

A WORKING PAPER:
MEMO ON THE RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS OF
THE CONSCIOUSNESS-CHANGING DRUGS

(LSD, Mescaline, Psilocybin)

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THIS memo is an attempt to pull together information and opinion relevant to an assessment of the religious significance of psychedelic ("mind-manifesting") drugs. Its conclusions are tentative and, except where noted, represent no one's opinion but my own. I was associated for nine months with the Leary-Alpert group in Cambridge, Mass., which undertook and encouraged important research before their recent disbandment. (A number of the members are continuing research, and are publishing a journal, *The Psychedelic Review*.¹)

There is by now an extensive literature, both technical and popular, on the effects of the psychedelic drugs. Physiologically speaking, the evidence indicates that these substances are not dangerous if responsibly used, and that they are non-habit-forming. Most researchers agree that a physiological tolerance is built up with regular use. Regarding psychological effects, there is a remarkably wide range of opinion. See especially Cholden², and Abramson³;

both are symposia exhibiting sharp differences of view. In general, those concerned with biochemical, medical or experimental-psychiatric research consider the drugs as hallucinogenic (hallucination-producing) and psychotomimetic (producing psychotic-like symptoms); while those concerned with psychotherapy or religion or aesthetics consider them psychologically beneficial and sometimes revelatory of new truth. For instance, one experimenter reported that none of his subjects ever requested LSD again, while another stated that 70% of his subjects did so! A specialist in internal medicine interested in research on states of delirium decided to experiment on such states by ingesting LSD himself. He reports:

This was no confused, disoriented delirium, but something quite different . . . our efforts toward understanding or defining this remarkable experience have been futile . . . the core of the LSD situation remains in the dark, quite untouched by our activities.⁴

Another, scientifically-minded psychiatrist found himself undergoing a literal rebirth experience: "floating around in

¹ P. O. Box 223, Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

² Louis Cholden, ed., *Lysergic Acid Diethylamide and Mescaline in Experimental Psychiatry*. N. Y.: Grune & Stratton, 1956.

³ H. A. Abramson, ed. *The Use of LSD*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

the amniotic fluid and suddenly going down through the vaginal canal to be born."⁵ These last two cases illustrate the way in which one's view of the *meaning* of the drug's effects can move one from the first to the second camp.

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE UNDER THE DRUGS

Recently I made a brief study of the reports of sixteen graduate students and others who had taken LSD or psilocybin in small groups in private homes, under the auspices of the Cambridge group. An extremely wide range of experience was reported. There were a number of references to self-objectification (i. e., standing off from oneself and observing), and to gains in insight about oneself. There was great variation in the degree of love experienced: some felt closer to other persons, others felt more separated and isolated. A few subjects sensed more acutely the hostility and projections of other persons, while others felt persons around them "truer to themselves" and freed of all defensiveness. Emotions ran the gamut from terror, depression or loneliness to feelings of great strength, deep affection or Rabelaisian joy. Of experiences with specifically religious content, there are many sorts: one subject stated that the head of Christ with a crown of thorns came to mind; another felt himself brought before God, tried, condemned and dragged away in chains.⁶ When he awoke and found himself alive, he felt a genuine reprieve, a chance for a new beginning. In one of the more thorough and carefully controlled of the studies of the effects of the drugs,⁷ the following statements were significantly more typical of the beliefs and values of subjects following administration of LSD than before:

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ "Research Program of the International Foundation for Advanced Study," Menlo Park, Calif., August, 1963. Mimeographed.

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.

Behind the apparent multiplicity of things in the world of science and common sense there is a single reality in which all things are united.

I have a deep conviction that there are, at the core of one's being, no forces or impulses of a destructive nature.

Everyone of us is the most important thing there is in the universe—and at the same time not more important than a fly or a blade of grass. (Erich Fromm)

Life is the destiny you are bound to refuse until you have consented to die. (W. H. Auden)

HOW GENUINELY MYSTICAL IS DRUG MYSTICISM?

