



“A NECESSARY BUT NOT SUFFICIENT CONDITION”: PSYCHEDELIC MYSTICISM, PERENNIAL LIMINALITY, AND THE LIMITS OF SUPERNATURAL THEISM

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ABSTRACT

*In 1957, Aldous Huxley published *The Doors of Perception*, a work that would galvanize debates regarding the sacredness and profaneness of mystical consciousness. In connecting psychedelically inspired, unmediated perception with mystical, and perennial, modes of understanding, Huxley, critics like R. C. Zaehner declared, elided the conditions that make mystical consciousness possible, inserting an amoral universal monism where only theistic doctrines should function. The comparative debates that subsequently emerged over the nature of real versus ersatz mysticism, while questioning critically the connection between morality and mysticism, ultimately extend beyond a mere critique of psychedelic culture. More distinctly, the debates over the “authenticity,” “truth,” and ethical weight of psychedelic mysticism demonstrate the challenges perennial beliefs posed to traditional, supernaturally based monotheistic religions. What critics of psychedelic mysticism fail to understand, as evidenced by Zaehner’s extended critique of Huxley, is the efficacy of psychedelics as a sacramental source for reimagining the experience of everyday living. The significance of reading the perennial undertones of the psychedelic experience can thus be found in Huxley’s overarching religious proclamation: “The truth is, of course, that we are all organically related to God, to Nature and to our fellow men.” To inhabit the perennial philosophy as a mode of being makes unitive interconnection the lived expression of reality; it reveals, as Huxley’s final psychedelic revelation signifies, that “one never loves enough.” Indeed, as this article argues through an engagement with the comparative debates that emerged in the 1960s, the liminal spaces unveiled in psychedelic consciousness—between the divine wonders of theism and the natural emptiness of monism—helped the 1960s counterculture reimagine, and reengage, complex dialogues between self and other, between the always already and the never quite yet. In so doing, psychedelic mysticism comes to represent an entry point into a perennial religion in which the divisive characteristics of modern religious and political positions gives way to an unmediated space of interconnection.*

Here, then, the psychedelic becomes the entheogenic: it inspires—as it did for members of the Marsh Chapel Experiment, a case study this article concludes with—a unitive, spiritual experience structured within an alteration of consciousness unbounded and unlimited.

KEYWORDS

Mysticism; Perennialism Psychedelic; Entheogen; Aldous Huxley; Sixties

Among the by-products of this state of being, the given fact of love was a kind of intuitive understanding of other people, a “discernment of spirits.”

—Aldous Huxley, “Letter to Dr. Humphry Osmond,” 1955

Thus the confusion that is popularly made between nature mysticism and the mysticism of the Christian saints can only discredit the latter. By making the confusion one is forced into the position that God is simply another term for Nature; and it is an observable fact that in Nature there is neither morality nor charity nor even common decency. God, then, is reduced to the sum-total of natural impulses in which the terms “good” and “evil” have no meaning.

—R. C. Zaehner, *Mysticism Sacred and Profane*, 1957

In his now iconic retelling of the discovery, development, and explosive impact of lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), the man commonly noted as its father, Albert Hofmann, describes LSD apostle Timothy Leary as the “enfant terrible” of sixties psychedelic culture. Hofmann, while sensitive to Leary’s spiritual enthusiasm for LSD, was highly concerned with “the propagation of LSD use among juveniles.” Consequently, while Hofmann describes Leary as a “man who truly soared high in the clouds,” he was also brazenly careless, tending “to underrate or completely overlook practical difficulties, unpleasant facts, and dangers,” an opinion Hofmann applied generally to the psychedelic fêtes dominating the 1960s hippie scene.¹ Hofmann’s opinion, coming forty years after the two initially met in Basel, Switzerland, reflects a broader critique that cuts pessimistically through the emerging psychedelic culture in which both Hofmann and Leary played a foundational role. For Hofmann, as with many other early proponents of LSD as a medical device, Leary’s cavalier celebration of psychedelics (along with those of Aldous Huxley, Alan Watts, and Richard Alpert, better known as Ram Dass), “shifted the focus from what should have been the essential issue.” In denouncing their scientific perspective by the mid-1960s, these figures, according to Hofmann, subverted the austere record of empirical evidence supporting medical use, thereafter transforming psychedelic substances—primarily mescaline, LSD, and psilocybin—into a social, scientific, spiritual, and cultural “taboo.”²

In a wide-ranging 2002 interview, Hofmann furthers this perspective, arguing that the hippie counterculture of the 1960s, spurred on by figures like Leary, transformed a distinctly positive aspect of “the therapeutic pharmacopeia” of the late 1950s/early 1960s into a self-serving “escape.”³ What was once of “great value to psychoanalysis and psychiatry” became a perceived “pharmacological panacea” implemented by an unprepared youth culture who had “dropped out” from modern culture, only to experience the isolated pangs of what cultural critic Theodore Roszak labels “counterfeit infinity.”⁴ Hofmann and Roszak, while approaching sixties psychedelic culture through distinct frames, partake in an all-too-common narrative that has eclipsed the efficacy of psychedelics, specifically obscuring the common (though not ubiquitous) interpretation that psychedelics, in “cleansing the doors of perception,” provide direct access to, and experience of, mystical knowledge (gnosis).

The critique of psychedelic mysticism follows two key paths, both emerging simultaneously to the psychedelic culture of the 1960s. The first developed initially out of the scientific community among medical opponents of the *public* use of LSD who denounced the cultural shift from chemical devices of medical research, diagnosis and, at times, therapies, into popular mechanisms of withdrawal. These mechanisms transformed the psychedelic subject, to borrow from David Farber’s historical explication of this position, into “unproductive, amoral citizens, lost in empty dreams that led nowhere.”⁵ This narrative of amoral decadence ends, inevitably, with the LSD-fueled “religion” of Charles Manson and the decadent self-contradictions of acid casualties. Rather than enlightenment—of finding one’s “true self”—“many who took the LSD trip,” historian Jay Stevens concludes, “never returned.”⁶

The second path developed directly against the ways in which proponents of psychedelics relied on mystical traditions to legitimate the spiritual power of psychedelic consciousness by identifying it with the ecstasy and rapture of religious mysticism. For these critics, beginning primarily with R. C. Zaehner’s response to Aldous Huxley’s *The Doors of Perception*, psychedelic supporters forced mystical traditions on top of experiences that, while reflecting phenomenally the subjective and objective shifts noted in the long history of religious mysticism, represented no more than profane moments of egotistical hedonism. Outside superficial similarities, critics stress that morality cannot be found within psychedelic consciousness exactly because it proposes, specifically in the case of Huxley, to remove all governing structures that provide the only

substantial basis for ethical principles. Placed together, these critiques paint a portrait of a decadent, amoral project of escapism that profaned spirituality by appropriating and utilizing the austerity of religious traditions to justify the naive experimentation of a narcissistic youth culture.

However, lost within this mire are the concerted efforts by psychedelic interpreters to locate alternative frames capable of directing the nature and implications of mystical states of being. For these interpreters, whom I refer to as psychedelic mystics, mind-altering substances break down the mediating effects of the ego; that is, a reductive modern notion of self that, from their perspective, negates the capacity to directly experience the nature of one's own being, the broader phenomenological world, and various manifestations of the preternatural. Importantly, then, placing a sixties perennial understanding of mysticism in conversation with critics' constructivist/relativist approaches unhinge accusations of amorality and the corresponding charge of heterodoxy that engulfed attempts in the 1960s to elucidate a spiritually based ethics from the expanded frames of psychedelic consciousness.⁷ In ending with an exploration of the Marsh Chapel Experiment, Walter Pahnke's 1962 dissertation project, which, under the guidance of Timothy Leary, measured the effects of psilocybin on a group of Harvard seminary students during a Good Friday mass, this article seeks to locate the entheogenic—the specifically religious—quality of psychedelic substances. Shifting from the psychedelic to the entheogenic intimates how, because the "drug is a *necessary* but not *sufficient* condition," "what one *does* with a psychedelic experience may be more important than merely *having* it."⁸

As a consequence, while much of the criticism directed against psychedelic mysticism argues that there is an "authentic" religious experience *inside* an individual, here we arrive at a significant rebuttal: what matters is *how* this mystical change is enacted (in material life). Engaging the intricacies of both sides of the debate expands our understanding of the efficacy of psychedelics, revealing the ways spiritually based interpretative frames provided psychedelic mystics of the 1960s with the tools to engage the perceptive openings made possible by psychedelic consciousness and to chart these openings as revelations of perennial truths that demand ethical responses. Moreover, in drawing out this core problematic—the perceived lack of morality—this article ultimately argues that the development of a mystical ontology in fact reveals a spirituality of altruism resulting from an unmediated experience of the world, both in its temporal, material dimensions and in its uncanny (meaning simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar) spiritual manifestations.

