sense of escape from high danger. But this hypothesis cannot possibly account for *all* the beatific episodes for the simple reason that the positive episodes often come first, or to persons who experience no negative episodes whatever. Dr. Sanford Unger of the National Institute of Mental Health reports that among his subjects “50 to 60 percent will not manifest any real disturbance worthy of discussion,” yet “around 75” will have at least one episode in which exaltation, rapture, and joy are the key descriptions.¹⁸ How are we to account for the drug’s capacity to induce peak experiences, such as the following, which are

not preceded by fear?

*A feeling of great peace and contentment seemed to flow through my entire body. All sound ceased and I seemed to be floating in a great, very still void or hemisphere. It is impossible to describe the overpowering feeling of peace, contentment, and being a part of goodness itself that I felt. I could feel my body dissolving and actually becoming a part of the goodness and peace that was all around me. Words can't describe this. I feel an awe and wonder that such a feeling could have occurred to me.*¹⁹

Consider the following line of argument. Like every other form of life, man's nature has become distinctive through specialization. Man has specialized in developing a cerebral cortex. The analytic powers of this instrument are a standing wonder, but it seems less able to provide man with the sense that he is meaningfully related to his environment, to life, the world and history in their wholeness. As Albert Camus describes the situation, "If I were. . . a cat among animals, this life would have a meaning, or rather this problem would not arise, for I should belong to this world. I would be this world to which I am now opposed by my whole consciousness."²⁰ Note that it is Camus' consciousness that opposes him to his world. The drugs do not knock this consciousness out, but while they leave it operative they also activate areas of the brain that normally lie below its threshold of awareness. One of the clearest objective signs that the drugs are taking effect is the dilation they produce in the pupils of the eyes, while one of the most predictable subjective signs is the intensification of visual perception. Both of these responses are controlled by portions of the brain that lie deep, further to the rear than the mechanisms that govern consciousness. Meanwhile we know that the human organism is interlaced with its world in innumerable ways it normally cannot sense through gravitational fields, body respiration, and the like; the list could be multiplied until man's skin began to seem more like a thoroughfare than a boundary. Perhaps the deeper regions of the brain which evolved earlier and are more like those of the lower animals—"If I were. . . a cat. . . I should belong to this world" can sense this relatedness better than can the cerebral cortex which now dominates our awareness. If so, when the drugs rearrange the neurohumors that chemically transmit impulses

across synapses between neurons, man's consciousness and his submerged, intuitive, ecological awareness might for a spell become interlaced. This is, of course, no more than a hypothesis, but how else are we to account for the extraordinary incidence under the drugs of that kind of insight the keynote of which James described as

*invariably a reconciliation. It is as if the opposites of the world, whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles, were melted into one and the same genus, but one of the species, the nobler and better one, is itself the genus, and so soaks up and absorbs its opposites into itself.*²¹

4. The Drugs and Religion Viewed "Religiously"

Suppose that drugs can induce experiences that are indistinguishable from religious ones, and that we can respect their reports. Do they shed any light, not (we now ask) on life, but on the nature of the religious life?

One thing they may do is throw religious experience itself into perspective by clarifying its relation to the religious life as a whole. Drugs appear able to induce religious experiences; it is less evident that they can produce religious lives. It follows that religion is more than religious experiences. This is hardly news, but it may be a useful reminder, especially to those who incline toward "the religion of religious experience," which is to say toward lives bent on the acquisition of desired states of experience irrespective of their relation to life's other demands and components.

Despite the dangers of faculty psychology, it remains useful to regard man as having a mind, a will, and feelings. One of the lessons of religious history is that to be adequate a faith must rouse and involve all three components of man's nature. Religions of reason grow arid; religions of duty, leaden. Religions of experience have their comparable pitfalls, as evidenced by Taoism's struggle (not always successful) to keep from degenerating into quietism, and the vehemence with which Zen Buddhism has insisted that once students have attained *satori*, they must be driven out of it, back into the world. The case of Zen is especially pertinent here, for it pivots on an enlightenment experience—*satori* or *kensho*—which some (but not all) Zennists

says resembles LSD. Alike or different, the point is that Zen recognizes that unless the experience is joined to discipline, it will come to naught.

Even the Buddha . . . had to sit . . . Without *zoriki*, the particular power developed through *zazen* [seated meditation], the vision of oneness attained in enlightenment . . . in time becomes clouded and eventually fades into a pleasant memory instead of remaining an omnipresent reality shaping our daily life . . . To be able to live in accordance with what the Mind's eye has revealed through satori requires, like the purification of character and the development of personality, a ripening period of *zazen*.²²

If the religion of religious experience is a snare and a delusion, it follows that no religion that fixes its faith primarily in substances that induce religious experiences can be expected to come to a good end. What promised to be a shortcut will prove to be a short circuit; what began as a religion will end as a religion surrogate. Whether chemical substances can be helpful *adjuncts* to faith is another question. The peyote-using Native American Church seems to indicate that they can be; anthropologists give this church a good report, noting among other things that members resist alcohol and alcoholism better than do non-members.²³ The conclusion to which evidence currently points would seem to be that chemicals can aid the religious life, but only where set within a context of faith (meaning by this the conviction that what they disclose is true) and discipline (meaning diligent exercise of the will in the attempt to work out the implications of the disclosures for the living of life in the every day, common sense world).

Nowhere today in Western civilization are these two conditions jointly fulfilled. Churches lack faith in the sense just mentioned, hipsters lack discipline. This might lead us to forget about the drugs, were it not for one fact: the distinctive religious emotion and the one drug unquestionably can occasion—Otto's *mysterium tremendum, majestas, mysterium fascinans*; in a phrase, the phenomenon of religious awe seems to be declining sharply. As Paul Tillich said in an address to the Hillel Society at Harvard several years ago:

The question our century puts before us [is]: Is it possible to regain the lost dimension, the encounter with the Holy, the dimension which cuts through the world of subjectivity and objectivity

and goes down to that which is not world but is the mystery of the Ground of Being?

Tillich may be right; this may be the religious question of our century. For if (as we have insisted) religion cannot be equated with religious experience, neither can it long survive its absence.

Notes

¹ *Soundings: Essays Concerning Christian Understandings*, edited by A. R. Vidler. Cambridge: The University Press, 1962, The statement cited appears on page 72.

² Hamilton, Edith. *Mythology*. New York, Mentor Book, 1940, p. 55.

³ Quoted in Alan Watts, *The Spirit of Zen*. New York: Grove Press, 1958, p. 110.

⁴ Mylonas, George. *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961, p. 284.

⁵ *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1935, pp. 206-212.

⁶ "The God in the Flowerpot." *The American Scholar* (Autumn 1963), pp. 584, 586.

⁷ *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane*. New York: Oxford Galaxy Book, 1961, p. 12.

⁸ Quoted in McGlothlin, William H. "Long-lasting Effects of LSD on Certain Attitudes in Normals." Printed for private distribution by the RAND Corporation, p. 16.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 45, 46.

¹⁰ Leary, Timothy. "The Religious Experience: Its Production and Interpretation." *The Psychedelic Review*, vol. I, no. 3 (1964), p. 325.

¹¹ "Drugs and Mysticism: An Analysis of the Relationship Between Psychedelic Drugs and the Mystical Consciousness." A thesis presented to the Committee on Higher Degrees in History and Philosophy of Religion, Harvard University, June 1963.

¹² The first account is quoted anonymously in "The Issue of the Consciousness-Expanding Drugs." *Main Currents in Modern Thought* vol. XX, no. I (September-October 1963), pp. 10-11. The second experience was that of Dr. R. M. Bucke, the author of *Cosmic Consciousness*, as quoted in James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: The Modern Library, 1902, pp. 390-391. The former experience occurred under the influence of drugs, the latter did not.

¹³ Slotkin, James S. *Peyote Religion*. Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1956.

¹⁴ "Daru and Bhang." *Quarterly Journal of the Study of Alcohol*. 1954, 15:229.

¹⁵ *Totem and Taboo*. New York: Modern Library, 1938.

¹⁶ *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, *op. cit.*, pp. 378-379.

¹⁷ Montague, Margaret Prescott. *Twenty Minutes of Reality*. Saint Paul, Minn.: Macalester Park Publishing Company, 1947, pp. 15, 17.

¹⁸ “The Current Scientific Status of Psychedelic Drug Research.” A paper read at the Conference on Methods in Philosophy and the Sciences, New School for Social Research, May 3, 1964.

¹⁹ Quoted by Dr. Unger in the paper just mentioned.

²⁰ *The Myth of Sisyphus*. New York: Vintage, 1955, p. 38.

²¹ James, William, *op. cit.*, p. 379.

²² Kapleau, Philip. *Zen Practice and Attainment*. A manuscript in process of publication.

²³ Slotkin, James S., *op. cit.*

The Politics of Consciousness

by Jay Stevens

[An excerpt from

Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream, 1987]

“THE WHOLE GODDAMN CLIMATE changed. Suddenly you were conspirators out to destroy people. I felt like Galileo. I closed my practice and went to Europe. I felt violated.”

