

EVOLVING ETHICS IN PSYCHEDELIC DRUG TAKING

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Psychedelics are unique from other drugs in that the experiences they make available often demand an ethic of living. Ethics of a spiritual, therapeutic, or exploratory quality develop spontaneously because of the transcendental nature of the experience. Contemporary psychedelic drug taking went through a cycle which peaked in 1972 and declined about 1979. A slow resurgence of interest is indicated by receding irrational hysteria and the emergence of new information. Psychedelic drug takers often adopt ethics similar to those in societies where such drugs are already an accepted part of culture, ethics which constructively integrate the experience with ongoing life.

Psychedelic experiences evoke states of consciousness which practically demand the formulation of an ethic of use (thus, the frequently cited importance of set and setting controls), and often an ethic of living. Historically, the various shamanic practices of divination, finding objects, diagnosis and healing, the incorporation of religious and spiritual symbolism into ongoing life and belief systems, and established rituals surrounding psychedelic drug taking show that ethics of several sorts connected to psychedelic drug use emerge spontaneously in widely varying cultures. Schultes (1940) has shown "teonanacatl" (*Panaeolus* sp.) to be the sacred mushroom of the Aztec empire. Wasson (1968) has identified the "soma" referred to in the Vedic hymns as the *Amanita muscaria* mushroom. Sharon (1972) has written of the use of San Pedro (*Trichocereus pachanoi*) cactus in Peruvian folk healing and diagnosis. Kusel (1965) gives an account of the "ayahuasca" (*Banisteropsis cippi*) doctors of the Amazon. Myerhoff (1974) wrote a thorough account of the Huichol Indians' peyote hunt as a "Sacred Journey," and the West Africans use "iboga" (*Tabernanthe iboga*) root to facilitate a trip to their ancestors (Fernandez, 1972).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the arguments which have been set forth to account for the spiritual, therapeutic, and exploratory experiences

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associated with psychedelic drug taking. But the reason these ethics emerge independently in widely varying cultures, I believe, is because they are a part of the body of "ethical governors" which inevitably arise to enable the individual to constructively use the experience and to integrate it with ongoing life.

It is not that the psychedelic experience can generate an unambiguously "good" ethic (with all the subjectivity this term carries), for there is certainly documented evidence of psychedelics being used in ways which would be disastrous if adopted by society as a whole. Aside from complications arising out of reckless experimentation, there are records of psychedelics being used as a weapon (McKenna, 1985), in various malevolent spells and sorceries (de Rios-Dobkin, 1972) and, of course, the infamous Manson case in which the use of LSD was linked with occult black magic. There is also a fair volume of science fiction works (e.g., those written by the late Frank Herbert) which explore the ethics and potentialities—good and bad—of psychedelics being used on a broad social scale. It is noteworthy, however, that in examining the considerable volume of literature which relates the *sustained* use of psychedelics within a group or culture, by far the greater volume of evidence shows that certain ethics appear which are stabilizing, benevolent, and integrative, not only for the individual but also for the social group in which he or she is embedded.

Consider Wasson's (1980) account of shamanic mushroom use as he and Alan Richardson discovered it in Mexico in 1955:

We were deeply impressed by the mood of the gathering. We were received and the night's events unrolled in an atmosphere of simple friendliness that reminded us of the *agape* of early Christian times.

A *velada* must be held for a worthy reason. . . . Trippers who engage a shaman to hold a *velada* out of curiosity miss the point completely.

Another case in point is the Peyote religion. The Peyote cult is rich with ethical standards concerning good and bad, well-defined rituals, social responsibilities, and attitudes toward mystical experiences. The current practice of peyotism by the Native American Church is one which has developed (and changed) over centuries, having its roots in pre-Columbian use of several psychedelic drug plants. A belief system of such integrity cannot be imposed by a singular leader or defined ritual, but rather has slowly evolved and manifested as ethics which integrated elements of the ancient tribal beliefs with the position in which the Indians found themselves in a growing non-Indian society. Edward Anderson (1980) has written extensively on the origin and evolution of the ethics surrounding peyotism:

The new Peyote ceremony . . . included traditional Indian religious symbols, . . . incorporated a belief in salvation as well as an ethical code, . . . (and) adopted certain parts of the Christian religion.

