

are supported and encouraged to see themselves as engaged in a strategically played game in which other players make the rules and have a very large stake in how the game is played.

Many career professionals have stepped up to support the work of the Institute for Career Transitions because we do not want to perpetuate a game that is a constant uphill climb for the job seeker. Some of us are joining job seekers to argue that this game is not working, and some are pledging to change the system itself by fighting to increase the minimum wage, secure support for contingent workers, guarantee annual income for all workers, and build union power and

engagement. On the legislative front, we need to campaign for the passage and implementation of policies that increase the rights of workers at all levels. We must also support the enforcement of initiatives introduced by the Obama administration to punish employers for discriminatory hiring practices and restructure the hiring system. And we need to support the many social change activists who are working to build a new economic system based on worker-owned cooperatives, socially responsible firms, and the aim of shared prosperity and ecological health for all.

Sharone's book and the work of the Institute for Career Transitions play an

important role in these efforts because they rethink where the responsibility for chronic unemployment falls. Sharone's work may at first seem only to address the dynamics of the job search, but it actually extends much further in scope, encouraging us to rethink the profound effect that unchecked self-blame can have, both on those who experience it and on those who collude in exacting it. ■

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The Psyche in Psychedelic

REVIEW BY STEPHEN MO HANAN

Entheogens, Society & Law: Towards a Politics of Consciousness, Autonomy & Responsibility

by Daniel Waterman
Melrose Books, 2013

EARLIER THIS YEAR I joined some friends at a performance by the New York Philharmonic of Verdi's *Requiem Mass*. Not one of us was Catholic or professed any creed threatening an afterlife of eternal suffering for the wicked. No perpetual willies over Judgment Day. Nevertheless, when the massed voices of chorus and orchestra unleashed their frenzy in the climactic "Dies irae" section, we four, like everyone in the packed house, were awestruck, transfixed, energized with a terror deeper than anything you could glean from Bible class. No knowledge of Latin was required to register the urgent pleading of "Libera me," the joy of the "Sanctus," or the profound serenity of the

"Agnus Dei." Music like this bypasses the thinking, querulous mind into a realm of pure experience. The depth of feeling curbs any need to interpret.

I thought of this often while plowing through Daniel Waterman's *Entheogens, Society & Law*, an epic exploration of consciousness, the substances that alter it, the traditions that investigate it, and the scientific and moralistic interpretations that misconstrue it. Like Verdi, Waterman wants to break through the conceptual frames that confine our experience of reality, in search of elemental truths housed in some private interior chamber. That his method relies on sentences and not sounds is both an aid and a limitation. He may lack the dramatic genius that fuels Verdi's musical power, but his mind is as comprehensive as Bucky Fuller's, as densely detailed as Derrida's, and as erudite as Diderot's. His book offers more footnotes than the Talmud, some of them spellbinding, others interminable. By the time he reaches his sublime "Afterword," he has examined

so minutely, digressed so encyclopedically, written so densely (and, I regret to report, proofread so atrociously) that the clarity and succinct force of his conclusions are as welcome as any miracle. But what a slog!



“Entheogens” (if you haven’t already consulted a dictionary) is the more recent term for what British psychiatrist Humphry Osmond christened “psychedelics” back in 1957, when he and a Canadian colleague initiated a series of long-term studies of hallucinogenic drugs, LSD and psilocybin among them. Similar research in the United States and Europe was, despite intriguing discoveries, almost completely halted by various legislative bodies starting in the late sixties. Waterman has entrusted his book with a task no less arduous than creating a historical (and even prehistoric) context for the human investigation of mind-altering substances, probing the deep psychological roots of taboos enforced by authoritarian institutions, and proposing that without a shared commitment to individual inner growth, our species is unlikely to endure.

Not everybody is persuaded that we will, or should. Waterman offers a fascinating analysis of apocalyptic cults past and present, portraying belief in a coming end of the world as the ego’s apprehension of personal death writ large. He is unsparing in his critique of Christianity (my preferred term for the “get saved or be damned” theology that worships Jesus but ignores his advice), pointing out that the doctrine of original sin, with its “particularly insidious effect on the psyche,” has been a gift to authoritarian elites from its inception, fostering an archetype of unfitness and justifying the maintenance of strict social control. When so-called conservatives invoke “human nature” to scold the idealistic, they are merely rebranding Saint Paul for the post-Freudian market.