Thus more than questions of authenticity, the psychedelic experience, by producing liminal frames of consciousness incommunicable and non-understandable within Western discourses, offered a channel to restructure these modes of knowledge. In relying on Eastern and mystical traditions to do so, such a restructuring suggests a distinct counterpoint to a secularizing modern world, while also placing sixties mysticism within broader historical practices and religious systems of belief that challenge the cultural relativism of Western (mono)theism.

While we cannot ignore problems of appropriation and troubling expressions of Orientalism,⁹ we also must not overlook the reasons *why* sixties figures turned to Eastern practices, specifically Zen Buddhism, and to a mystically inspired perennial philosophy in order to engage and understand psychedelic consciousness. For psychedelic mystics, these modes of understanding outline an experiential and lived position that refused to maintain modern processes of dichotomous patterning that elevate instrumental value while devaluing the nonbinary relation between the personal, social, natural, and political. Much like the ecstatic releases promised within traditional, religious mysticism, psychedelic mysticism suggests more than decadence and appropriation—it highlights a return to religious sentiment as a means for enacting the utopian visions that similarly propelled the direct politics of sixties (leftist) activists.¹⁰

Simply following decadent/amoral narratives of this historical moment jades our collective memory, making light of the many ways in which mystically inspired values continue to find expression within our contemporary moment.¹¹ To remain exclusively indebted to criticisms directed against psychedelic proponents thus misconstrues the historical record left to us; to approach the textual results of psychedelic mysticism, not as a determinative fixation, but as an exploration into the expressions and communal potentiality of unmediated spiritual insight goes far in rescuing psychedelic usage and consciousness from limited amoral readings and irreligious, or even antireligious, understandings. Engaging sixties-era mystical writings as spiritual documents suggests that many in the counterculture understood their revolution not merely in terms of political activism and social restructuring, but as a recommitment to spirituality.

Exploring the psychedelic and mystical writings of sixties figures goes far in resurrecting philosophical discussion as to what constitutes “true” mystical experiences and the role psychedelics had in that discussion beginning, at least in the United States, in the 1960s. While the hippie counterculture, and the sixties more generally, act as backdrops, this article aims to expand how

we understand the spiritual efficacy of psychedelics, specifically in terms of the perennial interpretations that emerged as a means for fundamentally reordering the makeup of modern society. Rather than generate a return to institutions or dogma, psychedelics helped spawn a religious awakening that begins and ends with a unitive experience—with an existential moment—of divine enlightenment. In this regard, I am concerned with the spiritual “heads,” not the aesthetic “freaks,” of sixties psychedelic culture; in other words, individuals who worked through the dynamics of psychedelic consciousness in order to resuscitate the existential belief in a perennial religion defined by an experience of oneness.¹²

FROM MATERIAL HEDONISM TO MYSTICAL LIMINALITY

The day following his first experience with psilocybin, writer Arthur Koestler declared to Timothy Leary, the individual responsible for psychedelically turning him on, “This is wonderful, no doubt. But it is fake, ersatz. Instant mysticism . . . there’s no wisdom there. I solved the secret of the universe last night, but this morning I forgot what it was.”¹³ The honesty of Koestler’s comment captures the multilayered critiques of psychedelic mysticism. Indeed, most critics do not deny the mind-manifesting qualities of psychedelic substances, but, as Koestler stresses, the potential for a cleansed perception does not necessarily correspond with, nor always lead to, profound religious wisdom. As R. C. Zaehner, a British scholar of Eastern traditions and comparative mysticism, established in a series of works concerned directly with the prospects of psychedelic (monistic) mysticism, by connecting drug-induced shifts in consciousness with the raptures of immanent enlightenment described in the authentic history of mysticism, figures like Huxley and Leary profane religion and spirituality, privileging decadent naivety over religious discipline. Zaehner thus connects the two critiques by arguing, in his essay “Rot in the Clockwork Orange,” against manifestations of an ancient monism (a metaphysics or religion of unity, of the One) that leads logically to excess, not only of the kind advocated by sixties proponents of psychedelic mysticism, or even earlier by occultists like Aleister Crowley, but, perhaps inevitably, to the amoral depravity of Charles Manson.¹⁴ For Zaehner, mysticism, when used to interpret the psychedelic experience, opens up the possibility for horror, not real enlightenment. When theology is misused, as it must be when connected to psychedelics, no moral check exists to prevent figures like Manson from mistaking a “oneness” with nature for godliness. To locate God in

the objective world—in nature and/or the preternatural—is, Zaehner argues, to pass “beyond good and evil.”¹⁵

Sidney Cohen, an early proponent and practitioner of LSD-based psychological therapy, recognizes intimately the capacity for psychedelics to extend beyond the psychotomimetic (the dominant 1950s medical term that understood psychoactive substances as chemical agents for mimicking the symptoms of psychosis) by revealing “a majestic, sunlit, heavenly inner quietude.”¹⁶ However, while he personally experienced this type of mystical awareness, Cohen maintains a similar grand perspective as Zaehner, challenging directly the hedonistic use often associated with, and at times promoted within, the hippie counterculture. Asked to appear before a United States congressional committee regarding the continued legality of psychedelic substances, Cohen’s testimony, coming from a well-respected member of the scientific community, played a vital role in decisions that ultimately outlawed LSD¹⁷ in 1968: “We have seen something which in a way is most alarming, more alarming than death in a way. And that is the loss of all cultural values, the loss of feeling of right and wrong, of good and bad. These people [hippies, LSD gurus, psychedelic mystics] lead a valueless life, without motivation, without ambition . . . they are decultured, lost to society, lost to themselves.”¹⁸ “Decultured” and trapped within “valueless” lives: Cohen’s words extend beyond a mere critique of psychedelic use. His testimony attacks the common interpretation, which seemed to begin with Huxley, that psychedelics foundationally remove filters of consciousness, deconditioning the individual from modern society.