The Indian thus found in Peyote a means of religious expression by which he could identify himself and obtain a degree of personal security while being faced with a bewildering variety of experiences in the white man's world. Peyotism helped to resolve the conflict between cultures through an integration of nativistic power, curing, and vision concepts with elements of

Christian ideology and culture. The conflict of cultures was resolved even further through the formalization and institutionalization of both the native American and white concepts in the creation of a religious ceremonial practice that provided hospitality, consolation, welfare, security, and curing.

Such positive relationships with peyote as the Indians have is far removed from the mainstream population's understanding about psychedelic experiences. Slotkin (1956) observed that "... the responses described in clinical experiments on whites are so different from the responses described by Indian Peyotists ... as to fall into completely different categories; they do not seem to be talking about the same thing."

Wallace (1959) also notes a number of distinct contrasts in the character of responses of clinically "normal" whites and Indian subjects experiencing mes-caline. What whites feel as "loss of contact with reality," is interpreted by the Indian as feelings of "contact with a higher order of reality," but a reality prefigured in doctrinal knowledge and implying more, rather than less social participation. Another characteristic white response is "no therapeutic benefits or permanent behavioral changes," while Indians feel "marked therapeutic benefits and behavioral changes (reduction of chronic anxiety, increased sense of personal worth, more satisfaction in community life)."

What might be the cause for such differences? Becker (1967) offers an interesting hypothesis. He argues that the emergence of drug using subcultures tend to minimize undesirable effects, so we can expect that the Indian, with a cultural heritage of peyote experiences embedded within his society, has entirely different perceptions of the psychedelic experience than do whites.

Individuals accumulate experience with the drug and communicate their experiences to one another. Consensus develops about the drug's subjective effects, their duration, proper dosages, predictable dangers and how they may be avoided; all these points become matters of common consensus validated by their acceptance in a world of users. A culture exists. When a user experiences bewildering or frightening effects, he has available to him an authoritative alternative to the lay notion that he has gone mad ... 'psychotic episodes' occur less frequently in proportion to the growth of the culture. ... Novice users, to whom the effects are most unfamiliar and who therefore might be expected to suffer most from drug-induced anxiety, learn the culture from older users in casual conversation and in more serious teaching sessions and are thus protected from the dangers of "panicking" or "flipping out."

Becker (1967) supportively extrapolates his observations to the marijuana-using subculture, but because of complexities attendant to LSD use that are not a part of the marijuana culture, he acknowledges that it remains inappropriate to make the same inference with respect to the latter. He concludes, though, that "the actual figure (of adverse reactions) will be a vector made of several components."

When the use of marijuana and LSD began to rise in the mid-1960s, there was

serious public misunderstanding about psychedelic drugs; indeed, the severe penalties prescribed by laws governing marijuana possession (Timothy Leary was sentenced to thirty years for possession of less than an ounce) were often comparable to those for crimes such as manslaughter, rape, grand larceny, and other extremely infringing social misconducts. With the media's sensationalization of "horror trips" and chromosome damage, laws were quickly passed to suppress other psychedelics in the subculture and opened up opportunities—and complications—in blackmarketing. Consequently, many young people experimented with psychedelics with little reliable background information and even less consideration for the ethical foundations of psychedelic drug use.

Bunce (1979) provides data to show that there was a sharp decline in the percentage of people reporting bad trips on psychedelics between 1961 and 1975, but adds that Becker's "supportive subcultures" cannot account for this entirely.