There is a wide consensus among those who have themselves taken these new substances, or who have studied the reports of others, that the subjective experiences are sometimes strikingly like those reported by mystics and visionaries of the past. In an extensive questionnaire study of 82 subjects who took psilocybin at Harvard, the following "mystical" characteristics were cited by well over half the subjects as occurring "quite a lot" or "among the most important aspects of my experience": loss of time sense; objects more significant and beautiful; being able to operate at several levels at once; extreme pleasure, ecstasy, cosmic joy, paradise; feeling of being very wise, knowing everything; feeling that nothing need be said.⁸

In a study of the effects of a moderate dosage of psilocybin administered before a Good Friday Service, Dr. Walter Pahnke has provided important substantiation of the mystical nature of some psychedelic experiences. In con-

⁸ Ralph Metzner *et. al.*, "The relation of expectation and setting to experience with psilocybin: A questionnaire study." Harvard University (dittoed, 1963). See also the reference in footnote 18.

trast to the control subjects, nearly all of the ten experimental subjects reported subjective experiences characteristic of traditional mysticism (e. g. paradoxicality feelings, unity, persisting positive changes toward the self). This investigation, a Ph. D. dissertation at Harvard, is of especial importance because of its careful methodological controls.⁹

An unqualified affirmative answer to the question of "genuineness" is given by William James. W. T. Stace and Henri Bergson are more cautious, but nonetheless incline to agree with James in his evaluation.¹⁰ A much more critical attitude is taken by R. C. Zaehner, a Roman Catholic scholar, who asserts that Aldous Huxley's experiences under mescaline are "natural mysticism" and "Eastern mysticism" (Hindu and Zen), but they are in no sense theistic or Christian mysticism.¹¹ Stace asserts categorically that "if the phenomenological descriptions of the two experiences [i. e., drug-induced and not drug-induced] are indistinguishable, so far as can be ascertained, then it cannot be denied that if one is a genuine mystical experience the other is also." Although feeling that we do not know enough about the effects of the drugs to be certain, Stace uses as the only modern example of his "extrovertive" form of mysticism the report of a person who had taken mescaline. Regarding his own experiences with nitrous oxide, William James comments:

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.¹²

Several sentences later he adds, "... to me the living sense of its reality only comes in the artificial mystic state of mind." It is of interest that James found both inspiration and confirmation for his philosophical pluralism in the experiences of "a pluralistic mystic" who experienced his revelations under anaesthesia.¹³ One basis of James' confidence in these matters is his refusal to judge any truth by its origin: "By their fruits ye shall know them, not by their roots. . . The roots of a man's virtue are inaccessible to us. . . Our practice is the only sure evidence, even to ourselves, that we are genuinely Christians."¹⁴

THE PROBLEM OF "CHEMICAL RELIGION"

Aldous Huxley¹⁵ has attempted to come to closer grips with the charge of "mere chemical religion." He points out that many of the means used by religious aspirants in the past—e. g., Yoga, fasting, deprivation of sleep, self-flagellation—have *physiological* effects. Changes in body chemistry have always been a part of the *context* of mystical experience. But that such states, even when drug-induced, do not result simply from physiological manipulation is the consensus of most. In this sense the charge of "chemical religion" is misleading.

However, the preceding considerations do not set at rest the minds of those who believe that the use of any "ar-

⁹ A full report is not yet available. It is discussed briefly in Noah Gordon, "The Hallucinogenic Drug Cult," *The Reporter*, 29, 3, August 15, 1963.

¹⁰ William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, N. Y.: Longmans, Green, 1902; W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, Lip-pincott, 1960; Henri Bergson, *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Henry Holt, 1935.

¹¹ R. C. Zaehner, "Menace of Mescaline," *Blackfriars* (London), vol. 35, 1954, pp. 310 ff.

¹² *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 388.

¹³ William James, *Memories and Studies*, N. Y.: Longmans, Green, 1911.

¹⁴ *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 20.