That was the way Oscar Janiger remembered the change in mood that began in the summer of 1962. Suddenly LSD was no longer innocuous. It was a dagger pointed at the heart of psychiatry, the next thalidomide, a time bomb that was cheerfully being constructed by deluded members of the profession.

“If you want to know, it was Leary and the others who were ruining what we had worked so hard to build.”

That was Janiger retrospectively laying blame. At the time no one knew where to point the finger. With the exception of some of the Lab Madness boys, who had been a tad bitter when their work was dismissed as passé, things had been proceeding with benign optimism, new recruits swelling the research ranks every week.

In a major city like Los Angeles, it was as easy to go on an LSD trip as it was to visit Disneyland. Interested parties could either contact the growing number of therapists who were using LSD in practice, or they could offer themselves as guinea pigs to any of the dozens of research projects that were under way at places like UCLA. Representative of the first approach was Thelma Moss, a former character actress turned “slick fiction” writer. Moss had heard Aldous Huxley talking about the Other World on a local television show, and before learning of Arthur Chandler and Mortimer Hartman, she had been prepared to search out some of Gordon Wasson’s magic mushrooms in Mexico. Moss made an appointment with Chandler and Hartman, and after deciding on a psychological problem that would focus the sessions (she chose frigidity), she took the first of twenty-three LSD trips.

Moss was not a novice when it came to psychoanalysis. She had been in therapy for years. But she had never really, in her heart of hearts, believed that there was such a thing as the unconscious. LSD convinced her. During one session she suddenly became a legless beggar caught in a desert sandstorm, a scene right out of *King Solomon's Mines*, except that deep inside herself she heard a voice whispering, *I died here*. Another time she watched her insides explode into flames with such force that she was flung against the wall. It reminded her a little of how emotions sometimes multiplied until every pore was engulfed, only this was "a vastly more ruthless force" (students of *Kundalini* take note). "What is it," she kept crying to her therapist, who finally gave her a tranquilizer.

Moss never knew where she would land after she passed through the Door. "Truth and lies and absurdity and grandeur were all mixed together in the psychedelic experience," she wrote. "In an effort to separate them, I would return for the next session, and the next, hoping each time that with this next session the truth would be revealed." It never was. But what did happen was so incredible, so contrary to the slick fiction that was her bread and butter, that she began keeping notes.

The other way to the Other World, the research project route, was exemplified by George Goodman, who is probably better known as the economist and writer Adam Smith. Goodman signed up for a UCLA project and was told by the director, "You are the astronauts of inner space. You are going deeper into the mind than anyone has gone so far, and you will come back to tell us what you found."

One of the things Goodman found was that he could see all "the basic molecules of the universe. . . all the component parts, little building blocks of DNA." He conscientiously drew a picture of what he thought was DNA, but it turned out to be a plastic monomer marketed by Dupont called Delrin. That didn't dampen Goodman's amazement, however, because up until taking the LSD he had had a banker's knowledge of molecules and chemical notation, which is to say he knew absolutely nothing about them.

There was something in the American psyche that craved spiritual adventure, something which writer Peter Mathiessen described as a "deep restlessness." Mathiessen had been a leader of the postwar Parisian expatriate scene, one of the founders of

Paris Review. But he'd also become involved with the Gurdjieff work and that stirred a yearning that he described this way: "One turns in all directions and sees nothing. Yet one senses that there is a source for this deep restlessness; and the path that leads there is not a path to a strange place, but the path home." In Peru Mathiessen experimented with yagé. Then he hooked up with a "renegade psychiatrist" in New York and started using LSD. "Most were magic shows," he later wrote. "After each—even the bad ones—I seemed to go more lightly on my way, leaving behind old residues of rage and pain."

Mathiessen was fortunate. Whenever his girlfriend took LSD it precipitated a terrifying confrontation with her own death. Since this was a fairly common occurrence for anyone who spent much time in the Other World, it is worth quoting Mathiessen's description of a bad trip:

She started to laugh, and her mouth opened wide and she could not close it; her armor had cracked, and all the night winds of the world went howling through. Turning to me, she saw my flesh dissolve, my head become a skull—the whole night went like that. Yet she later saw that she might free herself by living out the fear of death, the demoniac sage at one's own helplessness that the drug hallucinations seem to represent, and in that way let go of a life-killing accumulation of defenses. And she accepted the one danger of the mystical search: there was no way back without doing oneself harm. Many paths appear, but once the way is taken, it must be followed to the end.

If people like Mathiessen had a code, it was "there are no casual experiments."

One of the reasons LSD therapy was booming was because qualms about the drug's safety had been laid to rest in mid-1960, when Sidney Cohen published his findings on adverse reactions. Cohen surveyed a sample of five thousand individuals who had taken LSD twenty-five thousand times. He found an average of 1.8 psychotic episodes per thousand ingestions, 1.2 attempted suicides, and 0.4 completed suicides. "Considering the enormous scope of the psychic responses it induces," he concluded, "LSD is an astonishingly safe drug." With the question of safety out of the way, interest then focused on the best

way to use mind-expanding drugs. There were two schools of thought: those who saw LSD as a “facilitator” of traditional therapy, be it Freudian or otherwise, and those who followed the Hubbard-Osmond practice of giving huge dosages and trying, through the subtle use of cues, to produce a psychedelic or integrative experience. This became known as *psychedelic* therapy, as opposed to the more mainstream *psycholytic* therapy. It got so astute students of the literature could guess the theoretical orientation of an LSD monograph simply by its title: psycholytic papers had headings like “LSD as a Facilitating Agent in Psychotherapy” or “Resolution and Subsequent Remobilization of Resistance by LSD in Psychotherapy”; whereas psychedelic ones favored things like “LSD; Alcoholism and Transcendence” or “LSD and the New Beginning.”

There were certain constants, of course, set and setting being the most notable. But from there the different techniques diverged rather dramatically. Psycholyticists like Chandler and Hartman took a lot of time, using small dosages, establishing a path to the unconscious—sort of a maintenance road—before any real exploration began. What they tried to do was create a state of conscious dreaming, and the way they did it was by masking the various senses. With the eyes blocked, the mind would begin projecting inner movies, sort of like “a 3-D film tape... being run off in the visual field,” as one therapist described it. Some of these film loops were of actual incidents, forgotten since childhood, but most were composed of that symbolic patois that Freud felt was the true language of the unconscious, of psychic reality rather than objective reality.

The patients, asked to maintain a running commentary on what they were seeing, would report things like: *I’m in a black tunnel . . . there is a grayish light at the end of it. . . I’m moving toward it. . .* There was a moment in one of Thelma Moss’s sessions when she came to an abyss. Explore it, the doctor suggested:

As I plummeted down, I felt myself growing smaller and smaller . . . I was becoming a child. . . a very small child. . . a baby. . . I was a baby. I was not remembering being a baby—I was literally a baby. (The conscious part of me realized I was experiencing the phenomena of “age regression,” familiar in hypnosis. But in this case, although I had become a baby, I remained at the same time

a grown woman lying on a couch. This was a double state of being.) The leg of the baby that I was (my own adult leg) suddenly jerked into the air and I whimpered in the voice of a little child: “They stuck me with a needle!” Before I could find out who had stuck me with a needle, I was playing with round violet-colored marbles. . . which changed into squares. . . then rectangles. . . which grew long and high and became the four sides of a playpen. I was inside the playpen. My brother was outside it, playing. I whined like a baby: “They let him play outside but I have to stay in here...”

Then the playpen vanished and Moss found herself gazing into a big purple jewel, which became an amethyst pendant hanging from her mother’s neck, which became her mother’s face, purple with rage, and she was shaking someone that turned into a rag doll that turned into Moss.

That was what was at the bottom of that abyss.

No doubt because they were Freudians, Chandler and Hartman elicited a lot of childhood sexual trauma, Oedipus complexes, penis envy, but they also observed elements of the Jungian unconscious, the wise old man archetype, the symbol of evil archetype. Sometimes mythological creatures appeared, dragons and Japanese devil gods. And just as Huxley had written, there was a hellish dimension to the Other World, a Dark Wood that everyone stumbled into eventually. A few passed through to something else and returned convinced that they had looked into the heart of creation. *Had they?* After some thought, Chandler and Hartman decided this mystical gnosis was one of LSD’s potential drawbacks, since the patient was generally uninterested in further therapy.

But it was precisely this mystic *gnosis* that interested the psychedelic therapists. Using one large dose and a grab bag of nonverbal cues, after hours of interviewing, testing, analyzing, and prepping, the psychedelic therapist tried to lead the patient to that self-shattering point where he merged with the world—the point known to the Buddhists as *satori*, to the Hindus as *samadhi*, and to the psychological community as “a temporary loss of differentiation of the self and the outer world.” It was a realm of pure potential, and if the psychedelic therapist was skilled, the effects could be dramatic. Osmond and Hoffer’s success rate with chronic alcoholics was hovering between 50 and

70 percent, while Al Hubbard's clinic at Hollywood Hospital reported a figure in the low eighties.