It is argued that shifts in the societal formulation of the psychedelic experience in terms of law, medical opinion, education, and media propaganda have an effect on the relative ascription of experiences and hence on the relative occurrence of bad trips among users. Thus findings of a dramatic historical shift in bad trips on psychedelic drugs from a rate of 53% of users to 29% in the course of a decade can be explained in terms of an approach which views bad trips as social products, where experiences of bad trips are to an important degree a function of ascription, reflecting the relative ascendancy of competing definitions of the situation.

Montagne (1984) has shown experimentally that social knowledge influences the nature and meaning of drug experiences. Although his research centers on a legal stimulant drug, not a hallucinogen, a similar line of research would be appropriate to clarify the issue in regard to psychedelic drug taking. Numerous authors have noted "increased suggestibility" as one of the important facets of psychedelic trips, and for this reason experienced guides are recommended for novice trippers. Both Becker (1967) and Bunce (1979) are suggesting, indirectly, that cultural and social influences are a broader, but more subtle way that psychedelic trips are guided.

The Indian peyotist obviously has an established and, therefore, stabilizing heritage of use, and this seems to be what Becker (1967) suggests is in the process of emerging from the "supportive subcultures." Bunce's (1979) extension to include social influence shows that there are several variables involved in the perception of the experience. My paper argues that the cohesive factor which ties these variables together is in the process of manifesting as personal and group ethics which enable certain individuals to pursue psychedelic drug taking with greatly reduced risk. The consequences are that entirely new understandings of the experience—as well as of other facets of life—are now emerging.

Robert Veatch (1977) has delineated five categories of ethics related to drug use in general. Three are worthy of mention as relevant to psychedelic drug taking:

The Neo-Protestant Drug Ethic . . . justifies the use of psychotropics including the hallucinogens. . . . The religious vision of the modern drug

culture is not far removed from the mystical salvation vision of the peyote ritual.

The Protean Drug Ethic . . . radically abandons singlemindedness . . . variety for the sake of variety has become a kind of goal. . . . It is the ethic of the pill party where variety of chemical experience is valued in itself. . . . The drive to unify, to integrate, to make sense of one's life, is abandoned in favor of a quest for diversity.

The Therapeutic Drug Ethic . . . is the view that the goal of drug use is simply to produce happiness, contentment, accommodation, or adjustment. Elimination of conflict has itself become a goal rather than a means to a goal.

With respect to other cultures' use of psychedelic drugs, the Neo-Protestant Ethic would be more appropriately termed *The Spiritual Ethic*. It should be noted, too, that these categories are not mutually exclusive. The use of psychedelic drugs in healing and diagnosis, for example, can be considered in the category of therapeutic use, while often invoking mysticism or benevolent sorcery. A personal adjustment in psychological outlook may well be therapeutic *because* the individual perceives it in a spiritually or mystically integrative context. "It may be important to keep in mind that a 'mystical experience' . . . only *facilitates* (emphasis his) psychological healing by giving the individual a higher perspective on his conflicts" (Naranjo, 1973). In contrast, the Protean Ethic is a form of recreational use which adds generally to one's knowledge about drug effects, but is nevertheless one which seems to be self-eliminating with respect to psychedelic drug taking for reasons which will be discussed later.

To those which Veatch (1977) has listed I would add another, one which is almost exclusively relevant to psychedelic drug taking: *The Exploratory Ethic*. The Exploratory Ethic is one in which people are not necessarily seeking therapeutic benefits or religious experience, but *understanding*. *Why* are religious experiences precipitated with a material substance? What are the neurological mechanisms of hallucination? What are the boundaries of the mind under the influence of various psychedelics, and why do they have similarities or differences? How can one navigate consciousness within these various states, and where will we go if we explore such routes? The Exploratory Ethic expresses a desire for discovery and learning not unlike that pursued in theoretical physics and other types of pure research.

(The spontaneous use of the term "trip" to describe the psychedelic experience is well-taken. Because there is such potential for variety of experience even when the drug, dosage, set, and setting are carefully controlled, many researchers feel that we are yet at the beginning of discoveries in this field.)