Such a position, what historian of religion Harry Oldmeadow describes as the “*cul-de-sac*” of enlightenment, has been used to attack the amorality—the “turn on, tune in, drop out” axiom—connected to the psychedelic counterculture and, primarily, Leary.¹⁹ According to Theodore Roszak, Leary’s “superficial muddling” disingenuously legitimated psychedelics through a gross distortion of spiritual beliefs and practices, ultimately distracting “many of the young from all that is most valuable in their rebellion, and which threatens to destroy their most promising sensibilities.”²⁰ Within this cultural vacuum, anything goes, transforming morality, according to Whitall Perry—an author in the perennialist school of Frithjof Schuon and René Guénon—into the narcissistic self-celebrations of a drugged-out culture whose antinomianism debases religious mysticism.²¹

Intensifying this problematic, according to the second critique, was the inauthentic “turn east,” which, at least on the surface, supplied mystical frames for

interpreting psychedelics as an unfiltered encounter with the divine. However, as Harvey Cox stresses, this framing represented nothing more, at least for the psychedelic counterculture, than a way to “escape their culture.”²² Thus the first critique, in which psychedelics are connected to the moral bankruptcy perceived to be plaguing the hippie counterculture, leads directly to, and I should stress, directly from, the second critique of sixties psychedelic mysticism. “For our contemporary young” trapped within the illusions of “counterfeit infinity,” “dope wears the charisma of an esoteric wisdom, and they defend its uses with a religious fervor,” laments Roszak. Seeking to emphasize the potential of the New Left, Roszak dispels this “charisma” by exposing mystical rhetoric as inauthentic when forced within the distorted frames of psychedelic consciousness. “The young do not by and large understand what these traditions are all about,” Roszak concludes. “One does not unearth the wisdom of the ages by shuffling about a few exotic catch phrases—nor does one learn anything about anybody’s love or religion by donning a few talismans and dosing on LSD,” he continues.²³

This problem, as Jacob Needleman states, is the reduction of esoteric *knowledge* into exoteric *products*. Counterculture religions in general, Needleman suggests, essentially ignore the master–student demands of the religious path, transposing practice into a pill, thereafter making knowledge of the divine no more than another commodity available for quick purchase. The shift from canonical discipline to artificial (and capitalistic) “instant mysticism” takes place, according to Needleman, “when the formulation of esoteric ideas are ‘stolen’ from the personal disciplines of the *path* to be organized and promoted by individuals who are themselves in the condition of unconscious psychological fragmentation.”²⁴ This fragmentation, what Roszak describes as “amorphous and alienated personalities,” maintains a common sociological and ethnographic critique that stresses the banality of the sixties counterculture.²⁵ Martin Buber, in a scathing critique of Huxley’s psychedelic narcissism, describes this banal condition of psychedelic consciousness as “holidays from the very uncomfortable reminder to verify oneself as such a person” who participates “in the community of logos and cosmos.”²⁶

The renunciation of religious traditions and the fragmentation of consciousness produced by psychedelics have, as a result, been used to attack the coherency of countercultural morality. These criticisms often connect psychedelic religion to figures like Charles Manson who, exacerbated by an abuse of psychedelics and sex, appropriated religious iconography in order to create a new “fascist” “logos and cosmos” violently opposed to modern society.²⁷ Marcia Cavell, in an article for the *Saturday Review of Literature*, directly cites Manson’s amoral

religiosity to argue against psychedelic mysticism: "Guilt, as Manson says, is a figment of the imagination. One remembers that Satan's greatest snare has always been the promise of . . . 'paradise now.' A lesson to be learned from the Manson cult, I think, is that dreams of heaven often pave the road to hell."²⁸ Within such narratives, psychedelic mysticism offered no more than "instant gratification," never authentic enlightenment, clearly indicating how "psychic chemistry is no longer a means for exploring the perennial wisdom; it has," Roszak stresses, "become an end in itself."²⁹ This shift from means to ends, specifically when connected to the egomaniacal diabolism of figures like Manson, manipulates the religious into an amoral tool of self-aggrandizement and pure narcissism.³⁰

Philosopher John Passmore goes even further, pointing to the "moral and political irresponsibility" promoted in psychedelic mysticism to remind people that the Nazis, as with psychedelic mystics, found inspiration in the amorality of Dionysian mysticism. "Contemporary hippy-mystics are often convinced that they are the recipients of a special divine grace. They display . . . fanaticism, 'aristocratic' pride and antinomianism . . . setting themselves above all kinds of moral restraint," Passmore argues. The result is not the realization of a divine brotherhood on earth, but something more akin to the genocidal tendencies of an amoral fraternity that reifies the false promise of utopia often connected to psychedelic use/consciousness. "No one can read the pitiful story of American 'hippie' communities," Passmore declares, "and still believe that drugs encourage 'community.'"³¹ Consequently, psychedelic mysticism, to borrow from Zaehner's directed critique of Huxley's classic interpretation that psychedelics reveal "the sacramental vision of reality," amounts to nothing more than amoral (illusory) worlds of farcical meaninglessness.³²

Operating in a theistic framework that emphasizes discursive reason, Zaehner challenges the very basis of Huxley's interpretation, denying the latter's monistic/"panenhenic" equivocation of ego transcendence, spiritual union, and ecstatic states of being. "To the normal, rational mind," writes Zaehner, "his [Huxley] remarks make no sense whatever, and might therefore be dismissed as the illusions of a lunatic."³³ Religiously, such "illusions of a lunatic" emerge, according to Harry Oldmeadow, through a reduction from the rational and spiritual to the intuited and psychic. In a critique similar to Zaehner, Oldmeadow establishes the divide: "The drug-induced experience is essentially *psychic*, which is to say that it is still contingent, still within the realm of relativities and conditionings, a kind of moving, if you like, projected by the subconscious mind. The mystical experience, on the other hand, is essentially *spiritual*, which is to say that it liberates the 'subject' (who actually no longer exists as a subject)

not only from the physical limitations of time and space and from psychic constraints, but from the conditioned world (in both its gross and subtle aspects) altogether.”³⁴ As such, Zaehner and others attack the veiled materialism that emerges, rather contradictorily, from the common interpretation that psychedelics break down the barriers of consciousness, thereby revealing objects in their absolute, unfiltered “Is-ness,” in which all things (subjects and objects) are perceived to shine “with their own inner light.”³⁵

Zaehner more specifically attacks the psychological base of monistic mysticism, arguing that “in the case of Huxley, as in that of the manic, the personality seems to be dissipated into the objective world.” Against this manic break from reality, theistic mysticism, according to Zaehner, excludes both the subjective (“I”) and objective (“worldly”) from consciousness; the soul literally fills “with the Holy Ghost . . . the human personality is wholly absorbed in the Deity Who is felt and experienced as being something totally distinct and other than the objective world.”³⁶ While we will bracket temporarily the debate about what is “authentic,” Zaehner’s criticism establishes a clear approach that negates the *form* and *content* of mystical understandings that locate the divine within the natural—or preternatural—world.³⁷ For Zaehner, no perennial truth emanates from the world as it is; this is a farce that challenges the supernatural dogmas and spiritual positions of the world’s divergent religious traditions.³⁸ Accordingly, he muses, “Why should we be asked to believe that a vision of nature transfigured in any way corresponds to the vision of God Himself”?³⁹

Engaging this question through the lens of 1960s spiritual, academic, and psychedelic writings simultaneously charts the criticisms directed against psychedelic mysticism, while problematizing this narrative by unveiling uncertainties regarding the nature of religion and spirituality within the modern period. Such an approach exposes how liminal spaces of a perennial spirituality manifest in the sixties counterculture, ultimately removing interpretations of psychedelic experimentation from doctrinal debates regarding the nature of the supernatural in favor of a discussion regarding the meaningfulness of mystical experience.

PERENNIALISM, COMPARATIVE MYSTICISM, AND PSYCHEDELIC LIMINALITY

In *The Perennial Philosophy*, Aldous Huxley argues that the religions of the world share “immemorial and universal beliefs,” a “metaphysics” concerned “with the one, divine Reality substantial to the manifold world of things and lives and

minds."⁴⁰ Each world religion, unburdened by its cultural or historical context, simply expresses a different interpretation of this wisdom that, at its core, remains the same.⁴¹ In this way, the perennial philosophy transcends the dualistic principles that situate the modern technological state, resulting in, Huxley argues, "direct experiences" of the "Spiritual Absolute," the "unitive knowledge of the divine Ground."⁴²

Huxley was not the first to make such claims; indeed perennialism has a long history and has been applied in distinct ways religiously, philosophically, and politically. Frithjof Schuon, a vital thinker of perennialism, provides a common definition: "It has been said more than once that total Truth is inscribed in an eternal script in the very substance of our spirit; what the different Revelations do is to 'crystallize' and 'actualize,' in different degrees according to the case, a nucleus of certitudes which not only abides forever in the divine Omniscience, but also sleeps by refraction in the 'naturally supernatural' kernel of the individual, as well as in that of each ethnic or historical collectivity or of the human species as a whole."⁴³ While it would be a mistake to conflate the perennial philosophy of Huxley with Schuon and what has become better known in the United States as the Traditionalist School,⁴⁴ such a unifying position—one that transcends doctrinal differences to reveal an essential core that universally "preserves human societies from decay"—proved popular during the post-WWII era. Following Huxley, the perennial philosophy helped to contextualize the spiritual basis necessary to connect mystical consciousness with the psychedelic experience.⁴⁵