An update on Mr. Hubbard. Despite the misgivings of Humphrey Osmond, who felt it would create more problems than it would solve, Hubbard had gotten his Ph.D. in psychology from a Tennessee diploma mill. He was now Dr. Hubbard, at least on his stationery. It may be that in some sense Al felt he needed proof of intellectual parity, poor barefoot boy that he was, surrounded by the likes of Huxley and Heard. Perhaps he coveted their Oxbridge erudition. If so, it was an ironic situation, he longing to discourse intelligently about Jung and the Other World, while they envied him his simple American ability to get things done, whether it was a business deal or a guided tour of the Other World. But whatever Hubbard did, there was always a lot of shrewd practicality to it, and getting his doctorate was no different. Hubbard had decided—I lapse momentarily here into Leary's transactional terminology—that the one game he wanted to play was the psychedelic research game, with his own clinic, patients, colleagues, and before he could do that he needed credentials.

To be blunt, Hubbard had burned his bridges to pursue LSD; he had let his business interests wither from inattention, which can be stressful for a man with a Rolls Royce-island-estate lifestyle. Despite his genuine human hunger to find out what was happening in the mind's depths, Hubbard had not been unaware of the possibility that an LSD clinic might prove profitable. What he had needed was a doctor to provide the necessary medical expertise, and he had found him in the person of Ross McLean, the administrator of Hollywood Hospital, in New Westminster, British Columbia. McLean had given Hubbard a suite of rooms and in 1958 the first private Canadian clinic to use LSD therapy opened for business.

Hubbard's clinic became the testing ground for psychedelic therapy. In 1959 it attracted the attention of Ben Metcalfe, a local reporter. Hubbard invited Metcalfe to stop by for a two-day session, and Metcalfe did. He took the drug in Al's specially designed session room—Dali's Last Supper over the couch, Gauguin's Buddha on the far wall, another Dali, a crucifix, a small altar, a stereo system, burning candles, a statue of the Virgin. Metcalfe landed in a part of the Other World that was comparable to MGM's film library, particularly the section where his-

torical epics were stored. There were Flashes of Carthage and ancient Rome segueing into landscapes out of Titian; great battles fleetingly glimpsed; figures that were unmistakably Shakespearian. It would have been immensely entertaining had it not ended in a fit of weeping. Not sniffly little whimpers, but great heaving sobs. "This is all repressed material coming out," Doctor Hubbard said. "This is what we bury to become men."

It went on like that, with Metcalfe emoting and crying and mumbling to himself, while Al sat meditatively alongside, rarely interrupting. One of the most difficult things that a psychedelic therapist had to learn was how to do nothing, how to become transparent, yet remain attentive enough to respond at the crucial moment, like when Metcalfe began shouting, "I must be insane! I must be." A good therapist had to know which cue would untie this particular knot. Which picture, which whispered observation. "We're all insane when it comes to confronting ourselves," Al murmured. And there was a big click in Metcalfe's mind and he went shooting up toward this bright central sun, and as he flew, it seemed to him that his earthly ties, his kids, his wife, his job, all floated away from him like "flashes of multi-colored snow vanishing in the darkness while I sped upwards."

It felt like death.

"Did I die?" Metcalfe asked.

"No one really dies," said Captain Al.

Hubbard's one published work, "The Use of LSD-25 in the Treatment of Alcoholism and Other Psychiatric Problems" (*Quart. J. Stud. Alcohol*, 1961), was frequently cited in the literature, but his biggest contribution was the Hubbard room, the stereo playing Bach, the vaguely spiritual pictures. Although few researchers knew its provenance, duplicates appeared wherever psychedelic therapy gained a foothold.

Though there were some classic psychedelic therapists—Hoffer and Osmond in Saskatchewan come to mind, the Kurland group in Catonsville, Maryland—who used LSD in an almost old-fashioned way, a lot of the psychedelic therapists were new to the profession, either recent graduates or converts like Hubbard and his former protégé, Myron Stolaroff, and this was going to cause problems. In their enthusiasm they returned from the Other World with a childlike energy that was often obnoxious to their middle-aged peers. They cut corners and bruised feelings and this more than anything contributed to the jealousy that lay be-

hind the aura of “bad science” that began to surround LSD therapy.

Myron Stolaroff was a good example. Stolaroff had been in charge of long-range planning at Ampex, one of the first of the big electronics firms to settle south of the Bay Area, when he had been bitten by the psychedelic bug. Together with Hubbard he had tried to interest Ampex’s management in a program that would use LSD to solve all kinds of corporate problems, interpersonal problems, design problems, a long-range planning problems. But the plan had foundered on Al’s penchant for Christian mysticism. Stolaroff didn’t let go, though: he started holding weekly LSD sessions for some of Ampex’s more adventurous engineers; Hubbard came down from Canada one weekend and took them all to a remote cabin in the Sierras where he guided them through the kind of ontological earthquake only Al could manufacture. The senior management of Ampex had been horrified. Having gotten to know Hubbard through rather extraordinary circumstances, it didn’t seem at all irrational for them to be worrying, “What if this nutball drives our best men crazy?” So there had been sighs of relief when Stolaroff decided to leave Ampex and set up his own nonprofit psychedelic research center in Menlo Park, California—the International Foundation for Advanced Study.

The Foundation, which opened in March 1961, wasn’t the only organization working with LSD in the San Francisco area. The Palo Alto Mental Research Institute had been studying the drug since 1958, and had been instrumental in introducing dozens of local psychiatrists and psychologists, as well as interested laymen like Allen Ginsberg, to the perplexities of the Other World. But the Institute’s composure had been shaken by several terrifying incidents—colossal bad trips in which the subject returned from the Other World in questionable shape—and interest in LSD’s therapeutic potential had diminished. LSD programs were also under way at the Palo Alto Veterans Hospital, the San Mateo County Hospital, and Napa State Hospital, but no one was offering psychedelic therapy, and what little research was being done was unexciting: Leo Hollister (who will soon reappear in association with a hopeful young writer named Ken Kesey), at the Veterans Hospital, was still doing model psychoses work.

The point was that most LSD researchers were fairly conservative. So when a couple of engineers set up shop (Stolaroff’s

vice president, Willis Harman, had been an engineering professor at Stanford) and began poaching bread and butter patients—unlike Osmond and Hoffer, Stolaroff wasn’t just concentrating on chronic alcoholics, he was soliciting the man off the street, who in this case was the neurotic professional in the high tech-high education hub that surrounded Stanford—there were more than raised eyebrows. Charging five hundred dollars for one session with a highly questionable drug? The whole thing smacked of chicanery, despite the fact that Stolaroff had a licensed psychiatrist running the actual therapy sessions. But what was worse, it was chicanery with good word of mouth. The San Mateo *Call Bulletin*, scenting a medical scandal, had interviewed a number of Stolaroff’s patients and found them laudatory to the point of hyperbole. At the Foundation’s first and last open house, Stolaroff had been cornered by a disgruntled therapist who growled, “One of my ex-patients thinks you’re a saint,” making it clear that he thought Stolaroff was a charlatan. What was one to make, after all, of the *Call Bulletin’s* statement that the Foundation’s aims were “partly medical, partly scientific, partly philosophical, partly mystical”? The first two, okay, but philosophy was for philosophers, and mysticism? mysticism was for cranks!

It was a situation that was a little analogous to Leary’s at Harvard, in the sense that the local therapeutic community was so totally absorbed with the pointing finger (questionable professionals using questionable drugs to produce questionable cures) that it was almost as if it didn’t want to look at the moon. The Foundation was not reticent about the data it was seeing. Seventy-eight percent of its patients claimed an increased ability to love; 69 percent felt they could handle hostility better, with an equal percentage believing that their ability to communicate with and understand others had improved; 71 percent claimed an increase in self-esteem, and 83 percent returned from the Other World with the conviction that they had brushed against “a higher power, or ultimate reality.”

Robert Mogar, the Foundation’s expert in such diagnostic tools as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, had never seen anything that could produce the kind of dramatic changes that LSD routinely produced. Part of the usefulness of the MMPI was the fact that some of its scales were remarkably stable, which provided a background against which other personality changes could be measured. But under LSD these stable

scales, which generally pertained to beliefs and values, fluctuated wildly. To augment the MMPI, Stolaroff began using a variant of Oscar Janiger's elaborate card distribution system. This consisted of a hundred statements that the patient arranged in nine piles, ranging from those he agreed with least (pile one) to those he wholeheartedly endorsed (pile nine). Three times the cards were sorted into piles, once at the beginning of the program, two days after the LSD session, and then again in two months' time. The changes were consonant with what other researchers were beginning to report. Cards with statements like, "Although I try not to show it, I really worry quite a bit about whether I will prove adequate in meeting the challenge of life," tended to move down the scale. While those bearing statements like, "I believe that I exist not only in the familiar world of space and time, but also in a realm having a timeless, eternal quality," jumped to the top.

Of course there were some negative reactions. One patient felt he had been harmed mentally and roughly a quarter of the others complained that they now tended to lapse into daydreams with greater frequency. More troubling, but entirely understandable if the data about changes in worldview were correct, was an increase in marital problems—27 percent of the experimental subjects and 16 percent of the paying patients reported increased friction with their spouses.