Numerous authors have written of psychedelics being used as creativity stimulators, and I would place this type of use in the Exploratory category. "The suggestion that psychedelic drugs enhance creativity means . . . that they somehow have a direct effect on the faculty of insight, providing original solutions to artistic and intellectual problems through new combinations of ideas and feelings" (Grinspoon and Bakalar, 1979). The "new combinations of ideas and feelings" lead directly to new understandings.

The Protean Ethic is mentioned for contrast. The modern situation with psychedelic drug taking was complicated by a wave of hedonistic indulgence between about 1967 and 1973, in which many people took psychedelic drugs experimentally simply because they took *many* drugs experimentally. This frequently caused them to become so confused about the meaning of drug experiences that they created serious complications for themselves and/or others around them. This is the Protean Ethic applied to psychedelic drug taking and is decidedly *not* one suitable for sustained use, which is why we seldom see psychedelics being used recreationally in native societies.

Statistics show that the use of psychedelics peaked in the early 1970s, then began to decline (Strategy Council on Drug Abuse, 1976). The decline of the psychedelic drug scene between 1973 and 1978 was a time which effectively weeded out those who were simply seeking high times and euphoria, or Protean experimentation. One of the reasons this decline took place is that many of these people did not have their use of psychedelic drugs grounded in ethics which integrated the extraordinary experience with ordinary reality and social responsibility. Psychedelics are variable enough in their experiential manifestations that one cannot rely on euphoria as consistently as with other drugs.

People who used psychedelic drugs mainly for what they defined as pleasure tended to stop sooner than those who had more serious and complex purposes. Illicit drug users looking for something that would not disrupt their normal routines returned to substances like marijuana and cocaine, which have reliable euphoric effects and do not alter consciousness too much. Both . . . have become increasingly acceptable as everyday social drugs; they are used simply to feel good, and not as a source of cultural identity (Grinspoon and Bakalar, 1979:85).

Because the psychedelic trip is a multifaceted experience, it has an experiential variety and "color" unlike any other class of drugs which must be integrated over a wide range of extremes. And it is this *range* of experiences, from the long-sufferingly hellish to the spiritually sublime and psychologically healing, which prompts those who pursue them to develop their grounding ethics.

We don't see religious cults, social-belief systems, or ethical standards condensing from people using opiates, cocaine, alcohol, stimulants, or tranquilizers, at least not in the sustained sense which carries on over generations and centuries within a cultural group. With those drugs, the experience of euphoria is highly certain (barring a gross error of toxic dosage) and very predictable in its course. However, simple euphoria does not do much for consciousness, except possibly make a user want more euphoria, thus setting up a self-reinforcing loop of psychological and/or physical addiction.¹

Cultures which have a sustained use of psychedelic drugs, however, have adopted various grounding ethics which are evidenced by spiritual awareness, health concerns, and practicing psychic explorations of various sorts. These ethics become established in native and shamanic use of psychedelics, and are retained for the benefit of the individual, the community, and for future generations.

It is interesting to note that the unfolding of public consciousness concerning environmental issues, nuclear weapons proliferation, the Vietnam war, and crime

and rehabilitation programs coincided with the rise of psychedelic drug use in the late sixties and early seventies. It would be presumptuous to say that psychedelic experiences were responsible for initiating public awareness in these directions; however, many of the proponents for these movements were also people who were involved with psychedelic drugs in a constructively ethical way.

The ethics accrue not from merely having a psychedelic experience, but from having *many* experiences from which the individual can draw upon to consciously and constructively improve understanding about himself as well as his relationship to the world and social community around him. It is not an overnight happening; for some people it never happens.

In primitive shamanism . . . "the otherwise unfettered power of the world beyond is harnessed purposefully and applied to minister to the needs of the community" (Lewis, 1971:189). That is what technology, including drug technology is supposed to do in our society. . . . The metaphysical hunger that provides one reason for the interest in LSD is a permanent human condition, not an aberration that is created by the drug or one that can be eliminated by suppressing it (Grinspoon and Bakalar, 1979:308).