For example, Huston Smith, author of *The World's Religions* (1956) which charts major religious traditions within their individual doctrines and varieties, argued that, while it is essential to preserve the unique cultural expressions of the world's religions, it is just as essential to acknowledge the forgotten truth that supplies a common vision.⁴⁶ Within a world fragmented by the destruction and brutal dehumanization of war, imperialism, and nationalism, conceptualizing a core unitive principle seems problematic given the recent historical abuse of grand metanarratives. Yet despite this backdrop, Smith's work maintains the value of oneness not as a principle for degradation in the name of superior races or party elites (which Huxley has been accused of), but alternatively as a mystical doctrine in which divine knowledge occurs in and through unbiased interconnection. Oppositions and antagonisms no longer determine interactions—this is a Hermetic understanding, a mystical position that exists beyond the grand metanarratives of modernity. Consequently, projects that use unitive ideals in order to establish positions of hierarchy have missed the vital (mystical)

point. The One imagined in Huxley's version of the perennial philosophy refutes the hierarchy, instead engaging the complexities of the world without dualistic divides.

The problem, as Smith's work develops, is that we remain blinded by the violent demarcations of modern hierarchies of worth. Due to a modern moment in which "self-interest skews our perspective grotesquely," we "see only snatches here and there" of the "full picture," laments Smith. Imagining life as a "great tapestry" that we, unfortunately, "face from its wrong side," Smith believes that "from a purely human standpoint the wisdom traditions [the religions of the world] are the species' most prolonged and serious attempts to infer from the maze on this side of the tapestry the pattern which, on its right side, gives meaning to the whole." More important for Smith, this common vision carries real ethical weight by demonstrating how "this belonging to the whole . . . is what religion (*religio*, rebinding) is all about; the theme of at-one-ment laces its every expression."⁴⁷ This perspective emerges from Smith's recognition that any sense of oneness—of interdependence—remains obscured by misunderstandings and false perceptions that make it seemingly impossible to translate supernatural beliefs between religious traditions. The forgotten truth of the wisdom traditions, on the other hand, suggests that the divisive tendencies of linguistic systems, culturally relative frames, and discursive rationality are illusory when it comes to spiritual life.

Ultimately, for Smith, this illustrates both the ways in which religious beliefs find expression within distinct cultures, but also how shared principles remain restricted by theistic, supernatural, and discursive boundaries. Such belief, solidified in Smith's personal and metaphysical experiences with psychedelic substances, demonstrates that "if we lay aside our preconceptions about these religions, seeing each as forged by people who were struggling to see something that would give help and meaning to their lives; and if we then try without prejudice to see ourselves what they saw—if we do these things, the veil that separates us from them can turn to gauze."⁴⁸ The real problem with interreligious dialogue, as D. T. Suzuki similarly points out in a comparative study of Christian (specifically Meister Eckhart) and Buddhist (specifically Zen) mysticism, is an inability (or refusal) to acknowledge mystical similarities between traditions. Suzuki, while more often connected with the academic and popular diffusion of Zen practices in the West, charts "points common to both" Buddhism and Christian mystics, revealing how "terminology is all that divides us and stirs us up to a wasteful dissipation of energy."⁴⁹

This perennial position, Alan Watts develops further, arose out of concerns with the "non-verbal spiritual experience of the divine rather than mere

doctrine and precept.”⁵⁰ Watts contends that Western churches have become disconnected from unitive experience, trapped instead by the “shallowness of rationalism and its analytic view of life,” conditions that also define the modern period.⁵¹ Watts—like Huxley, Smith, and Suzuki—begins where modern religious discourse leaves off, arguing that making mystical experience absolutely contingent on canonical methods and supernatural terminology reduces the religious experience to doctrines and concepts which “are forms of words which can never be more than pointers to mystical vision and not by any means the best pointers.”⁵² By extending beyond categories of traditional understanding (including the theistic), the mystic, Watts claims, gains direct union with “God himself, the ultimate Reality, not as an idea conceived but as a reality experienced.”⁵³

This is not to say that mystical states of consciousness are ubiquitous, but it proposes that mysticism, as a direct experience of “the ultimate Reality,” can be located, at least potentially, within any experience or worldview that is or will be. Moreover, approaching mysticism through this perennial frame leads Watts to stress how the importance and meaningfulness of mystical states of consciousness derive from the metaphysical experience itself and its commonly held meaning, not the cultural frames. Such frames, while necessarily helping us understand and share these ecstatic states, can transform experience into remote ideas and abstract words. Conversely, mystical states unveil a reality, Huxley likewise argues, in which the “percept had swallowed the concept.”⁵⁴

In a perennial reading, mystical states offer a distinct heuristic from which to rethink and reimagine modern institutions structured through discursive categories and antagonistic relationships. Huxley believed that accessing the perennial philosophy establishes a liminal space from which to analyze, critique, and overcome these divisive characteristics of modern society. Mysticism, then, does not describe a state of being permanently removed, but rather supplies an existential counter-position to the politics determining modern life. Commodity-based consumer capitalism and political liberalism, which operate according to an “us versus them” ideology (democracy/communism, human/inhuman, civilized/primitive, developed/underdeveloped nations, etc.), emerge accordingly as common markers within 1960s mystical texts. Such texts stress that the insights offered by mystical states of consciousness—insights that reveal an essential oneness, an experience of pure interconnection—provide a reframing of the modern moment by challenging the legitimacy of such dichotomous ordering.⁵⁵

For some, such as members of the Traditionalist School (cited by post-WWII perennialists including Huxley and Smith, who calls René Guénon “one

of the greatest prophets of our time”), this means a turn against the “modern error” and a desire to return to the “Primordial Tradition” itself—that is, a pure metaphysics variably expressed as the *philosophia perennis*, the union between self and the “Principle,” what Frithjof Schuon calls a “transcendent unity.”⁵⁶ For others, like key psychedelic mystics of the 1960s, this unitive insight suggested a politics of inclusion without the prospect of exclusion. While divine truth for psychedelic mystics such as Wavy Gravy and Stephen Gaskin, both founders of communes constructed around projects of altruistic social justice, this position is not absolute. Timothy Leary, particularly in his later writings, often elevated certain lifestyles, contending, for example, that “LSD is a specific cure for homosexuality.”⁵⁷ While psychedelic consciousness may produce a condition—through an experience—of oneness, such contradictions demonstrate how the practicality of this position remains wed to interpretation and application. For some, experiencing unity demanded altruistic responses; to others, the position drew a line between the enlightened and those requiring a “cure.”

Yet in a general sense, by being expressively beyond the discursive structures of modern rational thinking (one cannot have inclusion without a mark, or boundary, of exclusion), deconstructing the perceived immutability of binary categories illustrates how such a unitive position becomes “possible” through mystical states of consciousness that expose these dualities as mere illusion. The emancipatory value of psychedelic substances resides in a capacity to resist habitual modes of thinking, thus allowing for a preternatural sense of reality. What one sees, Watts details in his psychedelic text *The Joyous Cosmology*, is an end to the dualism between personality and the cosmos, a perennial truth in which “there is simply no way of separating self from other, self-love from other-love. All knowledge of self is knowledge of other, and all knowledge of other knowledge of self.”⁵⁸ Symbiotically, “self and other, the familiar and the strange, the internal and the external, the predictable and the unpredictable *imply* each other,” resituating, as Watts’s work develops, the psychedelic as the entheogenic. In the end, this suggests a relational polarity in which “mutuality” becomes the defining mark of religious sentiment and spiritual awareness.⁵⁹

However, this perspective remains complicated, not only due to competing interpretations, but by the implications of a perennial understanding that removes, by its very nature, the dogmatic frames that traditionally make the mystical state possible in the first place. More troublingly, especially for theistic scholars like Zaehner, are the ways in which psychedelic (monistic) mysticism, in disregarding an emphasis on divine tenets that situate a God above, simultaneously removes the real discipline and devotion expected of the mystic.