¹⁵ Aldous Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, N. Y.: Harper, 1954; *Heaven and Hell*, N. Y.: Harper, 1956. (Both books are now issued together as a paperback, 1963.)

tificial means" in religious matters is questionable. Some religious persons feel that any highly structured spiritual discipline runs the danger of trying to storm the gates of Heaven, and thus of trusting insufficiently in the Grace of God. Two further facts are relevant here. One, noted by at least two religiously-oriented investigators, is that once the possibility of religious or aesthetic experience has been opened by the triggering action of the psychedelics, such experiences sometimes recur without such aids. The door to religious experience is unlocked. The other fact is the contemporary spiritual situation. We live in an age of "the hidden God," of the silence of the Holy Spirit. Some advocates of "drug mysticism" suggest that God may himself be at work in these recent discoveries of biochemical science.¹⁶

RELIGION OR HALLUCINATION?

When we move from the physiological to the psychological level of interpretation, we encounter a remarkable phenomenon. Certain types of inner events are experienced as fearful and hallucinatory by some subjects, and ecstatic, religious and highly beneficial by others. For example, the loss of a familiar and well-defined sense of self is experienced by some as slipping toward psychosis, by others as moving toward the realm of the Divine Life. Aldous Huxley comments on the issue in this way:

¹⁶ We shall not attempt in this paper to deal with the physiology of psychedelic drugs and the psychodynamic correlates of these changes. For a thorough study of the chemical and biochemical aspects of the drugs, see Ralph Metzner, "The Pharmacology of Psychedelic Drugs I," *Psychedelic Review*, 1, 1, Summer, 1963. Good discussions of psychodynamics may be found in the Abramson volume, already cited. Perhaps the best survey of the literature is Sanford N. Unger, "Mescaline, LSD, Psilocybin, and Personality Change," *Psychiatry: Journal for the Study of Interpersonal Processes*, 26, 2, May, 1963.

... it is important to examine the words we currently use. Take the word "hallucination", for example. The word carries a certain pejorative overtone. To call an experience a hallucination is, implicitly, to condemn it as unreal and in some way discreditable. But now let us consider what happens when we take mescaline. Looking at the ... world, we perceive it as being quantitatively very much as it was before, but qualitatively quite different, for everything has become inconceivably beautiful and significant. What reason have we for thinking that beauty and significance are less real than ugliness and dullness? A person who has taken mescaline sees the world as Wordsworth describes it in his great "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality in Childhood." Was Wordsworth the victim of a hallucination because, as a child and youth, he saw all things glorified, transfigured, clothed in celestial light? Or is it we who are living in hallucinatory illusion, because we fail to see anything in the world around us that is not drab, commonplace, lifeless and without significance?¹⁷

The highly aesthetic character of Huxley's revelations under mescaline is obviously a product of his unusual background and sensitivities. (As one quip has it, they are "99% Huxley and one-half gram mescaline.") But the differences are not only in the content of the experiences; events described in similar ways by different persons are *interpreted* in highly diverse ways. We are here confronted with inner events which are described *both* as "religious-mystical" and "hallucinatory". Seldom has the demand for the rethinking of the nature of mystical, experiential religion been so insistent.

WHAT IS THE "TRUTH-STATUS" OF THE EXPERIENCE?

The issue of hallucination vs. religious truth can be illustrated more explicitly. It is not uncommon for a person under

¹⁷ Cholden, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-8.