This is why a variety of religious practices (the Spiritual Ethic), rich with moral standards and teachings about right and wrong and personal responsibility (and of which peyotism is a shining example), have developed around psychedelic drug use in native societies, a phenomenon not seen with other drugs.

Since about 1979, there has been evidence of a gradual return of interest in psychedelic drugs. Several publications have appeared devoted solely to psychedelic drugs,² and scattered efforts are again being made to confront legal issues concerning the use of psychedelics as sacraments.³ As well, several independent researchers have published findings in spite of official opposition against this class of drugs. Doubtless some of these pursuits will prove to be frivolous "excuses" for drug indulgence, but nevertheless, a significant volume of new perspectives and information is being generated, much of which clearly carries qualities of integrity and concern about the ethical use of psychedelics. Something is coming into focus concerning the use of psychedelics which is *not* a part of the mainstream of practiced drug use. Let's look at a thin cross-section of recently published information:

What we experience as "thought" or "consciousness" has its physical basis in quantum-mechanical phenomena. We propose that the intercalation of 5-HT (serotonin), other neurotransmitters, and hallucinogenic neurotransmitter analogs into an RNA receptor site gives rise to . . . a charge-transfer complex, which initiates the separation of the helix by polarizing the base pairs; this allows charged ions to rush through the membrane. . . . The rapid bonding and debonding of intercalators causes a rapid twisting and untwisting of the helix, and this gives rise to a vibratory oscillation of the macromolecule. This oscillation, occurring within the electric field at the synapse, has the effect of generating an electromagnetic wave form . . . the signals thus generated by the . . . complex are reflective of the nucleic acid or nucleoprotein as it exists in its superhelixed *in vivo* state. The electron spin resonance

signal generated by this mechanism might be capable of carrying information which somehow would be experienced as thought.

However, the mind is probably an expression of laws operating on a hierarchical level superordinate to that represented by organisms, hence it is to be expected that it will exemplify some properties not found at the level of organism alone. These . . . are properties transcending the boundary conditions of organism and . . . make mind irreducible to physical or even organic structure (McKenna and McKenna, 1975:83-84).

The cultural catalysis that is a product of hallucinogens is now entering a new phase and it's related to an ontological transformation of how we perceive and handle language. . . . Telepathy I assume to be mind to mind transfer of thought . . . if you could hear what I'm thinking without me speaking, that would be telepathy. But I'm talking about . . . an ontological transformation of the language so that language is no longer perceived with the ears, it's perceived with the eyes (McKenna, 1983).

A prerequisite to creating feedback is that the input . . . must be dynamic. . . . This thought or energy is run through a pattern, circuit, or train of logic which is set up to integrate its own design at a faster rate than the thoughts or energies that it contains. . . . What limits the potential speed of all this is the physical nerve synapses and neurotransmitters which carry the impulses . . . by just slightly altering the forms of the circuit or logic pattern you can cause an effect called oscillation. . . .

Feedback and oscillation are both governed by the scientific and natural laws of physics and thermodynamics . . . it always shows up in the form of a scale or spectrum; . . . a structured progression which can be predicted mathematically . . . self-referencing hallucination, and logic, expanding exponentially out of itself will eventually lead the drug user to perceive increased psychospiritual energy and "higher intelligence," etc. Whether this . . . is . . . a complex delusional system or just provides the necessary state of mind for a "contact" . . . is the stuff that makes great science fiction and occult writing! (Lytle, 1984).

The model that we use is that the MDA with its age-regression, including past lives, gives you all the possibilities of all the people you were or could have been throughout history. . . . The LSD, we always say, gives you the inside of your own head. . . . When you take MDA and LSD simultaneously, you get a sort of matrix multiplication effect (Gracie and Zarkov, 1985).