The Foundation's theoretical manifesto—*The Psychedelic Experience: A New Concept in Psychotherapy*—was submitted for publication in late 1961. In it, the psychedelic experience was broken into three broad stages: (1) evasive maneuvers, (2) symbolic perception, and (3) immediate perception.

The evasive stage, according to the authors, was what earlier therapists had confused with schizophrenia, leading to LSD's misclassification as a psychotomimetic. What happened was this: the drug, by its very nature, released such a flood of new thoughts and perceptions that the patient's normal conceptual framework was overwhelmed, producing a panic condition with overtones of paranoia. But with skillful manipulation of set and setting, the therapist could guide the patient smoothly through the evasive stage to the point where the overly famous hallucinations began. These shifting geometrical patterns were a last gasp of an ego which, "having lost the battle to divert attention through unpleasantness, seeks to charm and distract the conscious mind

by throwing up a smokescreen of hallucinations to hide the inner knowledge which it fears."

Actually, the hallucinatory level was a preparation for the realm of symbolic perception, which was where the psycholyticists spent most of their time, deciphering the curious symbolic patois: "The subject constantly works off repressed material and unreality structures, false concepts, ideas, and attitudes, which have been accumulated through his life experiences. Thus a form of psychological cleansing seems to accompany the subjective imagery. This results in considerable ventilation and release almost independent of intellectual clarification. Gradually the subject comes to see and accept himself, not as an individual with 'good' and 'bad' characteristics, but as one who simply is."

But there was also a higher level still. Past the symbolic stage was a land of no boundaries:

The central perception, apparently of all who penetrate deeply in their explorations, is that behind the apparent multiplicity of things in the world of science and common sense there is a single reality, in speaking of which it seems appropriate to use such words as infinite and eternal.

As Abram Hoffer had told the last Macy Conference, if you could lead a patient to this point, then nine times out of ten a cure would miraculously occur. Why this happened was not easily explained in psychological terms (as Leary had realized when he decided to opt for the rhetoric of applied mysticism). But it seemed to be something like this: overwhelmed by the realization that one was an "imperishable self rather than a destructible ego," the patient underwent a kind of psychic expansion, in which "the many conflicts which are rooted in lack of self acceptance are cut off at the source, and the associated neurotic behavior patterns begin to die away." As the self expanded, it burst the webbing of unhappy relationships that had tethered it to the ground.

Another analogy: Imagine the self as an oxbow lake, which is formed when a meander is cut off from the main body of a shallow, slow-moving river. Over time, unless fresh sources of water are found, the oxbow begins to stagnate, becoming first a marsh, then a swamp, as vegetation (thickets of received ideas, neuro-

ses, etc.) starts to compete for oxygen. Psycholytic therapy, you might say, contented itself with removing the vegetation; psychedelic therapy, on the other hand, operated by dynamiting the obstruction and restoring the oxbow to what, in fact, it had always been: a lazy curve in a broad, flowing river. Both methods achieved the desired result, which was health, but in the second case something totally new (from the perspective of the oxbow world) was created. The psycholytic therapist used LSD to heighten the traditional psychotherapeutic values of recall, abreaction, and emotional release. But the psychedelic therapist was doing something entirely new, and whether he followed Tim Leary and called it applied mysticism, or the psychedelic experience, the integrative experience, or peak experience, it had an unmistakable and unwelcome odor. To discover, in the recesses of the mind, something that felt a lot like God, was not a situation that either organized science or organized religion wished to contemplate. Yet this was the implication of psychedelic research everywhere, not just at Harvard.

What sprang up was more a climate of criticism than any one specific charge. The profession began to worry. It worried about whether LSD, with its plunge into the deep unconscious, was an appropriate direction for a mental health movement whose *raison d'être* was the molding of healthy, adjusted egos. Could it promote the right sort of behavior change? It worried about the cure rates—Hubbard's 80 percent with chronic alcoholics was unbelievable—which was the start of the bad science criticism, one variant of which went like this: "LSD is a hallucinogen, researchers are taking it as well as giving it, therefore they must be hallucinating their data." That was the charitable bad science interpretation. The uncharitable interpretation maintained that LSD therapists, besides hallucinating their data, were actually making their patients sicker. And they didn't even realize this because the drugs were giving them delusions of grandeur (comparing themselves with the Mercury astronauts or Galileo, what rot!). Psychedelics were revealing a nasty (or a rival) strain of evangelism within the Cinderella science: everywhere you looked therapists were turning into lower-case gurus, with adherents rather than clients.

Roy Grinker put it as bluntly as possible in the *Archives of General Psychiatry*: "Latent psychotics are disintegrating under

the influence of even single doses; long-continued LSD experiences are subtly creating a psychopathology. Psychic addiction is being developed."

Grinker cited no data to back up these rather serious charges. He cited no data for the simple reason that there were none—Sidney Cohen's 1960 study on adverse reactions was still unchallenged in the literature. What Grinker was doing was projecting his own professional biases. Believing that your average citizen was a barely functioning tissue of neuroses and incipient psychoses, Grinker found it inconceivable that the opening of the Pandora's box of the unconscious could be anything but disastrous. Whether they knew it or not, people who used LSD had to be disintegrating; Grinker's whole model of consciousness depended upon it. To a traditional psychiatrist like Grinker, consciousness expansion meant unconsciousness expansion, and that was unconscionable.

Actually, a lot of the criticism over LSD can be reduced to a politics of perspective. A psychotomimeticist, for example, watching the ego dissolve under the press of LSD, would jot down "depersonalization," while a Myron Stolaroff or a Tim Leary, faced with the same phenomenon, might record an instance of "mystical union" or "integrative experience." Observing the flights of internal imagery caused by the drugs, the former would choose "hallucination" while the latter might select "visionary or symbolic interaction." As for the emotional highs that followed, the enthusiasm, one could either choose the psychopathological term, "euphoria," or go with the new psychedelic candidate, "ecstasy." When Abraham Maslow, a psychologist far removed from the LSD debate, published his first work on the curative effects of peak experiences (PE), psychedelic therapists like Hoffer quickly appropriated his vocabulary and the debate jumped to a new rhetorical level.

What was happening was basically a turf war over who would control traffic to the Other World. Were mere psychologists, to say nothing of artists, theologians, or an engineer like Myron Stolaroff, competent and responsible enough to investigate the extremes of consciousness, even if it was their own consciousness? Who owned the scientific prospecting rights to the Other World? The medical community claimed it did. According to one *Journal of the American Medical Association* editorial, anything which altered a person's "mental and emotional equilibrium"

was a medical procedure and “should therefore be under medical control.” In other words, LSD and its chemical brethren were part of psychiatry’s weaponry, but not psychology’s. Implicit in all this was the understanding that whoever received the mineral rights to the Other World would also be allowed to define its borders.

Thus it was the theme of “irresponsibility” that rose to the fore in the summer of 1962. LSD “was a useful adjunct to psychotherapy” went the refrain, but unfortunately it attracted “unstable therapists” who derived an “intoxicating sense of power” from bestowing such a fabulous experience on others. And these unstable therapists were the main reason why LSD was escaping, so to speak, from the lab. In July 1962, Sidney Cohen and Keith Ditman, writing in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, drew attention to the phenomenon of the “LSD party”—a phenomenon that the California Narcotics Bureau, when queried by the *LA Times*, knew nothing about. Of course LSD parties had been part of the Los Angeles psychedelic scene since the mid-Fifties, but what was changing was the quality of the participant. A lot of kids were taking LSD, and not just college kids, but the beatnik kids, the maladjusted rebels. To Cohen’s way of thinking, the Beats were exactly the sort of borderline personality types who should be kept away from LSD at all cost. If not, then Grinker’s editorial would become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Besides alerting the medical community to the growing misuse of LSD, Cohen also solicited more examples of adverse reactions. He published his findings in the spring of 1963. Nine incidents were explored, ranging from a psychologist who took LSD three times and then spent the next few weeks contemplating bizarre plots, one of which entailed the seizure of Sandoz’s entire LSD supply, to a secretary for a therapist with a large LSD practice who had taken the drug somewhat more than two hundred times and less than three hundred—she was unsure of the exact figure. What she was sure of was that whenever she looked in a mirror, she saw a skull.

Although adverse reactions were still rare, Cohen predicted that this would change as more therapists added LSD to their practice. The “inexpert” use of LSD could become a major health hazard, he wrote, and he recommended that use be “restricted to investigators in institutions and hospitals where the patients’

protection is greater and appropriate countermeasures are available in case of adverse reaction.” Projects like Leary’s were precisely what Cohen wanted to see ended.

The debate over who was a responsible therapist and who an irresponsible charlatan became moot when Congress passed a law in the summer of 1962 that gave the FDA control over all new investigational drugs. Scheduled to take effect in June of 1963, the law was principally aimed at the misuse of amphetamines. But the result was that all researchers using experimental drugs would now have to clear their research projects with Washington. No longer would it be possible to mail a form to Sandoz and receive in return LSD or psilocybin.