LSD or psilocybin to believe that he knows exactly what is going on in the mind of another, only to discover in conversation afterwards that he had been mistaken. The Realm of One Mind which he thought he had entered was an illusion, by objective standards. The whole experience could be reinterpreted as a kind of dream, in which one withdraws from the real world and experiences an imagined realm. (Parenthetically, it should be noted that there are a number of important differences between the dreams of sleep and the drug experiences: one feels closer to normal waking consciousness under the drug than in dreaming, and is sometimes able to choose "where he wants to go" and to recall where he is and what is happening to him; also the loss of sense of self and the discovery of levels of reality different from the usual space-time world are much more frequent.) Yet during the drug experience itself, the new and unfamiliar Reality is compelling, indisputable, unmistakably real! Can one place more reliance on a second-hand, after-the-fact interpretation than on the combined testimony of all one's faculties in a moment of experiential knowing? Here we are face to face with weighty philosophical problems which impinge on the interpretation and meaning of *any* mystical knowing, whether drug-induced or not. For an extensive and scholarly discussion of these matters, and one sympathetic to the claims of mystics, the reader is referred to the work of W. T. Stace referred to above. The following comments will approach mystical knowing first as a *subjective state*, and secondly as a mode of seeing which makes some kind of *direct contact with self-transcending Reality*.

My reading of many reports of psychedelic experiences, plus conversations with some who have claimed religious visionary experiences under drugs, suggest that they are a drawing-together, a focusing and vivifying, a confirmation of insights

and meanings from many sources. This concentration of knowing is suggested by the phrases, "this is it," "now I've seen it," "face to face with God," which occur in the records. That this is generally true is confirmed by many recent studies. In one of these, for example, 61% (of 194 subjects) indicated that they had had "an experience giving greater understanding of myself and others." These questionnaires were administered on an average of 10 months after the LSD experience.¹⁸ The individual reports suggest these "peak experiences" dramatize, crystallize and make lucid certain dim feelings and perceivings which hitherto had had neither clarity nor convincingness. And in overturning one's narrow self-limited world and opening him to the possibility of non-ego-centered seeing, they light the path ahead. In short, they consolidate the past, and envisage the future.

This still does not answer the problem of hallucinations. If there are hallucinatory elements in these mystical visions, how may one determine the trustworthiness of the wisdom and insight which seem to flow from them? It is my view that they cannot be trusted without check and confirmation of some kind. Experience can deceive, just as can the senses and the demonstrations of logic. "Discerning the spirits" has ever been a problem to religious people. It seems clear that any new knowledge acquired under the psychedelic drugs must be subjected to the tests of *reason* and of *subsequent experience* (one writer calls the latter "existential validation"). Do the insights lead toward the deepening of human relations, toward perceiving the world more accurately, toward freedom from ego-centeredness? Do they "jibe"

¹⁸ A study of Dr. Oscar Janiger, reported in "The Subjective After-Effects of Psychedelic Experiences: A Summary of Four Recent Questionnaire Studies," by the Editors, *Psychedelic Review*, I, 1, Summer, 1963.

with those already-affirmed values around which one disposes one's life? William James has discussed at length this "testing of the Spirits" by their practical consequences.

We may advance our discussion at this point by citing an instance of a drug-mystic's dealing with the dilemma of religion vs. hallucination. It was mentioned earlier that one subject discovered he had not been in the realm of One Mind in the manner he had assumed. In spite of this discovery, however, he found it impossible to dismiss it all as illusory. After much weighing and consideration, he finally decided that his experience of Unity was true in a *symbolic, if not in a literal*, sense. His transcendental experience dramatized for him the fact that there is less separation, less discrete individuality among men, than his everyday consciousness assumed. Rational confirmation of this fact was attested, for him, by other interpersonal experiences and by some of the discoveries of science, e.g., recent studies in the interaction of the biomagnetic fields of organisms, and in the influence of culture on personality.

The above discussion has dealt with mystical experience primarily as a subjective state; to interpret the experience of Unitive Consciousness as "symbolic" of man's inter-relatedness rather than as an immediate knowing is to assume a separate subjective consciousness which grasps objective facts by means of symbols. But if we carry the idea of human inter-relatedness very far, the dichotomy of "subjective state" vs. "objective fact" begins to break down. Up to this point, in other words, our analysis of what is valid in the experience has assumed a frame of reference which the experience itself calls into question. The more radically we interpret the symbolic meaning (i.e. the fact of human inter-connectedness), the more we move away from the usual subject-object mode of thinking and the more ready we are to interpret

the sense of Unity as an immediate apprehension of Reality. It is thus that most mystics have viewed their revelations. If the skeptical drug-mystic of the 20th Century were to let his newly-wise post-psychedelic reason correct the dichotomizations of his culturally-bound pre-psychedelic reason, his mystical vision of Reality might become credible on its own terms. Reason, in other words, can correct reason's errors.