Entheogens, Society & Law makes a persuasive case that alternative answers to the dilemma of “fallen man” not only exist but have always existed and can be accessed directly through a person’s mental system without reference to external authority, be it church, state, or media.

Waterman isn’t shy about his own extensive entheogenic experiences, and he gives them credit for confirming a more generous view: we’re not only sinless, we are blessed. “The kingdom of heaven is within you” is a metaphoric summation of an observed condition. As he explains, “. . . our alienated state is fundamentally an illusion and spiritual awakening consists of nothing more than a dispelling of that illusion and the compulsive acting out of its implications.”

Of course, that “nothing more” can happen in a sudden flash of cosmic insight, or demand a lifetime of therapy and contemplation, or both.

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But when the illusion-compelled acting-out reaches the level of violence exhibited by the guys who boss our world, it’s clear that said illusion needs urgently to be examined. What is it? Where does it come from?

Transforming a Violent World

Violence breeds alienation which breeds more violence, *ad infinitum*. But Waterman offers another clue, drawn from data by researchers like Stanislav Grof, who have observed, when regressing patients under entheogenic supervision, strikingly similar recollections of the birth trauma. The imprint that expulsion from the womb makes on our pre-verbal minds, stored in the unconscious and once thought irretrievable, now turns out to usher us into life with a fearful

psychic upheaval that may indeed be the DNA of “original sin.” It will have violent repercussions if not addressed and healed. But if everyone feels the wound, who will do the healing?

It seems we all leave the warm and familiar womb and enter this bright, noisy life scared shitless. PTSD is our birthright, and we soon enough learn that at the far end of the journey lurks death. In between we must contend with accident, illness, pain, and even cruelty. This is why you don’t have to be Catholic, or even Christianist, to tremble at the “Dies irae.” The archetype of dread is implanted deep in every one of us and plays a huge part in the way humanity behaves.

The newborn’s instinctive bonding with its mother is nature’s way not only of compensating for the birth trauma, but of hinting at a future course that cherishes connection, intimacy, and love in place of fear and confusion. Unfortunately, not everyone takes the hint.

Given enough of life’s basic necessities, the vast majority of humankind is content to live in fellowship with our neighbors and kin. Two forces erode this. One is an insufficiency of the basics. The other is an unrestrained concept of “enough.” The first gives rise to conflict, but also to social movements requiring empathy, cohesion, and justice. As for the second, just take a look around.

The world is a dangerous place, as Fox News never tires of reminding us. Yet pundits seldom stop to ask why this is, or if it must perpetually continue. *Entheogens, Society & Law* isn’t afraid to ask. A veteran of the “counter-cultural (r)evolution of the 1960s,” the author was present as

Western authorities reacted by seeking to repress or eradicate any intimation of a link between psychedelics, non-ordinary states of consciousness, religious or mystical experience, (mental) health and the ethical problems of Western society.

Though clearly of the left, he shares the view of many from his era that political reform is insufficient (if not useless) without some corresponding development in consciousness and in values. And likewise, the sign of transformed consciousness is an ego-busting concern for the world around us, both social and planetary: a paradigm shift simultaneously among masses and elites, of the sort that the late sixties so notably spawned.

As a member of that generation (which a friend once called the “Aquarian Age shock troops”), I find myself more than occasionally wondering what went haywire. Were the prophets of a transformed world somewhat premature or completely deluded? Or did we simply underestimate the threat we posed and the tenacity of the resistance? Was “hippie spirituality”—a cosmic panorama shrunk into two words—merely the product of drug-addled, New Age nitwits, or a visionary revolt against the sociopolitical morbidity spawned by the relentless, egoistic money lust of capitalism in our time?

Time will unfold its answer, which depends on our willingness to merge the external world with the interior one that perceives and responds to it. The odds are interesting. I like the paradox in the idea of a politics of meaning. Meaning is an interpretation we locate inside ourselves, while politics is typically located in the world without. But it’s a chicken-or-egg proposition. It seems to me that the meaning of life appears only when it derives from relating to something more than ourselves, and politics matters only when they either reinforce or challenge our inner values.

Is it for me to judge if people use entheogens to get high rather than deep? No more than if they practice yoga for physical fitness rather than spiritual development. Waterman likes the analogy of tools, which can be used, misused, or left alone. If an LSD trip can make you a saint or a

psychotic, so can reading the Bible or Qur’an. It’s all in the interpreting. All in the interpreting. A free society allows everyone to weigh the pros and cons and decide for themselves, without coercion or prohibition. The true paradigm shift is one from authoritarianism to imagination, from *should* to *could*.