It was unclear what effect the new regulations would have on LSD research, but a partial answer appeared at Oscar Janiger’s door in the autumn of 1962, in the form of a regional FDA official. Well dressed, polite, he asked to review Janiger’s LSD work. Then he told Janiger to turn over his remaining supply of the drug. Janiger was stunned, then angry. He made some phone calls and learned that others had received similar visits.

Someone was turning off the research machine.

But it was too late to turn off the publicity machine. The psychedelic bookshelf—once limited to Huxley and possibly the Wassons’ massive *Russia, Mushrooms and History*—was expanding in rapid fashion, as Adelle Davis’s *Exploring Inner Space*, Thelma Moss’s *Myself and I*, and Alan Watts’s *The Joyous Cosmology* arrived in the bookshops. All three were anecdotal accounts of the Other World, but the similarity ended there. Adelle Davis, who’d taken LSD as part of Janiger’s creativity study, had been transported to a phantasmagoric land suffused with the aurora borealis of God. “The most lasting value of the drug experience,” she wrote, “appears to be a number of convictions, most of them religious in nature, which are so strong that it makes not one iota of difference whether anyone agrees with them or not.” LSD had led her to “a new faith in God, a faith so satisfying and rewarding that my lasting gratitude goes to the Sandoz Pharmaceutical Laboratories.” Thelma Moss, on the other hand, had spent her sessions harrowing the Freudian Id. The flap copy on her book said it all: “I traveled deep into the buried regions of the Mind. I discovered that in addition to being, consciously, a loving mother and respectable citizen, I was, uncon-

sciously, a murderess, a pervert, a cannibal, a sadist and a masochist.” And then there was Watts’s smooth essay, which Leary and Alpert in the introduction lauded as “the best statement on the subject of space-age mysticism” available. “Watts follows Mr. Huxley’s lead and pushes beyond.”

Watts had a nice poetic feel for what it felt like to travel in the Other World, which is worth quoting:

Back through the tunnels, through the devious status-and-survival strategy of adult life, through the interminable passes which we remember in dreams... all the streets, the winding pathways between the legs of tables and chairs where one crawled as a child, the tight and bloody exit from the womb, the fountainous surge through the channel of the penis, the timeless wandering through ducts and spongy caverns. Down and back through ever narrowing tubes to the point where the passage itself is the traveler. . . relentlessly back and back through endless and whirling dances to the astronomically proportioned spaces which surround the original nuclei of the world, the centers of centers, as remotely distant on the inside as the nebulae beyond our galaxy on the outside.

Psychedelics and Religious Experience

by Alan Watts

[*California Law Review*,
Vol. 56, No. 1, January 1968, pp. 74-85.]

THE EXPERIENCES RESULTING FROM the use of psychedelic drugs are often described in religious terms. They are therefore of interest to those like myself who, in the tradition of William James,¹ are concerned with the psychology of religion. For more than thirty years I have been studying the causes, the consequences, and the conditions of those peculiar states of consciousness in which the individual discovers himself to be one continuous process with God, with the Universe, with the Ground of Being, or whatever name he may use by cultural conditioning or personal preference for the ultimate and eternal reality. We have no satisfactory and definitive name for experiences of this kind. The terms “religious experience,” “mystical experience,” and “cosmic consciousness” are all too vague and comprehensive to denote that specific mode of consciousness which, to those who have known it, is as real and overwhelming as falling in love. This article describes such states of consciousness induced by psychedelic drugs, although they are virtually indistinguishable from genuine mystical experience. The article then discusses objections to the use of psychedelic drugs that arise mainly from the opposition between mystical values and the traditional religious and secular values of Western society.

The Psychedelic Experience

The idea of mystical experiences resulting from drug use is not readily accepted in Western societies. Western culture has, historically, a particular fascination with the value and virtue of man as an individual, self-determining, responsible ego, controlling himself and his world by the power of conscious effort and will. Nothing, then, could be more repugnant to this cultural tradition than the notion of spiritual or psychological growth

through the use of drugs. A “drugged” person is by definition dimmed in consciousness, fogged in judgment, and deprived of will. But not all psychotropic (consciousness-changing) chemicals are narcotic and soporific, as are alcohol, opiates, and barbiturates. The effects of what are now called psychedelic (mind-manifesting) chemicals differ from those of alcohol as laughter differs from rage, or delight from depression. There is really no analogy between being “high” on LSD and “drunk” on bourbon. True, no one in either state should drive a car, but neither should one drive while reading a book, playing a violin, or making love. Certain creative activities and states of mind demand a concentration and devotion that are simply incompatible with piloting a death-dealing engine along a highway.

I myself have experimented with five of the principal psychedelics: LSD-25, mescaline, psilocybin, dimethyl-tryptamine (DMT), and cannabis. I have done so, as William James tried nitrous oxide, to see if they could help me in identifying what might be called the “essential” or “active” ingredients of the mystical experience. For almost all the classical literature on mysticism is vague, not only in describing the experience, but also in showing rational connections between the experience itself and the various traditional methods recommended to induce it: fasting, concentration, breathing exercises, prayers, incantations, and dances. A traditional master of Zen or Yoga, when asked why such-and-such practices lead or predispose one to the mystical experience, always responds, “This is the way my teacher gave it to me. This is the way I found out. If you’re seriously interested, try it for yourself.” This answer hardly satisfies an impertinent, scientifically minded, and intellectually curious Westerner. It reminds him of archaic medical prescriptions compounding five salamanders, powdered gallows rope, three boiled bats, a scruple of phosphorus, three pinches of henbane, and a dollop of dragon dung dropped when the moon was in Pisces. Maybe it worked, but what was the essential ingredient?

It struck me, therefore, that if any of the psychedelic chemicals would in fact predispose my consciousness to the mystical experience, I could use them as instruments for studying and describing that experience as one uses a microscope for bacteriology, even though the microscope is an “artificial” and “unnatural” contrivance which might be said to “distort” the vision of the naked eye. However, when I was first invited to test the

mystical qualities of LSD-25 by Dr. Keith Ditman of the Neuropsychiatric Clinic at UCLA Medical School, I was unwilling to believe that any mere chemical could induce a genuine mystical experience. At most, it might bring about a state of spiritual insight analogous to swimming with water wings. Indeed, my first experiment with LSD-25 was not mystical. It was an intensely interesting aesthetic and intellectual experience that challenged my powers of analysis and careful description to the utmost.

Some months later, in 1959, I tried LSD-25 again with Drs. Sterling Bunnell and Michael Agron, who were then associated with the Langley-Porter Clinic, in San Francisco. In the course of two experiments I was amazed and somewhat embarrassed to find myself going through states of consciousness that corresponded precisely with every description of major mystical experiences that I had ever read.² Furthermore, they exceeded both in depth and in a peculiar quality of unexpectedness the three “natural and spontaneous” experiences of this kind that had happened to me in previous years.

Through subsequent experimentation with LSD-25 and the other chemicals named above (with the exception of DMT, which I find amusing but relatively uninteresting), I found I could move with ease into the state of “cosmic consciousness,” and in due course became less and less dependent on the chemicals themselves for “tuning in” to this particular wave length of experience. Of the five psychedelics tried, I found that LSD-25 and cannabis suited my purposes best. Of these two, the latter—cannabis—which I had to use abroad in countries where it is not outlawed, proved to be the better. It does not induce bizarre alterations of sensory perception, and medical studies indicate that it may not, save in great excess, have the dangerous side effects of LSD.

For the purposes of this study, in describing my experiences with psychedelic drugs I avoid the occasional and incidental bizarre alterations of sense perception that psychedelic chemicals may induce. I am concerned, rather, with the fundamental alterations of the normal, socially induced consciousness of one’s own existence and relation to the external world. I am trying to delineate the basic principles of psychedelic awareness. But I must add that I can speak only for myself. The quality of these experiences depends considerably upon one’s prior orientation and attitude to life, although the now voluminous descriptive

literature of these experiences accords quite remarkably with my own.

Almost invariably, my experiments with psychedelics have had four dominant characteristics. I shall try to explain them in the expectation that the reader will say, at least of the second and third, “Why, that’s obvious! No one needs a drug to see that.” Quite so, but every insight has degrees of intensity. There can be obvious-1 and obvious-2, and the latter comes on with shattering clarity, manifesting its implications in every sphere and dimension of our existence.

The first characteristic is a slowing down of time, a *concentration in the present*. One’s normally compulsive concern for the future decreases, and one becomes aware of the enormous importance and interest of what is happening at the moment. Other people, going about their business on the streets, seem to be slightly crazy, failing to realize that the whole point of life is to be fully aware of it as it happens. One therefore relaxes, almost luxuriously, into studying the colors in a glass of water, or in listening to the now highly articulate vibration of every note played on an oboe or sung by a voice.

From the pragmatic standpoint of our culture, such an attitude is very bad for business. It might lead to improvidence, lack of foresight, diminished sales of insurance policies, and abandoned savings accounts. Yet this is just the corrective that our culture needs. No one is more fatuously impractical than the “successful” executive who spends his whole life absorbed in frantic paper work with the objective of retiring in comfort at sixty-five, when it will all be too late. Only those who have cultivated the art of living completely in the present have any use for making plans for the future, for when the plans mature they will be able to enjoy the results. “Tomorrow never comes.” I have never yet heard a preacher urging his congregation to practice that section of the Sermon on the Mount which begins, “Be not anxious for the morrow. . . .” The truth is that people who live for the future are, as we say of the insane, “not quite all there”—or here: by over-eagerness they are perpetually missing the point. Foresight is bought at the price of anxiety, and when overused it destroys all its own advantages.