According to Zaehner, this godless condition introduces hedonistic access to traditional—and supernatural—states of religious being defined by asceticism, dogma, and rituals. For Zaehner, only systems of belief and modes of understanding that follow doctrines established by a monotheistic transcendental God have recourse to moral states. Without such a divine architect, other religious traditions (monistic, “panenhenic,” pantheistic, and psychedelic) relinquish the very foundation from which ethics or morality emerge.

Yet harmonizing mystical states of consciousness with perennial truths does not necessarily indicate, as some critics claim, that *any* moment or *any* experience result in mystical illumination. In leveling supernatural tenets and beliefs to underscore the core lived experience, perennialist (or monistic) mystics do not simultaneously level the ecstasy and rapture that separates mystical states of consciousness from the ordinary consciousness of the ego, nor from the demands of pluralistic society. Huxley directly admits as much, noting that the nature of this “one, divine Reality” “cannot be directly and immediately apprehended except by those who have chosen to fulfill certain conditions, making themselves loving, pure in heart, and poor in spirit.”⁶⁰ Huxley thus privileges the immediate, mystical experience, not the “second-hand” reports of “metaphysicians,” but the “men and women who chose to fulfill the conditions upon which alone, as a matter of brute empirical fact, such immediate knowledge can be had.” Indeed, as *The Perennial Philosophy* biographically exposes, at the time of the writing, Huxley himself had not yet experienced what the “‘saint’ or ‘prophet,’ ‘sage’ or ‘enlightened one’” experiences “first-hand”—that is, “a genuine religious experience.”⁶¹

In this way, Huxley does not suggest that nontheistic mysticism effaces the mystic from the experience. Regardless of discursive frames or mystical training, what emerge as vastly more important, specifically for Huxley and 1960s-era psychedelic mystics, are the (existential) experience and the (interpretative) meaning of that experience. So, while the mystic, the sage, and the prophet remain, Huxley cared little for doctrinal or dogmatic boundaries with regard to mystical states of consciousness. In psychedelics, Huxley found a cause for mystical consciousness: psychedelics opened the doors of perception, giving him direct access to an experience of the infinite he wrote about in *The Perennial Philosophy*.

“Thus the person who takes LSD or mescaline,” Huxley writes following his own experience, “may suddenly understand—not only intellectually but organically, experientially—the meaning of such tremendous religious affirmations as ‘God is love.’”⁶² Huxley concedes that the psychedelic experience is a “gratuitous

grace" and, therefore, does not guarantee permanent enlightenment.⁶³ But, as Huxley develops in a 1958 article for the *Saturday Evening Post*, the psychedelic experience, specifically when placed "against a background of visionary and even mystical experience," makes possible an infinite experience that can only be described as an expression of mystical wisdom. To draw lines between experiences, to be "squeamish" and declare as "shocking" claims "that men and women can, by physical and chemical means, transcend themselves," is, Huxley argues, to ignore the efficacy and long history of such experiences—in other words, how, "if properly used, [such experiences] can be enormously helpful to those who have received it."⁶⁴ Psychedelic mysticism, by granting access to perennial truths, exposes the discordant limits created by imposing boundaries between the types of, and sources for, mystical experiences. For Huxley, the essential moment is not *how* the mystical state of consciousness comes about, but *what* it reveals about the structures governing our daily experience of reality, and *why* this is meaningful spiritually, subjectively, and socially.

The spiritual—and practical—importance of immediate experience leads Huxley to conclude that mysticism must be a both/and proposition. Accordingly, Huxley states, "Those who are offended by the idea that the swallowing of a pill may contribute to a genuinely religious experience should remember that all the standard mortifications—fasting, voluntary sleeplessness and self-torture—inflicted upon themselves by the ascetics of every religion for the purpose of acquiring merit, are also, like the mind-changing drugs, powerful devices for altering the chemistry of the body in general and the nervous system in particular . . . in one way or another, all our experiences are chemically conditioned."⁶⁵ By leveling all experiences, Huxley unabashedly disconnects his own mystical perception from religious discipline, while simultaneously rejecting views that imagine ascetic mortification as distinct from other corporeal "devices." Nothing can, absolutely, limit the means for mystical consciousness. More controversially than for Huxley, psychedelic consciousness demonstrates that mystical understanding—regardless of how it is produced—is a matter of body chemistry. Such a position, however, reduces spiritual transcendence to an expression of the body, challenging doctrinal readings that presuppose a distinction between the spiritual and the material.

Huxley's proposition that psychedelics permit him to reach the heights of mystical insight and, as a result, to an experience outside his subjective self, conflates his own arguments, challenging simultaneously his propositions that (1) mysticism is a matter of body chemistry (what happens if/when the body dissolves within the mystical state), and (2) that perennialism wipes away all dualities in moments of rapture and ecstasy.⁶⁶ While exactly the ecstatic state

of “Being–Awareness–Bliss” Huxley celebrates as an indicator of the perennial philosophy and as a source for interconnection, critics, specifically Zaehner, quickly seized on the profane ambiguities within Huxley’s philosophy. Such ambiguities not only negate the *cause* for “authentic” mysticism, but, as Huxley acknowledges, more disturbingly remove “the ordinary, the necessary concerns of human existence, above all for concerns involving persons.”⁶⁷

The spiritual significance of psychedelic mysticism thus becomes how interpreters collectively choose to understand the nature, or structure, of mysticism and, more important perhaps, how these same individuals (whether in following Huxley or Zaehner) understand the *moral implications*—morality indicative of ethical behavior, of how “others” are treated—of mystical understanding in everyday life. Responses ostensibly fall into two roughly defined camps. The first position, as demonstrated more thoroughly in our discussion of perennialism, argues that mystical awareness demonstrates the unitive universality of the world’s religions—a “cosmic consciousness” to borrow from R. M. Bucke’s classic work.⁶⁸ Differences in traditions result only from culturally specific interpretations; if one were willing, and able, to look beneath the surface of doctrinal practices, the disparity melts away, revealing the mystical core shared by all religions.⁶⁹

While naturally moralistic and ethical for many (including many psychedelic mystics of the 1960s), a perennial position is often accused of leveling all experience, thereby removing the (theistic) basis for proper—meaning moral—living. This second position, developed most clearly by Zaehner in the 1960s and Steven Katz in the 1980s, emphasizes the amorality that must exist at the base of pantheistic and monistic religious beliefs, while also advocating for culturally specific mystical traditions and theistically oriented religious interpretations. While Zaehner’s critique properly points to the historical record of psychedelic amorality—Manson his prime suspect—Katz’s emphasis on the cultural relativity of mysticism indicates the theological challenge psychedelic mysticism posed to the very foundation of modern religious establishments, particularly in the United States.⁷⁰ By emphasizing a perennial reality, psychedelic mystics, according to Katz’s constructivist critique, negate traditional markers for the mystical and the religious. If psychedelics remove concerns for all others, while imploding cultural diversity, the only inevitable result, according to Zaehner, is a descent into amoral narcissism.