But the psychedelic explorer whose experiences we have been discussing was not satisfied. He insisted that there were hallucinatory elements in his Unitive experience which must be taken full account of, epistemologically, in *any* interpretation of it. He insisted that there was an intimate relation between the personality of the individual voyager and his so-called insights into the nature of Reality. It was in this connection that he described his second psychedelic session. As a "negative" experience, it illustrated more dramatically than the first the molding of cosmic knowings by psychodynamic factors. In contrast to his encounter with the Realm of One Mind during the first drug session, the second one presented him with the *Angst* of total annihilation of ego. His panic was apparently keyed off by his intense desire to enter more completely into the Unitive Consciousness. The reality of his own death filled him with horror, and he glimpsed the impossibility of ever completing his spiritual pilgrimage toward surrender of self. He experienced with quaking intensity what others have called the Abyss, and he knew within himself the terror of nihilism. But two qualifying insights soon followed. One was that "the Abyss" was to some extent his personal abyss, i. e. his own neurotic trends. (The neurotic pattern in this person involved a search for spiritual glory obviously unrealizable in his actual life and behavior.) He also began to understand that the Abyss, as only one aspect of cosmic reality, might have a

complement in the vision of the Godhead represented by Unitive Consciousness. The full psychedelic vision, if taken seriously, would—like the sustainer Vishnu and the destroyer Shiva in the Hindu pantheon of Gods—encompass both the benign and the destructive aspects of the Divine.

An image of Reality suggested by the non-separation of subject and object may be helpful. Huston Smith, in an important article on contemporary modes of knowing,¹⁹ has suggested that reality is an ellipse, one focus of which is the objective-appearing world and the other the perceiver. The extent to which and the clarity with which individual consciousnesses know this reality varies immeasurably. The more distorted perceptions are those in which the observer-pole intrudes too much. Some aspects of Reality may shine forth in the experience of anyone, but the encounters of some of us are more heavily freighted with individual problems and distortions than others. Such distortions are probably caused by a *combination* of individual needs and conflicts, and culturally-transmitted screens and blinders.²⁰

An example of distortion by individual neurotic trends has already been suggested. In his moment of panic our drug-mystic was convinced there was nothing in the cosmos but Abyss. Only later did he recognize how much his own neurotic patterns had molded this frightening perception. But we can go to the opposite

extreme and assert it was "all neurosis" only by continuing doggedly to maintain the old subject-object dichotomy. It is safest to assume both a cosmic reference and an idiosyncratic influence in the total experience.

Parenthetically, we may note another reason for rejecting the view that any person's grasp of the nature of things is measured by his "mental health." Persons with psychiatric problems may be enabled to comprehend more perceptively than socially-adjusted individuals the presence of a "confining stockade" of cultural frames of reference.²¹ Some Old Testament prophets make good case studies in this regard.

Relatively little is yet known about the *cultural* determinants of experience; the field is a controversial one. Since religious thought is the aspect of the culture with which we are most concerned here, it will be useful to speculate on some theological aspects of the Abyss experience. The panic of Non-being seems more intrinsic to Western than to Eastern religion. There is in Buddhism a Great Doubt in the pilgrimages of some devotees, but it apparently occupies a less important place than the Dark Night of the Soul, Luther's *Anfechtungen*, and similar temptations, testings, and periods of spiritual dryness in the West. It may be that the encounter with the Abyss stems largely from the Western concept of God as an entity, as Other. No matter how much Whitehead or Tillich we may have absorbed, the root cultural intuition of the Divine as *over against* the individual person remains. Thus the absence of any experienced sense of God's presence is felt as His withdrawal—as Abyss. And if He is Other, there must be separation between what enters into

¹⁹ Huston Smith, "The Revolution in Western Thought," *Saturday Evening Post*, Aug. 26, 1961.