The second characteristic I will call *awareness of polarity*. This is the vivid realization that states, things, and events that we ordinarily call opposite are interdependent, like back and front,

or the poles of a magnet. By polar awareness one sees that things which are explicitly different are implicitly one: self and other, subject and object, left and right, male and female—and then, a little more surprisingly, solid and space, figure and background, pulse and interval, saints and sinners, police and criminals, in-groups and out-groups. Each is definable only in terms of the other, and they go together transactionally, like buying and selling, for there is no sale without a purchase, and no purchase without a sale. As this awareness becomes increasingly intense, you feel that you yourself are polarized with the external universe in such a way that you imply each other. Your push is its pull, and its push is your pull—as when you move the steering wheel of a car. Are you pushing it or pulling it?

At first, this is a very odd sensation, not unlike hearing your own voice played back to you on an electronic system immediately after you have spoken. You become confused, and wait for *it* to go on! Similarly, you feel that you are something being done by the universe, yet that the universe is equally something being done by you—which is true, at least in the neurological sense that the peculiar structure of our brains translates the sun into light, and air vibrations into sound. Our normal sensation of relationship to the outside world is that sometimes I push it, and sometimes it pushes me. But if the two are actually one, where does action begin and responsibility rest? If the universe is doing me, how can I be sure that, two seconds hence, I will still remember the English language? If I am doing it, how can I be sure that, two seconds hence, my brain will know how to turn the sun into light? From such unfamiliar sensations as these, the psychedelic experience can generate confusion, paranoia, and terror—even though the individual is feeling his relationship to the world exactly as it would be described by a biologist, ecologist, or physicist, for he is feeling himself as the unified field of organism and environment.

The third characteristic, arising from the second, is *awareness of relativity*. I see that I am a link in an infinite hierarchy of processes and beings, ranging from molecules through bacteria and insects to human beings, and, maybe, to angels and gods—a hierarchy in which every level is in effect the same situation. For example, the poor man worries about money while the rich man worries about his health: the worry is the same, but the difference is in its substance or dimension. I realize that fruit

flies must think of themselves as people, because, like ourselves, they find themselves in the middle of their own world—with immeasurably greater things above and smaller things below. To us, they all look alike and seem to have no personality—as do the Chinese when we have not lived among them. Yet fruit flies must see just as many subtle distinctions among themselves as we among ourselves.

From this it is but a short step to the realization that all forms of life and being are simply variations on a single theme: we are all in fact one being doing the same thing in as many different ways as possible. As the French proverb goes, *plus ça change, plus c'est la meme chose* (the more it varies, the more it is one). I see, further, that feeling threatened by the inevitability of death is really the same experience as feeling alive, and that as all beings are feeling this everywhere, they are all just as much “I” as myself. Yet the “I” feeling, to be felt at all, must always be a sensation relative to the “other”—to something beyond its control and experience. To be at all, it must begin and end. But the intellectual jump that mystical and psychedelic experiences make here is in enabling you to see that all these myriad I-centers are yourself—not, indeed, your personal and superficially conscious ego, but what Hindus call the *paramatman*, the Self of all selves.³ As the retina enables us to see countless pulses of energy as a single light, so the mystical experience shows us innumerable individuals as a single Self.

The fourth characteristic is *awareness of eternal energy*, often in the form of intense white light, which seems to be both the current in your nerves and that mysterious e which equals mc^2 . This may sound like megalomania or delusion of grandeur—but one sees quite clearly that all existence is a single energy, and that this energy is one's own being. Of course there is death as well as life, because energy is a pulsation, and just as waves must have both crests and troughs, the experience of existing must go on and off. Basically, therefore, there is simply nothing to worry about, because you yourself are the eternal energy of the universe playing hide-and-seek (off-and-on) with itself. At root, you are the Godhead, for God is all that there is. Quoting Isaiah just a little out of context: “I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light and create the darkness: I make peace, and create evil. I, the Lord, do all these things.”⁴ This is the sense of the fundamental tenet of Hinduism, *Tat tram asi*—

”THAT (i.e., “that subtle Being of which this whole universe is composed”) art thou.”⁵ A classical case of this experience, from the West, is in Tennyson's Memoirs:

*A kind of waking trance I have frequently had, quite up from boyhood, when I have been all alone. This has generally come upon me thro' repeating my own name two or three times to myself silently, till all at once, as it were out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being, and this not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the surest of the surest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction but the only true life.*⁶

Obviously, these characteristics of the psychedelic experience, as I have known it, are aspects of a single state of consciousness—for I have been describing the same thing from different angles. The descriptions attempt to convey the reality of the experience, but in doing so they also suggest some of the inconsistencies between such experience and the current values of society.

Opposition to Psychedelic Drugs

Resistance to allowing use of psychedelic drugs originates in both religious and secular values. The difficulty in describing psychedelic experiences in traditional religious terms suggests one ground of opposition. The Westerner must borrow such words as *samadhi* or *moksha* from the Hindus, or *satori* or *kensho* from the Japanese, to describe the experience of oneness with the universe. We have no appropriate word because our own Jewish and Christian theologies will not accept the idea that man's inmost self can be identical with the Godhead, even though Christians may insist that this was true in the unique instance of Jesus Christ. Jews and Christians think of God in political and monarchical terms, as the supreme governor of the universe, the ultimate boss. Obviously, it is both socially unacceptable and logically preposterous for a particular individual to claim that he, in person, is the omnipotent and omniscient ruler of the world—to be accorded suitable recognition and honor.

Such an imperial and kingly concept of the ultimate reality, however, is neither necessary nor universal. The Hindus and the Chinese have no difficulty in conceiving of an identity of the self and the Godhead. For most Asians, other than Muslims, the Godhead moves and manifests the world in much the same way that a centipede manipulates a hundred legs—spontaneously, without deliberation or calculation. In other words, they conceive the universe by analogy with an organism as distinct from a mechanism. They do not see it as an artifact or construct under the conscious direction of some supreme technician, engineer, or architect.

If, however, in the context of Christian or Jewish tradition, an individual declares himself to be one with God, he must be dubbed blasphemous (subversive) or insane. Such a mystical experience is a clear threat to traditional religious concepts. The Judaeo-Christian tradition has a monarchical image of God, and monarchs, who rule by force, fear nothing more than insubordination. The Church has therefore always been highly suspicious of mystics, because they seem to be insubordinate and to claim equality or, worse, identity with God. For this reason, John Scotus Erigena and Meister Eckhart were condemned as heretics. This was also why the Quakers faced opposition for their doctrine of the Inward Light, and for their refusal to remove hats in church and in court. A few occasional mystics may be all right so long as they watch their language, like St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, who maintained, shall we say, a metaphysical distance of respect between themselves and their heavenly King. Nothing, however, could be more alarming to the ecclesiastical hierarchy than a popular outbreak of mysticism, for this might well amount to setting up a democracy in the kingdom of heaven—and such alarm would be shared equally by Catholics, Jews, and fundamentalist Protestants.

The monarchical image of God, with its implicit distaste for religious insubordination, has a more pervasive impact than many Christians might admit. The thrones of kings have walls immediately behind them, and all who present themselves at court must prostrate themselves or kneel, because this is an awkward position from which to make a sudden attack. It has perhaps never occurred to Christians that when they design a church on the model of a royal court (basilica) and prescribe church ritual, they are implying that God, like a human monarch, is afraid.

This is also implied by flattery in prayers:

*O Lord our heavenly Father, high and mighty, King of kings, Lord of lords, the only Ruler of princes, who dost from thy throne behold all the dwellers upon earth: most heartily we beseech thee with thy favor to behold. . . .*⁷

The Western man who claims consciousness of oneness with God or the universe thus clashes with his society's concept of religion. In most Asian cultures, however, such a man will be congratulated as having penetrated the true secret of life. He has arrived, by chance or by some such discipline as Yoga or Zen meditation, at a state of consciousness in which he experiences directly and vividly what our own scientists know to be true in theory. For the ecologist, the biologist, and the physicist know (but seldom feel) that every organism constitutes a single field of behavior, or process, with its environment. There is no way of separating what any given organism is doing from what its environment is doing, for which reason ecologists speak not of organisms in environments but of organism-environments. Thus the words "I" and "self" should properly mean what the whole universe is doing at this particular "here-and-now" called John Doe.

The kingly concept of God makes identity of self and God, or self and universe, inconceivable in Western religious terms. The difference between Eastern and Western concepts of man and his universe, however, extends beyond strictly religious concepts. The Western scientist may rationally perceive the idea of organism-environment, but he does not ordinarily feel this to be true. By cultural and social conditioning, he has been hypnotized into experiencing himself as an ego—as an isolated center of consciousness and will inside a bag of skin, confronting an external and alien world. We say, "I came into this world." But we did nothing of the kind. We came out of it in just the same way that fruit comes out of trees. Our galaxy, our cosmos, "peoples" in the same way that an apple tree "apples."