When you pit science and mysticism together, you get an astonishing new product, utterly unlike any of the mysticism that ever existed before and utterly unlike the science that existed before. We've got a whole generation of turned on scientists and scientifically-curious mystics who are working together and making fantastic breakthroughs in consciousness. . . . And that's really what intelligence increase means. It means learning to use your nervous system for maximum ecstatic functioning at all times. . . . This is the goal of the philosophers, in alchemical terms. When you learn to turn all incoming impressions to your advantage . . . everything turns to gold for you, because you're turning it into gold (Wilson, 1985).

Clearly, this is a more sophisticated level of understanding than what we saw during the Haight-Ashbury days. It is also far different from the social by-products generated by other types of drug use. Certainly there are risks for the people involved which cannot be lightly dismissed, but there also appears to be an emerging group of experimentalists, spiritualists, and therapists who have explored psychedelics for years with little difficulty.

The reason this is possible is that stabilizing ethics are emerging through individuals and groups who sense the responsibility to constructively use the experience throughout their life and social sphere. Granted, that many points remain unresolved, perhaps even divergent, but the trend over the last three decades suggests that the emerging ethics are in the process of excluding hedonism and Protean indulgence, but inclusive of spiritual integrity, empathy, and responsibility; ethics of living without which the psychedelic experience would be little more than an excursion in perceptual fantasias.

More accurate information is accumulating. New models to account for the psychic effects and mystical phenomena are being proposed. Much of the misinformational propaganda which had been used to "hys-terrify" the public about the psychedelics; the "chromosome scare," the "permanent psychosis" scare, the "crime sprees and orgies" associations has fallen by the way, since these situations simply did not develop to the degree the alarmists suggested. The inter-relationships of dosage, effects, and set/setting variables are better understood. The technical aspects are being investigated; reports are gradually accumulating on various new and little known compounds and their analogs: MDMA, MDE, 2-CB, 5-MeO-DMT, DPT, escaline, to name a few.

In the broadest sense the psychedelic experience is an information experience which enables the psychedelic drug taker to see, literally, the relationships of information, and information *processing* that go on within the mind, which are not normally accessible. And because the experience is largely retained in memory, often more impressionably than "normal" consciousness (i.e., it is the *opposite* of inebriation), it becomes understood as a consciousness expansion. Even though the individual knows he will come down, knows there is a relationship between dosage and intensity, and knows he can modify the experiences by altering set and setting, he inevitably asks, "Why is such an experience possible?" Because the experience is often extraordinarily novel and extreme, the natural way to relate it with normal perceptions is to understand it as being of a transcendental or religious nature. Hence, strong feelings arise as the mind makes an effort to relate the extraordinary psychedelic experience with ordinary reality. Similarly, therapeutic benefits are frequently associated with spiritual perceptions.

The supportive subcultures which develop around psychedelic drug taking, help crystallize understanding, and allow ethics to manifest which stabilize expectations and effects. This is somewhat resonant with the more general and controversial biological theory of morphogenetic fields recently proposed by Rupert Sheldrake (1983). One of the peripheral consequences of his hypothesis has to do with a "field theory" of memory.

The idea that the memories are not stored inside the brain is, in fact, more compatible with the known facts than the conventional theories. The main reason we think memories are stored inside the brain is the fact that there

can be a memory loss as a result of brain damage. . . . Sometimes there is a permanent memory loss but this doesn't prove that memories are stored inside the brain. If I came and chopped out a few carefully selected components from the tuning circuits of your TV set and you found you could no longer receive certain channels, this would not prove that those channels were located in the components that I removed. It would merely prove that they are part of the tuning system that was necessary for picking them up.

Now if we tune into our own memories because we are more like ourselves in the past than we are like other people, why don't we tune into other people's memories as well? Well, according to this hypothesis we do. . . . By tuning into so many memories all at once we would pick up not the details of individual's experience but . . . the average patterns of experience, . . . the average patterns of thought. We would, in fact, end up with something like Jung's concept of the archetypes in the collective unconscious.

In this hypothesis it is conceivable that there could be something like memories of past lives, for which there is indeed evidence. These considerations about memory also reframe the whole discussion of survival of bodily death (Sheldrake, 1986).