Yet in the study of mysticism, to first equivocate the mystical emptiness of psychedelic (and monistic) consciousness with amorality, then to juxtapose this with the interpretative fullness of theism, as Zaehner does, or the supernatural relativity of cultural constructs, as Katz does, misses the larger point and falls

victim to the very discursive vices mystics oppose so vehemently. The imposition of a value hierarchy, and the supposition that only culturally specific, theistic mysticism represents authentic states of divine union renders all other mystical experiences—monistic, pantheistic, psychedelic, or otherwise—at best as preternatural encounters and at worse as amoral moments of self-absorption. Such a position allows Zaehner to deny unequivocally the moral weight of profane states of nontheistic mysticism. However, in so doing, Zaehner's perspective does more than reify dichotomous patterning and religious divides; it fundamentally ignores the interpretative value—the *moral significance*—of mystical states of consciousness. Rather than confirm institutionalized truths, this moral significance characterizes an engagement with the phenomenal world that, in locating how “All is in the All”⁷¹ interprets unitive oneness as a condition of absolute social responsibility.

Huston Smith, sympathetic to yet concerned with psychedelic mysticism, charts how this central critique limits the ways we contemporaneously understand psychedelics. Smith argues that “Zaehner's refusal to admit that drugs can induce experiences descriptively indistinguishable from those which are spontaneously religious is the current counterpart of the seventeenth-century theologians' refusal to look through Galileo's telescope or, when they did, their persistence in dismissing what they saw as machinations of the devil . . . when the fact that drugs can trigger religious experiences becomes incontrovertible, discussion will move to the more difficult question of how this new fact is to be interpreted.”⁷² I would like to stress that Smith's reading emerges from his own “descriptively indistinguishable” experiences, and significance derives not solely from the experience itself, but in “how this new fact is to be interpreted.” Unlike Zaehner, Smith, like many sixties supporters of the relationship between psychedelics and religious experiences, notes that meaning does not arise from categories, typologies (though these proved important), or levels of mysticism, but rather from the phenomenological similarities studied within theological discussions and scientific analyses—most famously, Walter Pahnke's Marsh Chapel Experiment, also known as the Good Friday Experiment.⁷³

CONCLUSION: FROM PSYCHEDELIC MYSTICISM TO ENTHEOGENIC RELIGION—A CASE STUDY

As we will see through a brief investigation of the Marsh Chapel Experiment, early studies of the spiritual effects of psychedelics, even when referring to monistic or pantheistic states of consciousness, often resulted in an enhanced

religious belief in the divine or the infinite, regardless of theological type. Moreover, reading Pahnke's experiment, specifically in light of the sacred/profane debate, goes far in demonstrating that psychedelic mysticism can result in the love and morality Zaehner works so hard to separate from nontheistic mystical states. Tracing the path of psychedelics—from psychotomimetic substances to amoral techniques of escapism to harbingers of religious insight—suggests an extension into what has been termed the "entheogenic." However, it is important to note that this path represents a particularly modern and Western version; it thus operates against a backdrop of religious traditions East and West that partook in psychoactive substances as sacraments for divination or mystical transcendence.⁷⁴

In a broader sense, Pahnke's experiment provides a more immediate example of the entheogenic potential of psychedelics, reflecting the belief that psychoactive substances "awaken or generate mystical experiences." Entheogens, as Robert Forte defines further, are "one of the oldest and most widespread means of attaining a religious experience."⁷⁵ More than interpretative devices or mechanisms for a direct perception of the world, we can go further and argue that, through this entheogenic framing, psychedelics help bring about, but do not produce, spiritual experiences and distinctly religious sentiments. While such sentiments often express perennial or monistic positions, the Marsh Chapel Experiment expands the framework, indicating how psychedelic mysticism also expresses, and helps participants experience more fully, religious traditions and understandings of the divine that span from Plotinus's One to monotheistic renderings of the Holy Trinity.

Pahnke, a theology graduate student at the Harvard Divinity School who had already earned a medical degree (M.D.), devised the Marsh Chapel Experiment as the basis for his dissertation, curious to trace empirically if, in religiously predisposed subjects, psilocybin would act as a reliable entheogen. Under the supervision of Timothy Leary and the Harvard Psilocybin Project, Pahnke sought to investigate philosopher W. T. Stace's conclusion⁷⁶ "that in the mystical experience there are certain fundamental characteristics that are universal and not restricted to any particular religion or culture."⁷⁷ According to Pahnke, such universality implies that psychedelic substances "are not narcotics, sedatives, or energizers, but have the unique effect on the human psyche of bringing into awareness forms of consciousness that are usually hidden or unconscious" (including the mystical and the religious).⁷⁸

Drawing on the pioneering typology of William James, and buttressed by the empirical and analytic marks identified by Stace, Pahnke developed a nine-fold, interrelated phenomenological typology to describe the core experience of

mystical consciousness.⁷⁹ Even more important, Pahnke adopted James's essential understanding of mystical consciousness, an understanding set squarely within a perennial perspective that sought distance from mediating structures, materialist assumptions, and discursive devices. For James, "in the end it [understanding mystical states and the religious life] had to come to our empiricist criterion: By their fruits ye shall know them, not by their roots . . . the roots of a man's virtue are inaccessible to us. No appearances whatever are infallible proofs of grace. Our *practice* is the only sure evidence, even to ourselves."⁸⁰ Likewise for Pahnke, the means by which one obtains a mystical experience does not matter; what absolutely counts is *how* the end experience affects the daily realities of one's life.

Taking place on Good Friday, April 20, 1962, in the basement of Boston University's Marsh Chapel, the experiment brought together twenty middle-class male Christian theology students and was designed primarily to (1) establish a religious setting both spiritually meaningful and familiar for the participants in order to gather empirical data about the nature of psychedelic consciousness; and (2) analyze this data according to Pahnke's nine categories in order to determine the relationship between psychedelics and mysticism. Divided into five groups of four, the theology students, none of whom had previous experiences with psychedelics, were each joined by two group leaders made up of research assistants and scholars with previous psychedelic experiences, including notably Huston Smith and Leary.

Methodologically, through a double-blind, random process, half the subjects received 30 milligrams of psilocybin, while the remaining participants received a psychoactive placebo—200 milligrams of nicotinic acid (niacin), a vitamin (part of the vitamin B complex)—that causes shifts in physiological feelings, including warmth and tingling of the skin. In addition, one leader per group received randomly 15 milligrams of psilocybin. The Good Friday service, run by the Reverend Howard Thurman, a mentor to Martin Luther King Jr., was transmitted through loud speakers in real time into the small chapel located beneath the main sanctuary. Breaking down the importance of structure and ritual (set and setting), Pahnke describes the experiment's scene: "Inside the private chapel, the subjects and leaders listened to a two-and-a-half-hour religious service consisting of organ music, four solos, readings, prayers, and personal meditation."⁸¹ Within one hour, the placebo kicked in and quickly subsided; but over the next few hours, when the psilocybin truly took hold, it became clear to all involved who received the psychedelic and who had not. While a definite limitation of the study, the experiment revealed a distinctive substance/experience

correlation that suggested, to Pahnke, that within psychedelic substances and experience an entheogenic—meaning a specifically religious—tendency clearly exists.

To measure results, Pahnke tape-recorded individual reactions immediately following the service, as well as an ensuing group discussion. As soon as possible, each subject wrote a “phenomenological account of his experience” and, “within a week,” filled out a “147-item questionnaire,” which was subsequently used as “the basis for a ninety-minute tape-recorded interview that followed immediately.” Pahnke also was concerned with the lingering effects—the “fruits”—of each participant’s psychedelic experience, and therefore conducted interviews six months later with the specific intent to “measure both positive and negative attitudinal and behavioral changes that had lasted for six months and were felt to be due to the experience.”⁸²

Analyzing the average scores of the first questionnaire, average scores of the follow-up questionnaire, and scores assigned to the written reports, Pahnke concluded that nine of the ten subjects who ingested psilocybin had a mystical experience. Within the control group, only one member claimed so; and, as Walter Houston Clark notes, the subject who received psilocybin but denied any type of mystical experience later admitted that he hoped to discount any connection between psychedelics and a religious experience.⁸³ Most important for Pahnke, as Paula Jo Hruby emphasizes in a retrospective look at the Marsh Chapel Experiment, proved to be the ways in which “the phenomenological experiences of the experimental subjects were indistinguishable from, or even identical to, the characteristics of mysticism defined *a priori*.”⁸⁴ Pahnke did not affix mystical narratives on top of the empirical evidence, but rather demonstrated how phenomenological evidence directly reflects mystical states of consciousness—the only mediating factor appeared to be the presence of psilocybin.