Such a shift flies directly in the face of competitive consumerism, to say nothing of militarism and environmental plunder. The few who profit hugely from all three do so because they have hypnotized the many into

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accepting their interpretation of the scene that life perpetually unfolds before us, commonly known as reality. This interpretation favors scientific reductionism over spiritual inquiry, habit over spontaneity, calculation over wonder, mechanism over intuition, alarm over serenity, and so forth. To challenge this, or any approved interpretation, is perilous, as history repeats and repeats.

Embracing Holistic Medicine

Every culture on every continent has had its own version of tribal indoctrination, but there have also everywhere been shamans, *curanderas*, medicine men, prophets, and contrarians, often with knowledge of mind-altering plants whose personal and social

effects Waterman vividly (if exhaustingly) documents: teachers who offered, openly or in secret, a rival, radical interpretation to counter the prevailing one. They taught paths of peace and amity, creativity and bliss, to be encountered within. Teachers remembered and forgotten, sometimes esteemed, more often spurned.

“Must then a Christ perish in torment in every age to save those that have no imagination?” asks George Bernard Shaw’s Saint Joan. Her partner in a flaming death, Lt. Muath al-Kasasbeh, is only the latest sacrifice to Moloch, the dread god who imagines only the worst. Can we even begin to imagine a world where such cruelty ceases? Do we have it within us? What would the entheogenist John Lennon say?

Waterman was raised in a secular leftist family of Holocaust survivors who settled in Holland after the war. His first entheogenic experiences were profound though not religious, except perhaps in the Tom Paine sense: “The word of God is the creation we behold.” By comparison, my Orthodox background culminated in fiery Hebrew letters streaming through space. Waterman is less inclined than I am to think of the encountered place as divinity, but it manifests through him no less for that, as loving attention to the world and society and a call to healing.

Early in the book, Waterman expounds (at perhaps unnecessary length) on the varied meanings of the Greek word *pharmakon*, from which we derive pharmacist, Big Pharma, etc. It can be translated as “medicine,” “remedy,” and even “poison.” He uses this to transition into the theme of interpretation that runs throughout. To Vietnam-era upholders of the status quo, mescaline was definitely a poison. To redwood-hugging hippies it was a remedy. Each would have viewed the other as insane.

But surely there’s middle ground, a place where meeting is possible. Everyone can see the world humanity has created since the Industrial and

American Revolutions is altered materially almost beyond recognition. But the psychological system that undergirds the material one is where the changes begin. Today's world is a product of ideas that began in the minds of countless individuals: Thomas Edison and Adolf Hitler, Clara Barton and Samuel Colt, Steve Jobs and Mao Zedong. If the intelligence of our species is to outlast its destructive tendencies, we must turn to therapeutic intervention. If there exist medicines in our world that can restore a perplexed mind to clarity in ways that forge deep connections with others and with the natural world, wouldn't we be fools to overlook them?

Change is in the air. Johns Hopkins, NYU, the University of New Mexico, and schools in London and Zurich are sponsoring clinical trials of the palliative effects of psilocybin—a compound found in some species of entheogenic

mushrooms—for alcoholics and cancer patients. Results are encouraging, outstandingly so in terms of curing alcoholism and helping the terminally ill live joyously and face death fearlessly. Leading neuroscientists have begun to consider and appreciate aspects of the mind that overrule scientism itself, implying that the mystics may have been right all along. Only this moment is real.

Forty-five years ago Ram Dass proposed in *Be Here Now* that the rational mind is “a perfect servant and a lousy master.” Where is the better master that the mind is designed to serve? Waterman finds it in the maze of the unconscious, a maze complicated by false starts, dead ends, surges of panic and terror. Yet in due course the maze leads to where the ultimate mystery awaits, a mystery that has no name because, like music, it defies reason:

We desperately need to evolve a deeper, more empowering understanding of human nature and history with which to meet the challenges we face . . . a radical awakening to the powers of the human heart/mind/spirit that is potentially available to every human being, precisely because it comes from within, and not from some mystical external source that we cannot question.

I hope Daniel Waterman keeps these questions coming. The arc of the moral universe is indeed long, but it calls on every one of us to make it shorter. ■

STEPHEN MO HANAN performed on Broadway and London's West End in some of the most conspicuous musicals of the eighties. Now a playwright, his latest, *Hush Money*, was a semifinalist for the O'Neill Playwrights Conference and the Bay Area Playwrights Festival.

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