Such a vision of the universe clashes with the idea of a monarchical God, with the concept of the separate ego, and even with the secular, atheist/agnostic mentality, which derives its common sense from the mythology of nineteenth-century scientist. According to this view, the universe is a mindless mecha-

nism and man a sort of accidental microorganism infesting a minute globular rock that revolves about an unimportant star on the outer fringe of one of the minor galaxies. This “put-down” theory of man is extremely common among such quasi scientists as sociologists, psychologists, and psychiatrists, most of whom are still thinking of the world in terms of Newtonian mechanics, and have never really caught up with the ideas of Einstein and Bohr, Oppenheimer and Schrodinger. Thus to the ordinary institutional-type psychiatrist, any patient who gives the least hint of mystical or religious experience is automatically diagnosed as deranged. From the standpoint of the mechanistic religion, he is a heretic and is given electroshock therapy as an up-to-date form of thumbscrew and rack. And, incidentally, it is just this kind of quasi scientist who, as consultant to government and law-enforcement agencies, dictates official policies on the use of psychedelic chemicals.

Inability to accept the mystic experience is more than an intellectual handicap. Lack of awareness of the basic unity of organism and environment is a serious and dangerous hallucination. For in a civilization equipped with immense technological power, the sense of alienation between man and nature leads to the use of technology in a hostile spirit—to the “conquest” of nature instead of intelligent co-operation with nature. The result is that we are eroding and destroying our environment, spreading Los Angelization instead of civilization. This is the major threat overhanging Western, technological culture, and no amount of reasoning or doom-preaching seems to help. We simply do not respond to the prophetic and moralizing techniques of conversion upon which Jews and Christians have always relied. But people have an obscure sense of what is good for them—call it “unconscious self-healing,” “survival instinct,” “positive growth potential,” or what you will. Among the educated young there is therefore a startling and unprecedented interest in the transformation of human consciousness. All over the Western world publishers are selling millions of books dealing with Yoga, Vedanta, Zen Buddhism, and the chemical mysticism of psychedelic drugs, and I have come to believe that the whole “hip” subculture, however misguided in some of its manifestations, is the earnest and responsible effort of young people to correct the self-destroying course of industrial civilization.

The content of the mystical experience is thus inconsistent

with both the religious and secular concepts of traditional Western thought. Moreover, mystical experiences often result in attitudes that threaten the authority not only of established churches, but also of secular society. Unafraid of death and deficient in worldly ambition, those who have undergone mystical experiences are impervious to threats and promises. Moreover, their sense of the relativity of good and evil arouses the suspicion that they lack both conscience and respect for law. Use of psychedelics in the United States by a literate bourgeoisie means that an important segment of the population is indifferent to society’s traditional rewards and sanctions.

In theory, the existence within our secular society of a group that does not accept conventional values is consistent with our political vision. But one of the great problems of the United States, legally and politically, is that we have never quite had the courage of our convictions. The Republic is founded on the marvelously sane principle that a human community can exist and prosper only on a basis of mutual trust. Metaphysically, the American Revolution was a rejection of the dogma of Original Sin, which is the notion that because you cannot trust yourself or other people, there must be some Superior Authority to keep us all in order. The dogma was rejected because, if it is true that we cannot trust ourselves and others, it follows that we cannot trust the Superior Authority which we ourselves conceive and obey, and that the very idea of our own untrustworthiness is unreliable!

Citizens of the United States believe, or are supposed to believe, that a republic is the best form of government. Yet vast confusion arises from trying to be republican in politics and monarchist in religion. How can a republic be the best form of government if the universe, heaven, and hell are a monarchy?⁸

Thus, despite the theory of government by consent, based upon mutual trust, the peoples of the United States retain, from the authoritarian backgrounds of their religions or national origins, an utterly naive faith in law as some sort of supernatural and paternalistic power. “There ought to be a law against it!” Our law-enforcement officers are therefore confused, hindered, and bewildered—not to mention corrupted—by being asked to enforce sumptuary laws, often of ecclesiastical origin, that vast numbers of people have no intention of obeying and that, in any case, are immensely difficult or simply impossible to enforce—

for example, the barring of anything so undetectable as LSD-25 from international and interstate commerce.

Finally, there are two specific objections to use of psychedelic drugs. First, use of these drugs may be dangerous. However, every worth-while exploration is dangerous—climbing mountains, testing aircraft, rocketing into outer space, skin diving, or collecting botanical specimens in jungles. But if you value knowledge and the actual delight of exploration more than mere duration of uneventful life, you are willing to take the risks. It is not really healthy for monks to practice fasting, and it was hardly hygienic for Jesus to get himself crucified, but these are risks taken in the course of spiritual adventures. Today the adventurous young are taking risks in exploring the psyche, testing their mettle at the task just as, in times past, they have tested it—more violently—in hunting, dueling, hot-rod racing, and playing football. What they need is not prohibitions and policemen, but the most intelligent encouragement and advice that can be found.

Second, drug use may be criticized as an escape from reality. However, this criticism assumes unjustly that the mystical experiences themselves are escapist or unreal. LSD, in particular, is by no means a soft and cushy escape from reality. It can very easily be an experience in which you have to test your soul against all the devils in hell. For me, it has been at times an experience in which I was at once completely lost in the corridors of the mind and yet relating that very lostness to the exact order of logic and language, simultaneously very mad and very sane. But beyond these occasional lost and insane episodes, there are the experiences of the world as a system of total harmony and glory, and the discipline of relating these to the order of logic and language must somehow explain how what William Blake called that “energy which is eternal delight” can consist with the misery and suffering of everyday life.⁹

The undoubted mystical and religious intent of most users of the psychedelics, even if some of these substances should be proved injurious to physical health, requires that their free and responsible use be exempt from legal restraint in any republic that maintains a constitutional separation of church and state.¹⁰ To the extent that mystical experience conforms with the tradition of genuine religious involvement, and to the extent that psychedelics induce that experience, users are entitled to some constitutional protection. Also, to the extent that research in the

psychology of religion can utilize such drugs, students of the human mind must be free to use them. Under present laws, I, as an experienced student of the psychology of religion, can no longer pursue research in the field. This is a barbarous restriction of spiritual and intellectual freedom, suggesting that the legal system of the United States is, after all, in tacit alliance with the monarchical theory of the universe, and will, therefore, prohibit and persecute religious ideas and practices based on an organic and unitary vision of the universe.¹¹

Notes

¹ See W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902).

² An excellent anthology of such experiences is R. Johnson, *Watcher on the Hills* (1959).

³ Thus Hinduism regards the universe not as an artifact, but as an immense drama in which the One Actor (the *paramatman* or *brahman*) plays all the parts, which are his (or “its”) masks or personae. The sensation of being only this one particular self, John Doe, is due to the Actor’s total absorption in playing this and every other part. For fuller exposition, see S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (1927); H. Zimmer, *Philosophies of India* (1951), pp. 355-463. A popular version is in A. Watts, *The Book—On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are* (1966).

⁴ Isaiah 45: 6, 7.

⁵ Chandogya Upanishad 6.15.3.

⁶ Alfred Lord Tennyson, *A Memoir by His Son* (1898), 320.

⁷ *A Prayer for the King’s Majesty, Order for Morning Prayer*, Book of Common Prayer (*Church of England, 1904*).

⁸ Thus, until quite recently, belief in a Supreme Being was a legal test of valid conscientious objection to military service. The implication was that the individual objector found himself bound to obey a higher echelon of command than the President and Congress. The analogy is military and monarchical, and therefore objectors who, as Buddhists or naturalists, held an organic theory of the universe often had difficulty in obtaining recognition.

⁹ This is discussed at length in A. Watts, *The Joyous Cosmology: Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness* (1962).

¹⁰ “Responsible” in the sense that such substances be taken by or administered to consenting adults only. The user of cannabis, in particular, is apt to have peculiar difficulties in establishing his “undoubted mystical and religious intent” in court. Having committed so loathsome and serious a felony, his chances of clemency are better if he assumes a repentant demeanor, which is quite inconsistent with the sincere belief that his use of cannabis was religious. On the other hand, if he insists unrepentantly that he looks upon such use as a religious sacrament, many judges will declare that they “dislike his

attitude,” finding it truculent and lacking in appreciation of the gravity of the crime, and the sentence will be that much harsher. The accused is therefore put in a “double-bind” situation, in which he is “damned if he does, and damned if he doesn’t.” Furthermore, religious integrity—as in conscientious objection—is generally tested and established by membership in some church or religious organization with a substantial following. But the felonious status of cannabis is such that grave suspicion would be cast upon all individuals forming such an organization, and the test cannot therefore be fulfilled. It is generally forgotten that our guarantees of religious freedom were designed to protect precisely those who were not members of established denominations, but rather such (then) screwball and subversive individuals as Quakers, Shakers, Levelers, and Anabaptists. There is little question that those who use cannabis or other psychedelics with religious intent are now members of a persecuted religion which appears to the rest of society as a grave menace to “mental health,” as distinct from the old-fashioned “immortal soul.” But it’s the same old story.