²⁰ Several writers have stressed recently the "confining stockade of verbalized symbols" which limit our seeing: Aldous Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, N. Y.: Harper, 1954; Erich Fromm, D. T. Suzuki, R. DeMartino, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, N. Y.: Harper, 1960; Alan Watts, *Psychotherapy East and West*, N. Y.: Pantheon, 1961.

²¹ For development of this thesis in the context of the new drugs, see Joe K. Adams, "Psychosis: 'Experimental' and Real," *Psychedelic Review*, 1, 2, Fall, 1963.

our experience "from Him" and what arises simply "out of our own unconscious." At root the problem is not the anthropomorphizing of God; it is the Aristotelian tendency to see persons—and thus God—as separate and self-subsistent entities.

If the thought-forms of the West continue to move away from Aristotelian and toward Process categories, some of the metaphysical puzzles we have been discussing will wither away. The "skin-encapsulated ego" will cease to dominate our perceiving and thinking. What our drug subject conceives as "his" insights or conflicts will be seen as particularized expressions of wider conscious processes, perhaps evolutionary processes. (The "evolution of consciousness" has become an important theme in contemporary intellectual history. See, for example, Charles Davy, *Towards a Third Culture*, London: Faber and Faber, 1961.) The "I" of the drug experience may be seen as an aspect, a temporary focus of an ever-flowing life-process. This brings us back to Huston Smith's image of the ellipse, of which the observer-pole is one focus. From this perspective the Abyss and the Unitive Consciousness are "knowings" shaped by the three factors: personality dynamics, cultural thought-forms, and the nature of Reality. To take a psychedelic visionary experience as direct and unmediated insight into cosmic Truth is, in the light of modern knowledge, inexcusably naive. But to interpret the vision as simply psychopathology, or cultural conditioning, or some combination of these, is inexcusably reductive. It is reductive because, as a result of the subject-object split still assumed by much of modern science, it falsely separates the experienter from the cosmic matrix of his experience. It "reduces" everything, in other words, to the subject-pole. A proper understanding of the psychedelic experience can guide us along the knife edge leading between reductionism and naiveté.

PREPARATION, AND THE CHARGE OF "CHEAP RELIGION"

The relation between preparation for the drug session and the nature of the experience is problematical. One clear result of research so far is that *set* (expectations and the general state of the subject just before the session) and *setting* (external conditions at the time of administration) are of considerable importance in determining what happens. For example, the administration of LSD to a group of religious volunteers (Mennonites) in an experimental setting dealing with mental illness led to uniformly unpleasant experiences and, so far as reported, no religious experiences.²² In contrast, Dr. Timothy Leary,²³ whose main concern in drug research is "transcendental experiences", summarizes his results: "Less than ten per cent of our original sample were believers or churchgoers, yet such terms as 'god', 'divine', 'deep religious experience', 'meeting the infinite' occurred in over half the reports!" The operation of "set" may be illustrated from a questionnaire study of 82 subjects at Harvard.²⁴ Statistical analysis revealed that the mood of "social affection" may be one of the sets determinative of mystical states. This mood was more likely than any of seven other moods (e.g., Concentration, Pleasantness, Anxiety) to precede the religious-mystical cluster of items (e.g., "feeling a unity of all things," "confronting the mystery of life"). In contrast, the specific expectation in the subject that he will have a religious or mystical experience does *not* correlate significantly with the

²² Abramson, *op. cit.*

²³ Timothy Leary and Walter H. Clark, "Religious Implications of Consciousness Expanding Drugs," *Religious Education*, May-June, 1963.

²⁴ Ralph Metzner *et al.*, "The relation of expectation and setting to experience with psilocybin: A questionnaire study." Harvard University (dittoed, 1963).

actual occurrence of these religious-mystical states!

