

Foreword

It is a pleasure to be able to write a foreword to this excellent book. Excellence lies in the eye of the beholder and no doubt there will be some whose attitudes towards it will resemble that of one of the Deans of Harvard University. In the late 1960s this eminent gentleman was traversing Harvard yard when he ran into Professor Richard Evans Schultes, the great ethnobotanist, who directs the Harvard Botanical Museum. Schultes has contributed more to our knowledge of psychoactive plants than anyone in the world today. He is the proper successor to the great Spruce and other botanical explorers of Amazonia. The Dean was naturally glad to see his distinguished colleague once more back from the jungles and mountains of South America, and asked him in an absent-minded way: 'And what have you found this time Dick?' To which Dr Schultes replied: 'We found three more hallucinogenic plants.' The Dean clasped his head and moaned 'Don't we just need them here,' and slunk away. Harvard was at the height of its troubles then.

Early in 1973 I was at a meeting where Schultes enlivened the assembly by telling us that when he first went to Central and South America only about half a dozen hallucinogenic plants were known. After his most recent expedition, and those of his pupils, he has now brought the number to eighty-eight. Schultes has the enthusiasm of great specialists, but his discoveries underline the theme of Brian Wells' admirably compact and sensible book, for at one time or another many of us have been troubled by the results of these powerful substances when used ineptly or clumsily, and have wished that they would disappear. The evidence is that they are not going to do so.

They seem to be an ancient, long-sustained and general interest of humankind which, until recently, could only be satisfied sporadically, uncertainly and often dangerously. Dr Schultes told us of the mescal bean (not to be confused with peyote or

mescal button, as it is called), a most powerful and dangerous hallucinogen of which he found many splendid examples growing as ornamental trees when on a Southern campus recently. He photographed them but did not discuss them in his lectures. Due to the presence of cytosine this particular hallucinogen has something of the property of Russian roulette, and is favoured by only the most courageous.

Quite recently Schultes' pupils have discovered a psychedelic petunia growing somewhere in the Andes. His work shows that these substances have been with us since the beginning of history, that they are likely to stay with us and will probably become more abundant. Our enormous knowledge of synthetic chemistry, psychopharmacology and enzymology makes it improbable that we will be able to prevent their use by those who wish to use them unless we are prepared to set up a police state of the most oppressive kind, or can persuade people to abstain in some other way. History suggests that policemen are not at their best or most effective when trying to prevent people from doing things which they are inclined to do, and which others do not consider grossly immoral or socially dangerous. In other words, as this book suggests, we shall probably have to learn to live with these substances just as we have learned to live with alcohol, tobacco, and some of those sports which were once considered to be bloody and brutal, like that disruptive minor form of warfare, known as 'football', which caused moralists great distress in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, being considered not a safety-valve against riot but an incitement to rioting.

Should we then shrug our shoulders and act as if there was nothing to worry about? Certainly not, there is plenty to worry about, and Brian Wells has raised most of the really important questions here. It is unfortunate that once again medicine and society fell into that old trap of trying to reinforce moral disapproval of those who take psychedelics, with medical warnings about the dreadful fate which would befall them. We have done this repeatedly and it always fails, but that doesn't prevent us from trying once more. Just how devoted we are to this kind of thing is shown by that completely fictitious sun-gazing episode in which a rather pathetic blind official in Pennsylvania concocted

a story of six young LSD takers who blinded themselves by gazing at the sun. This story became incorporated in official statements about the dangers of LSD even though the episode itself was wholly false.

The great differences of opinion among those who study the effect of LSD on chromosomes has been even more remarkable. The late Dr Walter Pahnke of Springrove Hospital, Maryland, told me that in their study of alcoholics, who were being treated with LSD, it was his task to take over samples of blood before and after treatment to a well-known cytologist at the National Institute of Mental Health. After he had delivered one sample the scientist rang him up saying: 'We must stop this, it is far too dangerous to continue. The chromosomes are in such very poor shape.' My old friend reminded him gently that perhaps before stopping the experiment they should find out whether they were dealing with an alcoholic who was receiving the LSD treatment, a member of the comparison group, or pre-treatment patients who had not received any. The cytologist agreed and was chastened to discover that the sample he had received was from a pre-treatment patient. Their follow-up suggested that, if anything, chromosomes were somewhat improved by LSD treatment; but this should not be taken seriously, for in addition to the LSD they had been having a better diet, and living under better conditions than they had been doing before admission to hospital. This does suggest, however, that we should be wary of leaping to conclusions, and should avoid trying to scare away intelligent young people who are perfectly well aware of the errors which have been made.