¹¹ Amerindians belonging to the Native American Church who employ the psychedelic peyote cactus in their rituals, are firmly opposed to any government control of this plant, even if they should be guaranteed the right to its use. They feel that peyote is a natural gift of God to mankind, and especially to natives of the land where it grows, and that no government has a right to interfere with its use. The same argument might be made on behalf of cannabis, or the mushroom *Psilocybe mexicana Heim*. All these things are natural plants, not processed or synthesized drugs, and by what authority can individuals be prevented from eating them? There is no law against eating or growing the mushroom *Amanita pantherina*, even though it is fatally poisonous and only experts can distinguish it from a common edible mushroom. This case can be made even from the standpoint of believers in the monarchical universe of Judaism and Christianity, for it is a basic principle of both religions, derived from Genesis, that all natural substances created by God are inherently good, and that evil can arise only in their misuse. Thus laws against mere possession, or even cultivation, of these plants are in basic conflict with biblical principles. Criminal conviction of those who employ these plants should be based on proven misuse. “And God said ‘Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed—to you it shall be for meat.... And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.’”

A Beautiful Day

by Anonymous

[from Diary of a Psychonaut:
a collection of trip reports and psychedelic writings
<http://psychonaut.lycaeum.org/>]

MY GIRLFRIEND L AND I DECIDED to take LSD together one beautiful Sunday morning. We’d tripped together on acid at parties a couple of times, but never in a more intimate setting. After the success of our MDMA trip together a few weeks previous, I felt that the time was right. She’d never done a day trip, so we decided to take the acid briefly after waking up.

At approximately 10:00 a.m. we rose, spent a few minutes getting ourselves awake, and ate our drugs. I took three hits, she chose to do only one. After we took the acid we spent a short period of time hanging out around the house, deciding what to do. Before long, we decided to take a walk to a nearby park. By the time we made the decision, I was starting to feel the acid. As usual it first made itself known as a slight tension in my chest and a faint but definite feeling of altered awareness.

As we walked away from my house L briefly wondered if she should have taken more. I offered to go back and get her another hit, since I had one left over. She considered it briefly but declined, saying she would take another when we got back from the walk if she still felt she needed it.

The walk was only very slightly altered, a mild opening, but it was quite nice. The day was warm and beautiful, and the sunlight seemed crisp and jewel like. The day had a feeling of being charged through with a magical aura, a feeling that anything might happen, but that it would all be good. L, on the other hand, seemed a little paranoid to be out in public. I believe that the difference in our reactions stems largely from our respective degree of familiarity with psychedelically altered states. She is a relative novice, having tripped just over a dozen times, while I have had over a hundred trips. In my early experiences it was

much more common for me to be “creeped out” or paranoid while tripping in a public or semi-public setting.

Once we arrived at the park we sat on a bench and watched the world go by. As I mentioned it was quite a nice day, the sun was shining, kids were playing, birds and squirrels were making the most of a beautiful early spring day. We sat and made idle conversation and just enjoyed the environment and each other’s company. Before long L decided we should head back, since the acid was working very strongly for her and she was a little uncomfortable being in such an exposed situation.

As we walked back the effects were increasing. I was starting to see trails from objects as we walked by them. L said she felt like she was walking a foot above the pavement, not even walking but merely gliding along effortlessly.

When we arrived at my house there were several people there, hanging out with my roommate. We greeted them, then L went into my bedroom and shut the door. I took a few minutes to exchange amenities with them before following her in.

In my room we talked about listening to music but couldn’t really agree on anything. We did manage to get a few minutes into one album but L found it a little too heavy and asked me to turn it off. Around that time I heard my roommate and his guests leave so we decided to go into the living room and hang out there.

After some discussion we decided to listen to Spiritualized’s *Lazer Guided Melodies*. I put it on and we sat on the couch to listen to it. Before long we started kissing, and before too much longer that progressed into caresses, fondling and general fooling around. Shortly after that we decided to move back into my bedroom in case my roommate returned.

It wasn’t long before we were naked. Sex on acid is one of my favorite things and I was eager to introduce L to its charms. Unfortunately she was having her period, which involved a fair amount of discomfort, mostly lower back pain. We would fool around for a while, then she would get uncomfortable, which distracted her to a fair degree. On acid, once distracted it is easy to get even more distracted, and it took a while before we were able to actually have sex. We were both enjoying it, but it wasn’t quite as all encompassing as sex on acid can be due to her discomfort and the distractions that caused both of us. We both managed to maintain a sense of humor about it and after maybe

half an hour or forty-five minutes we decided to stop and take a bath together.

I went into the bathroom to run us a bath while L relaxed and tried to deal with the pain she was experiencing. Knowing how unpleasant any sort of physical pain can be during a trip I empathized with her a great deal. It made me think of how weird it must be to be a woman, which in turn caused me to reflect on how weird it is to be a male and the beautiful yin/yang dichotomy of our separate sexual existences.

As the tub filled I thought also about how well the trip was going so far. In many ways what psychedelics do is strip away layers of masks and half truth to reveal the essence beneath. It felt very positive to me that L and I were getting along so well and that she seemed equally pleased with the somewhat “elemental” persona revealed by the LSD as she did with my every day identity. I had expected as much, but it felt good to be validated in such a manner.

L came in and we got in the tub. Looking at her I realized again how beautiful she was and how lucky I was to have found someone so compatible with me. I have what I consider to be a fairly weird personality, and although I never have trouble making friends, many people are somewhat apprehensive about getting on intimate terms with me. I have had several potential girlfriends bail on me when they realized just exactly how weird I really was, and for once I felt quite safe that that wasn’t going to happen.

Sitting in the warm water felt quite nice. I sat on the faucet end so L could lie back and relax and we talked. I told her how beautiful she looked to me and asked how her trip was going. She told me she was having a great time and was glad to be with me. Our conversation continued along these lines for a while. It occurred to me that this trip had a lot of lunar energy to it. Lunar energy is tied in my mind not only to femininity but also to menstruation. L seemed to be some sort of moon goddess. In retrospect I sort of wished I had pursued this line of thought further, since I am very interested in archetypal energies such as this and have had some success manifesting those energies during psychedelic trips in the past.

After quite some time in the tub, lounging and basking in each other’s presence we decided to get out and get dressed. L decided she needed a cigarette, which meant a trip to the store,

since she didn't have any with her. We got our shoes and socks on and set off.

The short walk to the convenience store was pleasant and convinced me we should stay outside for awhile. L bought her cigarettes and we headed for a park nearby my house (a different one than we'd been in earlier). Once we got there we spent a few minutes going down the slide and giggling, remembering what it was to be a child. We finally ended up lying in the grass looking at the clouds.

The clouds were incredible, beyond description and nearly beyond belief. Only nature could have produced something so beautiful and chaotic. The clouds were infinitely dense fractal constructs that pulsated and rolled and swirled around themselves in some sort of incredibly complex dance. It was literally breathtaking and I could barely take my eyes off of it. L and I watched this for a while before deciding we needed some juice, so we headed to the grocery store around the corner.

The grocery store was very, very weird. I got a very tense, unpleasant vibe from it. It just wasn't any place we wanted to be. We wandered around for a few minutes looking for one specific type of juice without any luck while smelling all sorts of unpleasant smells (the seafood department was flat out rank) and overhearing the strangest bits of people's conversations. Finally I asked someone who worked there if they carried what we were looking for, and of course, they didn't. We chose to leave and try someplace else, partially because the whole place was just creeping me out.

A small coffeeshop next door provided us with some decent juice and we headed back to the park. L sat on a rock and smoked while I sat and looked at her, once again marveling at how beautiful she looked and how happy she made me feel. I took the time to tell her this and got a warm hug and a kiss in return. We kissed a while and then decided to go back to cloud watching. The clouds were no less fascinating and beautiful than before and we spent quite a while enjoying them before heading home.

When we got back L suggested we try to finish having sex, which I was more than happy to oblige. We went into my bedroom and more or less picked up where we left off. I felt like my arousal had merely been suspended and it took no effort to get me right back to where I was. The sex itself was wonderful, if not quite as colorful and boundary dissolving as it had been earlier,

closer to the peak. We came more or less simultaneously to both of our delight.

Afterwards we hung out for a while trying to decide whether or not to go get some food. Finally we decided to eat and left the house with that in mind. Our first few choices were closed, but we managed to find adequate sustenance at a burrito shop a little ways from my house. After sharing a huge burrito we were both more or less down, with only residual effects left. We went and picked up my daughter from her mother's house and headed home. We ended up hanging out with some friends that stopped by, smoking pot and drinking a couple of beers before heading to bed around midnight.

As usual I felt fine the next day, with no hangover to speak of. The trip left me with a warm glow and a good feeling about my future with L. I felt incredibly close to her, and I know she felt the same way. The trip was very intimate and loving and was more about getting into one another than tripping off into weird headspaces. All in all it was a wonderful, beautiful day. Once again psychedelics have proven to be a wonderful way to accentuate an already great situation into something extra special, even transcendent.