Clearly we are faced with some puzzles here. In some settings even religious persons fail to have transcendent experiences. Interest in or expectations of having them does not seem to induce them. On the other hand, in a favorable setting, many subjects not religious in their interests or motivation find that transcendental or mystical terminology is the only one in which they can conceptualize what has happened to them. We simply do not yet understand what personality variables are significant in determining who, under what conditions, will experience a mystical state. Dr. Pahnke's study suggests that the more deeply mystical experiences were granted to those persons who were most temperamentally open to them (i. e., already having experienced some degree of mystical religion, or open and undefensive toward such an experience). Dr. Denber of New York City "felt no question that the basic result of taking mescaline is a function of one's antecedents . . . one's past experiences, one's present state and one's future aspirations."²⁵ To the variables of set and setting we must add that of pre-drug personality. Further research on the relation between personality of the subject and his psychedelic experience is going forward at the International Foundation for Advanced Study, Menlo Park, California.

My own limited observation—in a setting favorable to religion—suggests that the deepest and most *personally significant* spiritual encounters came to those who were *prepared* for them. One striking example of this is found in the consistently mystical experiences of a long-time devotee of Zen practice, G. Ray Jordan.²⁶ He documents in a con-

vincing manner his conclusion: "The profound intuitive understandings which have erupted during my sessions have not contradicted but tended to confirm my earlier ideas and aspirations regarding religion and life."

These somewhat contradictory reports and statistical findings can be reconciled only by taking account of the import of the phrase "personally significant." The significance of any experience is dependent on how it fits into the psychic economy of the person. Fit with the psychic structure depends on at least three factors: the individual's personality before taking the drug; his preparation for it; and the manner in which he interprets, implements and consolidates his experience. As one example, we can assume that a religious, self-dissatisfied person, open to new and off-beat experiences, would be more likely to want to take the drug and to *work at* integrating the insights gained into his life philosophy than would a more rigid or intellectually lazy person. If these assumptions are correct, we have already gone some distance toward responding to the charge of "cheap religion".

There is not much question that the elements of the mystical experience *per se* (e. g., transcendence of time-space) are easily available, perhaps more so than ever before in human history. The *cost* is elicited from those (probably a small minority of those taking the drugs) for whom the "artificial" mystical states actually bring about a transformation or deepening of personal life. This cost is paid in spiritual seeking, perhaps in self-discipline, *before* the drug session (which may in some cases be a matter of years or decades or a lifetime of seeking), and in the working out and applying of the implications of the mystical encounter in one's particular human situation *after* it occurs. One interesting example of this is provided in the case of Ray Jordan, quoted above. He reports an unusually profound and intense

²⁵ Cholden, *op. cit.*

²⁶ G. Ray Jordan, Jr., "Reflections on LSD, Zen Meditation and Satori," *Psychologia* (Kyoto, Japan), vol. 5, 1961, pp. 124-130.

mystical realization during an LSD session a few days after a *sesshin* (several days of almost continuous meditation in a Zen monastery) and immediately following a two-hour-long meditation with his wife.

I am uncomfortably aware that my Puritan-Quaker self has had a large share in these conclusions. They rest all too heavily on the Law that the laborer should reap full reward for his labors. It is just possible that God, in His inscrutable Grace, may wish to shatter all our Pharisaic pretensions, and through these remarkable chemical substances gracefully provide glimpses of the realm of the Spirit precisely to those whose paths would otherwise have never come near it.

A residue of uncomfortableness remains. Reason may remedy *reason's* errors, but can it assess a lived reality? Emily Dickinson, that most honest and intellectual of all the analysts of mind and experience, concludes:

The rainbow never tells me
That gust or storm are by;
Yet she is more convincing
Than philosophy . . .