Sheldrake's hypothesis has attracted interest in the psychedelic community because it offers an avenue for understanding many phenomena of psychedelic experiences that are thought of as supernatural, mystical, or metaphysical. The "psychic field" of information—true or false—about this class of drugs is one of the raw materials from which individual and group ethics are assembled.

The extremism is dying away, both positive and negative, and is being replaced with the realization that psychedelics, like any other facet of technology, have latent dangers and potentialities not yet fully realized. Qualities of good or bad in psychedelic drug takers arise not from some innate characteristic of the substance they are using, but from understandings or misunderstandings about it, about themselves, about their social responsibilities, and so on.

It is interesting to note that the lack of quality information about psychedelics has plagued not only the drug-using subculture but also the medical community. The public hysteria over drugs has recently escalated to the point where people seem to accept ideas about drugs, including psychedelic drugs, that are totally devoid of independent thinking and logical reasoning; this is the "just say no" rationale. However, the *unspoken* implication is that on the issue of drugs, we should let the political institutions do our thinking for us. One cannot help but wonder how similar "hysterification" propaganda might be extrapolated to deal with other "undesirable" social phenomena. The approach might be effective for school children who wouldn't be able to understand hazards attendant to drug use anyway, but is it an *ethical* approach to drug control? This approach sets up a social polarization against drug research, and by extension, against other sorts of psychic research even by qualified investigators, and inhibits existing information from being disseminated. Hopefully, this situation is in the process of changing. "The question is not how to get (psychedelic drugs) off the street . . . but how to get them back into hospitals, laboratories, and other supervised settings . . . it is time

to take up the work that was laid down unfinished in the sixties" (Grinspoon and Bakalar, 1979:292-293).

I will not delineate what is to be construed as ethical or unethical use of psychedelics because the issue borders on one's personal outlook and is difficult to approach without being ambiguously subjective or cultishly deterministic. To some extent, the ethics will be reflective of where a person is geographically, socially, and spiritually. A group of Navaho peyotists would probably not feel comfortable if they were displaced to an Amazonian ayahuasca session, and vice versa. I personally disagree with Wasson's (1980) statement that psychedelic drug taking out of curiosity is missing the point (implying, thereby, that such use would be unethical), but his view is obviously reflective of the spiritual and therapeutic ethics of the native shamanic use as he observed it. This would be similar to saying that pure research is unethical because it has no immediate purpose.

However, a few starting points can be suggested. First, *information gathering* from the reports of other psychedelists and by keeping a personal journal or diary is very valuable. (In pre-literate societies, the tribal shaman served as the informational repository for understanding the effects of drug plants and their application.) Not only does this provide one with data for observation and reflection, personal research, formulation of hypothesis, etc., but it is also the first step necessary to separate information from misinformation. Second, *communication* with other drug takers is obviously important for the reasons suggested by Becker (1967) above, but so is communication with non-users as well. I doubt we will ever see a society in which the majority uses psychedelic drugs, and it is important for both users and non-users to develop a stable relationship with each other to allay hostilities and fears, as well as to exchange information with a note of charitable benevolence and good will.⁴ Finally, *balance*: Whether the personal interest in psychedelics centers around developing spiritual awareness, psychological healing or psychic exploration. The whole purpose of ethics in psychedelic drug taking is to balance the extraordinary states of consciousness experienced with the ordinary states. Balance is attained by "fine tuning" information flow and feedback, not only with one's internal perspectives, but also in constructive interaction and communication with one's social sphere. One should avoid becoming entranced with wonder or simple euphoria to the extent that it precludes the ability to assess objectively where he is in relation to the rest of his society. At the other pole, let's not become so caught up in analytical rationalizations that we overlook the opportunity to experience those feelings that transcend reason: love, "at-one-ment" with humanity, and the "eternal now" as pure experience, among others. Information gathering, communication, balance; these are not themselves ethics, but three interrelated techniques that will allow ethics to unfold within the individual which are integrative and constructive for the individual and his social sphere.