I am not suggesting that there may not be physical dangers, which we are still unable to evaluate. The author deals with these sensibly, but I think there is one matter that he has not, perhaps, emphasized sufficiently. This is, even supposing we were able to produce a wholly safe, totally reversible psychedelic, it still seems doubtful to me whether this should be employed by the young, whose perceptual worlds are still unstable. One of the main tasks of growing up consists of learning to be relatively emotionally stable in a relatively stable perceptual world. It is we who make that stable world and it is sometimes very difficult to

achieve this. I believe that many young people have been distracted by psychedelics from this major task, which is to learn something about the world in which they find themselves, its customs and its folkways, and relate what they have learned to their own personal temperamental equation in the best way possible. Some cultures have managed to incorporate psychedelics in their *rite de passage*, but this is certainly not true of Europe and the United States today.

However, when we come to the middle aged and the elderly, the situation is wholly different. They are frequently far too set in their ways in a world which is changing rapidly. They are likely to suffer for these rigidities. Some people have become stodgy by their twenties, but many people by their forties are beginning to become like T. S. Eliot's clubman cat, Bustopher Jones, with his comforting thought, 'it will last out my time'. With our increased expectation of life this is fortunately not true; we need to find ways of keeping people flexible enough to live in a constantly changing world which can become increasingly unfamiliar, threatening and even hostile, for those who are unwilling or unable to recognize that things just will not stand still.

It has seemed a curious irony to me that psychedelics became popular with the wrong people, at the wrong time, in the wrong way. The headstrong young approached them with a careless rapture and were often indiscriminating and prepared to take anything; consequently, many avoidable misfortunes occurred. However, they seem to be learning by employing the method scorned by Bismark, who said: 'Fools say they learn by experience; I prefer to learn by other people's experience.' I have the impression now that they are a good deal more cautious and misfortunes are consequently becoming fewer, which is what one would expect.

Regarding the term psychedelic; it was intended as a neutral term to replace psychotomimetic, hallucinogenic, fantastica, etc. Aldous Huxley and I corresponded about this; he wrote to me on 30 March 1956:

About a name for these drugs – what a problem! I have looked into Liddell and Scott and find that there is a verb *phaneroein*, 'to make visible or manifest', and an adjective *phaneros*, meaning 'manifest,

open to sight, evident'. The word is used in botany – phanerogam as opposed to cryptogam. Psychodetic is something I don't quite get the hang of. Is it an analogue of geodetic, geodesy? If so, it would mean mind-dividing, as geodesy means earth-dividing, from *ge* and *daiein*. Could you call these drugs psychophans? Or phaneropsychic drugs? Or what about phanerothymes? *Thumos* means soul, in its primary usage, and is the equivalent of Latin *animus*. The word is euphonious and easy to pronounce; besides it has relatives in the jargon of psychology – e.g. cyclothyme. On the whole I think this is better than psychophan or phaneropsychic.

Phanerothyme – substantive. Phanerothymic – adjective.

To make this trivial world sublime,
Take half a gramme of phanerothyme.

I thought and still think that this is a most beautiful word, but it seemed rather difficult, so after considering such possibilities as psychephoric – mind-moving; psychehormic – mind-rousing; psycheplastic – mind-moulding; psychelytic – mind-releasing; psychezymic – mind-formenting; psycherhexic – mind-bursting forth, my choice is psychedelic – mind-manifesting (Osmond, 1957), because it is clear, euphonious and uncontaminated by other associations.

I thought one of these terms should serve and, therefore, replied to Aldous with this couplet:

To fathom Hell or soar angelic,
Just take a pinch of psychedelic.

I had no idea then how widely this word would come to be used.

What can we expect for the future of psychedelics? Who can tell? But there are some things which seem unlikely. Establishments do not change their points of view quickly or dramatically; what is likely to happen is that people will become slowly less excited and distressed regarding psychedelics, and this will coincide with wiser, more sensible and more cautious use. As the Establishment sees it, the beastly things will have apparently gone away; those who enjoy using them will, if they are wise, not prod their elders too much or say 'I told you so' too often. In the next few decades we can expect simple ways of producing psychedelic substances, probably on a domestic basis, but also fairly simple ways of preventing their more harmful effects. In

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fifty or sixty years they will probably be incorporated in Western cultures, and historians looking back will wonder what all the fuss was about. They will also, I am sure, wonder why my old friend Aldous Huxley's good advice was not taken, but then it is the fate of the wise and prophetic seldom to have their advice taken.

Let us hope that we will learn to use these remarkable substances wisely and well rather than simply as trivial entertainments. Meanwhile those of us who would become a little more unblinkered would do much worse than read this concise, admirable and well-researched book.

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