“The most striking difference between the experimentals and the controls,” Pahnke stresses accordingly, “was the ingestion of thirty milligrams of psilocybin, which it was concluded was the facilitating agent responsible for the difference in phenomena experienced.”⁸⁵ Pahnke quickly notes, however, that mystical consciousness represents but one manifestation of the psychedelic experience; rather than a one-to-one relationship which would seemingly bolster Zaehner-like criticisms, Pahnke stresses the important caveat that the “drug is a *necessary* but not *sufficient* condition.”⁸⁶ Such recognition, as Rick Doblin emphasizes in his twenty-five-year follow-up to Pahnke’s original experiment, develops from the reality that, even with the “proper” staging, casualties,

freak-outs, and antireligious moments remain possible. To make Pahnke's same point, however, Doblin points to (seemingly purposeful) omissions by Pahnke that worked to situate the results of his experiment in a positive light. Through interviews with original participants, Doblin learned that Pahnke failed to expand fully on two subjects who expressed negative experiences, one of whom actually escaped what he felt to be "a prison" rather than a chapel. After a brief scuffle, the subject returned only through the calming influence of Huston Smith and Timothy Leary, along with "a shot of thorazine as a tranquilizer," which, as Doblin stresses, Pahnke "does not report anywhere."⁸⁷

Nevertheless, despite methodological shortcomings and imprecise (and at times arbitrary) questions and scoring mechanisms, Doblin concludes that "the experiment's fascinating and provocative conclusions strongly support the hypothesis that psychedelic drugs can help facilitate mystical experiences when used by religiously inclined people in a religious setting."⁸⁸ Moreover, Doblin's long-term follow-up, as with a 2006/2008 study at Johns Hopkins University,⁸⁹ provide "further support to the findings of the original experiment," namely, how "the experimental subjects unanimously described their Good Friday psilocybin experience as having had elements of a genuinely mystical nature and characterized it as one of the highpoints of their spiritual life." In fact, as Doblin reports, "each of the psilocybin subjects felt that the experience had significantly affected his life in a positive way and expressed appreciation for having participated in the experiment."⁹⁰

Given the sepia-toned glasses that often skew psychedelic nostalgia among former hippies, Doblin's conclusions are particularly significant given the subjects. These were not former hippies, but, at the time of the experiment, "professors or students of religion, psychology and philosophy at universities, colleges and seminaries in the Boston area," with "five out of the eight psilocybin subjects and five out of the ten placebo subjects currently working as ministers" at the time of Doblin's follow-up.⁹¹ What the experiment signifies, therefore, is not that psychedelics act as a panacea, nor offer proof of a chemical form of instant mysticism, but rather the importance of disposition (*set*) of both the one experiencing and those helping guide the psychedelic experience, and the significance of the physical environment (*setting*).

Thus Pahnke, in line with his mentor Leary and earlier researchers including Sidney Cohen and Humphry Osmond, stresses the importance and contingency of *set* ("denotes the preparation of the individual, including his personality structure and his mood at the time") and *setting* (which "is physical—the weather, the room's atmosphere; social—feelings of persons present towards

one another; and culture—prevailing views as to what is real”)—in other words, the *rituals* that help structure the manifestation of psychedelic consciousness as mystical awareness.⁹² While decadent use certainly became vogue in the later 1960s, the results of the Marsh Chapel Experiment illustrate the austerity and, in a certain way, asceticism of early experiments with psychedelics. This early belief, as demonstrated in Pahnke’s experiment and further developed in Leary, Richard Alpert, and Ralph Metzner’s psychedelic manuals, did more than connect phenomenological experiences and a priori descriptions—it also expressed a preternatural form of spirituality devoted to using psychedelics within a religious setting in order to experience perennial oneness.⁹³ Consequently, as Pahnke repeatedly stresses, while “it is a misconception to imagine that LSD is the magic answer to anything,” it became apparent, based on the empirical evidence of his experiment, that psychedelics *can* function as “a trigger, a catalyst or facilitating agent.”⁹⁴

As trained psychologists and original members/founders of the Harvard Psilocybin Project, Leary, Alpert, and Metzner proved tantamount in combining scientific and spiritualized experimentation with psychedelic substances.⁹⁵ Like Pahnke, while all three contend that psychedelics contain the key to unlocking mystical gnosis, none (outside Leary’s later aggrandizement) believed that psychedelics in and of themselves function *as* mystical experience. “Of course,” Leary, Alpert, and Metzner declare in their iconic work *The Psychedelic Experience*, “the drug does not produce the transcendent experience. It merely acts as a chemical key—it opens the mind, frees the nervous system of its ordinary patterns and structures.”⁹⁶ Clearly indebted to Huxley, *The Psychedelic Experience* essentially codified the lessons of the Marsh Chapel Experiment. Relying on Huxley’s belief that a cleansed perception provides the necessary first step into cosmic consciousness, psychedelics, as Pahnke notes above, help facilitate this process by explicitly breaking down modern ideologies that separate the believer from the source of her belief. But psychedelics can only go so far, and “it is for this reason that manuals or guide-books [like *The Psychedelic Experience*] are necessary.” The purpose of such manuals, as Leary, Alpert, and Metzner continue, “is to enable a person to understand the new realities of the expanded consciousness, to serve as *road-maps* for new interior territories . . . to teach the person to direct and control awareness in such a way as to reach that level of understanding variously called liberation, illumination, or enlightenment.”⁹⁷

Heeding Huxley’s advice, Leary, Alpert, and Metzner relied directly on the long history of Eastern mysticism and shamanic traditions to make sense of psychedelic consciousness, reimagining *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* as a

guidebook capable of directing the insights of the psychedelic experience. In the introductory foreword to the first-ever English translation of the *Bardo Thödol* (what editor W. Y. Evans-Wentz translates to mean *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*), Lāma Anagarika Govinda—a Western convert to Buddhism who helped expose the West to Tibetan Buddhism and meditative practices—stresses the symbolic and metaphoric inner meaning of the text, how it “is far more . . . [than] religious speculation about death and a hypothetical after-death state . . . It is a key to the innermost recesses of the human mind, and a guide for initiates, and for those who are seeking the spiritual path of liberation.”⁹⁸

As the very structure of the *Bardo Thödol* suggests, liberation does not come spontaneously, but emerges by following the instructions outlined in the text. Awakening to a state between death and rebirth—what Leary, Alpert, and Metzner, following Govinda, describe as a liminal space freed from the regulating conformity of the ego—thereby occurs within and through the mapping provided by the *Bardo Thödol*. Consequently, while the book ostensibly describes the death experience, it also symbolizes the processes of life, of living in the here and now.⁹⁹ Leary, Alpert, and Metzner structured *The Psychedelic Experience* to guide similarly the psychedelic initiate toward an esoteric truth of absolute interconnection discovered at the core of psychedelic consciousness. In addition to programming an experience described as an immediate moment of egolessness, *The Psychedelic Experience* maps a perennial relationship between mystical consciousness and an altruistic worldview.

In terms of the debate regarding the relationship between psychedelics, mysticism, and morality, this application and ritualization implies a return to interpretation and a reliance on practices and understandings that reverberate throughout history. Psychedelics trigger experiences that seem to reside outside of normal frames of understanding; because of this, it becomes necessary to engage the broader spiritual traditions and mystical modes of understanding drawn on by psychedelic mystics in order not only to grasp the meaning of psychedelic consciousness, but also to rescue its moral implications—its religious fruits—from projects of internal escapism. Pahnke’s resulting emphasis on set and setting, and the very emergence of psychedelic manuals designed to help “understand,” “direct,” and “control” psychedelic awareness, indicates “that what one *does* with a psychedelic experience may be more important than merely *having* it,” Pahnke concludes.¹⁰⁰ To stay mired within discussions of what constitutes authentic versus profane mysticism consequently misses the ways in which psychedelic consciousness, by revealing “new realities” reflecting perennial beliefs

in unitive experiences (including theistic renditions, as Pahnke's experiment demonstrates), offers new direction for engaging the everyday experience of life.