This paper may seem nebulous and generalized because we are just beginning to understand these compounds; to complicate the matter, we are also only beginning to understand the operations and potentialities of the human mind. These two factors are like two less-than-unity decimals multiplied to give a product smaller than either. I feel optimistic that psychedelic drugs hold potentials as yet undiscovered, but these potentials cannot be realized without a serious assessment of the dangers involved. The tremendous growth of information in the

fields of biological mechanics, genetics, and quantum theory over the past few decades also gives us an opportunity for understanding psychic and various psychological phenomena unmatched in history. Psychedelic drugs may yet prove to be a valuable tool for understanding the mind that we would be foolish to discard prematurely, for there seems to be a definite interlock of complimentary information here.

In many ways, survival within the blackmarket drug scene is more fraught with peril and more complex than outside it. It is unfortunate to see people who pursue drug taking—psychedelic or otherwise—with little attention to the technology attendant to dosage, situational use, and pharmacology. It is becoming increasingly clear that complications in drug taking accrues from not having a grounding ethical code which is both empathetic toward fellow humans and constructive in a personal sense. There are many drugs for which the effects are such that it is extremely difficult to sustain constructive and empathetic motivations; sustained use of such drugs simply degenerates to an "entrancement with euphoria." With psychedelic drugs, however, because of the transcendental nature of the experience, the variability in terms of being pleasant as well as unpleasant, and an almost universal quality of spiritualism in the experience, we see a situation which actually promotes an ethic of use, and often an ethic of living which carries throughout the drug taker's community or social sphere. Those who fail to make this realization do not long pursue psychedelic drug taking.

NOTES

1. While sustained psychedelic drug taking is sometimes construed as psychological addiction, this attitude arises in part from the cultural bias that exists against illicit drug use rather than an assessment of the interplay between the user's *experience* and application of the experience in formulating ethics applicable to ongoing life. Even so, psychological dependence can and does occur, though not to the degree it does with numerous other drugs.
2. Some of the publications which have appeared since 1979 oriented specifically toward psychedelic drug taking and relevant information include: *Blotter* (1979) published by the Psychedelic Education Center, Santa Cruz; *Sporeprint* (1979) by the Fane of Psilocybe Mushroom Association, Victoria, B.C.; *The Psychozoic Press* (1982) by Elvin D. Smith, Coos Bay, Oregon; *High Frontiers* (1984) by Sacred Cow Mutilators, Mill Valley, California; *Notes from Underground* (1985) by Gracie and Zarkov Productions, (location not given), and *Psychedelic Monographs and Essays* (1985) by Thomas Lyttle, Naples, Florida.
3. See the article on psychedelics and religion printed elsewhere in this issue.
4. The Manson family escalated themselves into serious ideological (and legal!) complications because they lacked an interactive communication exchange with non-users. Manson could be said to have a Spiritual Ethic of drug taking, but "good" only if one also believed in his destiny as the incarnation of Christ. The only way he could maintain his influence over his family was by pointedly reducing and limiting communicative exchange with others who differed in ideological persuasion. Similar "ultimatarian" mechanisms have turned up throughout the world at various times in history for controlling mass consciousness, and seldom have to do with drug taking. Manson had spent much of his life in prison, and was probably a borderline psychotic who seized upon the use of LSD—and the state of suggestibility it allows—as a vehicle to manipulate the minds of others to elevate himself. The state of suggestibility brings about an opportunity for transference of belief systems, and is a major feature of psychotherapy and religious teachings of several denominations, and probably goes on in more subtle ways in political and economic institutions as well. For

Manson, the LSD was only a convenient catalyst to accelerate what he was already doing— infringing the rights of others to sustain himself. Obviously he could not long remain in situations where people did not conform to the “Manson-ism” he demanded. His case is an example of extreme imbalance and the danger of such imbalance in psychedelic drug taking. He became too “center heavy” for social good, and of course, even for his own good.

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