THE ETHIC OF "EXPERIENCING"

Recent cultural studies (e. g., Spindler²⁷) suggest that there are two different "value orientations" which characterize our culture. The first, the more traditional, is related to "the Protestant ethic" and stresses such things as achievement in work, orientation toward the future, independence, puritan morality; the other is newer, shares some of the characteristics of David Riesmann's "other-directedness" and emphasizes sociability, self-expressive and aesthetic activity, "experiencing", orientation to the present, and a relativistic moral attitude. It is the latter group of values which emerge from

a reading of descriptions of drug sessions. Aesthetic enjoyment, novel (sometimes ecstatic) experiencing, detachment from worldly responsibilities, are frequently reported. It is difficult to say to what extent the rise of "an ethic of experiencing" has fed the tremendous burgeoning of interest in the psychedelic substances; obviously the rediscovery and synthesizing of *new* drugs was one major factor. But it is clear that for many the frequent taking of them is an expression of this emerging ethic.

There are two dangers arising from this marriage of drug sessions and the emergent value orientation. One, paradoxically, is a form of other-worldliness. For some the discovery that one can have frequent mystical experiences is heady wine. Mundane concerns fade into the background and the "transcendental vision" becomes an end in itself. (This fascination with the experience for its own sake was one of the sources of friction in the Harvard research on psilocybin and of its eventual discontinuance under the auspices of that University.) The other danger is that of cultism. There are evidences of the formation of redemptive groups, of new "churches" with frequent drug-mediated transcendental experiences at their center. These groups have the advantage of freedom to explore new avenues of religious experience and expression. This should not be discounted. On the other hand, as Rufus Jones has said, "To sever one's roots in history and in the slowly-gathered content of religious faith is 'to build all inward' . . . , is to suffer shrinkage, and to run the tremendous risk of ending in moral and spiritual bankruptcy" ²⁸

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE RELIGIOUSLY-CONCERNED

In 1925 the psychologist, James Leuba, attempted to discount all religious mys-

²⁷ George D. Spindler, "Education in a Transforming American Culture," *Harvard Educational Review*, 1955, vol. 25, pp. 145-156.

²⁸ Rufus Jones, *Quakerism, A Spiritual Movement*, p. 72.

ticism by exhibiting its roots in natural processes.²⁹ In this argument, the major thrust was the linking of the "higher" forms of religious mysticism (e. g., Quaker or Roman Catholic) with the drug-induced visions and ecstasies of primitive peoples. The discovery and widespread use of these old and new psychedelic drugs makes this link much less tenuous. It raises importunately the query: What is the relation between religious experience and natural processes? Two opposite reactions are possible. One is to coalesce the two, and to lose all sense of tension between the Divine Life and the world of nature. The other is a sharp repudiation by "theologians of the Word" of experience as the basis of religious faith. Karl Barth in his earlier writings is the clearest spokesman of this position. The gap between such Christian thinkers and those who support a more experiential religion (e. g. Jung, Tillich) may be widened.

The central issue is one of direct experience vs. a faith based on commitment and obedience. This paper is perhaps best concluded by some questions which Timothy Leary posed to a group of Lutheran psychologists at the 1963 Convention of the American Psychological Association:

Is your [religious] advisor talking from direct experience, or simply repeating clichés? . . . Do his words spring from a

spiritual or from a secular point of view? Is he motivated by a dedicated quest for answers to basic questions, or is he protecting his own social-psychological position, his own secular game? How would the debate sound to you if you were fatally diseased with a week to live, and thus less committed to secular issues? . . . Is the point of view one which opens up or closes down? Are you being urged to explore, experience, gamble out of spiritual faith, join someone who shares your cosmic ignorance on a collaborative voyage of discovery? . . . If he is against what he calls "artificial methods of illumination," ask him what constitutes the natural. Words? Rituals? Tribal customs? Alkaloids? . . . If your advisor is against LSD, what is he for?³⁰

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

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²⁹ James H. Leuba, *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism*. Harcourt, Brace, 1925.

³⁰ Timothy Leary, "The Religious Experience: Its Production and Interpretation," 1963. (Mimeographed.)