Mystical consciousness, psychedelic or otherwise, does not replace "ordinary" existence or perception. Rather, it offers a new basis to engage the various structures that organize and divide modern living. The rituals and practices (almost all of which were derived from Eastern religious practices or the practices of traditional shamans) developed by early experiments with psychedelics, and the resulting manuals and critical interpretations, imply that the experience of direct religious consciousness expected a form of ritual organization. Neither entirely new, nor traditional in the sense of dogmatic religions, psychedelic mysticism found expression by drawing from the rich history of religious sacraments, psychoactive or otherwise. These previous traditions and spiritual understandings offered direction to help combat both the negative manifestations of psychedelics (supporters rarely denied the potential for negative "trips") and the growing narrative that sought to draw a definitive line between the *means* and *ends* of mystical states of being.

For Pahnke, and for the debate in question, the most powerful result of his experiment emerged from a (religious) belief among subjects who "felt that this experience had motivated them to appreciate more deeply the meaning of their lives, to gain more depth and authenticity in ordinary living, and to rethink their philosophies of life and values."¹⁰¹ Measuring "positive changes in attitude" (category 9 in Pahnke's typology) both immediately after the experience and in the six-month follow-up illustrated distinctive shifts in "one's relationship with other persons, greater sensitivity, increased tolerance, and more real compassion." The participants in the Marsh Chapel Experiment describe an experience of finally coming to know "the meaning of genuinely meeting another person without the subtle masks that separate man from man."¹⁰² Psychedelics thereafter function as a type of sacrament, expressing a unique entheogenic quality that, due to this religious core, makes rethinking one's "philosophies of life and values" a distinctly moral issue.

As with theistic forms of mysticism, an encounter with an "ultimate reality" does not negate concerns with, or the meaningfulness of, "ordinary reality," but, as Pahnke stresses, makes it possible to rethink and reorder the structures that govern "ordinary reality." Indeed, as Huxley himself notes, psychedelics are neither "necessary nor sufficient for salvation," but "if properly used, can be enormously helpful to those who have received it. And this is true of all such

experiences, whether occurring spontaneously, or as the result of swallowing the right kind of chemical mind changer, or after undertaking a course of 'spiritual exercises' or bodily mortification."¹⁰³ The capacity for psychedelic consciousness to bring the experiencer to the brink of the divine—what Huston Smith describes in his own entheogenic account as enabling an unmediated experience of "the Great Chain of Being . . . all the way to its top"—ultimately suggests that approaching 1960s experiments and experiences in psychedelic mysticism as entheogenic expressions of perennial narratives goes far in reconciling the social concern of the counterculture (invariable described as "peace and love") with the unique manifestations of a wholly renewed religious sentiment.¹⁰⁴

On November 5, 1995, thirty-three years after the Marsh Chapel Experiment, one of its original student participants, the Reverend Mike Young, delivered a sermon that represented "an invitation to entheological dialogue." Reverend Young challenged the religious establishment for failing to properly approach entheogens, for "paint[ing] itself into an especially awkward corner" by ignoring sacramental experiences capable of evoking a "reordering, a reframing, of the experiencer's meanings and meaning-making . . . in ways that religious leaders have always said were good."¹⁰⁵ Continuing, Reverend Young captures the spiritual value of psychedelic mysticism and exposes what we potentially miss if we continue to exclude psychedelics, specifically as developed in sixties mystical texts, from the realm of religious sacraments: "The ego-loss experienced with LSD, the sense of reconnectedness with MDMA, the standing-naked-before-the-infinite, out-of-the-body experience with ketamine: these provide the occasion for the reframing of existential questions (such as 'Who am I?' and 'What is, therefore, important?') that the experiencer realizes they have gotten so wrong. This reframing and re-connecting, this remembering of ourselves, is what pushes and pulls us to be more than we are. Spoken of in different ways and sought by different means, it is at the heart of our various spiritual disciplines."¹⁰⁶ The real question, then, becomes how psychedelic mysticism leads to distinct changes in one's approach to life and living—how it transforms one's view from a modern vision based on various dualities and borders, to a religious sentiment in which "the proof of the experience is in the fruits."¹⁰⁷

In a curious way, Zaehner and constructivists like Katz had it right: interpretation and interpretative value are essential in understanding and engaging mystical consciousness. However, by failing to give credence to nontheistic perspectives, and by elevating cultural relativism at the expense of perennial connections, Zaehner and the constructivists paint an incomplete picture, merely reifying a narrative that fails to explore *how* psychedelic consciousness, when

interpreted within and through mystically inspired frames, expressed a distinctly spiritual and moral perspective. The belief that psychedelics can induce an unmediated experience of the One—of a perfected unity between all beings and all things—became a spiritual mantra, signifying how, if an essential oneness lay at the base of all existence, then the only worldly response possible must be unrestricted altruism. Thus, unlike with Zaehner and the constructivists, the interpretative value does not preordain the experience, but distinctively helps maintain the quotidian value and usefulness of psychedelic consciousness.

While some, such as social activist Wavy Gravy or communard Stephen Gaskin, structured a life around this understanding, others fell victim to the dark side of psychedelic consciousness, finding not heaven, but hell. As we continue to reflect on the significance of psychedelics, mysticism, and religious experience, this real problem signals the importance of resuscitating the discussion of set and setting. The ritualization of psychedelics as a sacramental process demonstrates, beyond the immediacy of the experience, how religious and worldly significance emerge from an openness to structuring the contours of psychedelic consciousness, and an inclination to share and enact the mystical results through the universality offered by religion and the perennial philosophy. If, as Alan Watts contends, psychedelics disclose “a new image of man, not as a spirit imprisoned in incompatible flesh, but as an organism inseparable from his social and natural environment,” then meaning and value come not from personally obtaining this insight, but in helping us reimagine complex dialogues between self and other, between the always already and the never quite yet.¹⁰⁸

NOTES

1. Albert Hofmann, *LSD: My Problem Child: Reflections on Sacred Drugs, Mysticism, and Science* (Santa Cruz, Calif.: Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, 2009), 97–99. See also Craig S. Smith, “Nearly 100, LSD’s Father Ponders his ‘Problem Child,’” *New York Times*, January 7, 2006.

2. Charles S. Grob, “A Conversation with Albert Hofmann,” in *Hallucinogens: A Reader*, ed. Charles S. Grob (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 2002), 16. For specific proponents of psychedelics as a medical device, see part 7, “Therapeutic Applications,” in *Psychedelics: The Uses and Implications of Hallucinogenic Drugs*, ed. Bernard Aaronson and Humphry Osmond (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1970). For a critical interrogation into the structures dictating this debate, see Humphry Osmond, “A Review of the Clinical Effects of Psychotomimetic Agents,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Science* 66 (1957): 418–34, in which he condemns the restrictive psychotomimetic narrative of psychoactive substances, introducing the term “psychedelic” to complicate the medical–social–cultural–spiritual divides.

3. Grob, "Conversation with Albert Hofmann," 16–17.
4. Ibid., 16; Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 145, 155–56.
5. David Farber, "The Intoxicated State/Illegal Nation: Drugs in the Sixties Counterculture," in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*, eds. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002), 32. Farber does not support this position, but he does analyze this perspective historically.
6. Jay Stevens, *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (New York: Grove Press, 1987), 368. For an example of the media sensationalism of acid casualties, see "Psychiatry: An Epidemic of Acid Heads," *Time*, March 11, 1966; and Albert Rosenfeld, "A Remarkable Mind Drug Suddenly Spells Danger: LSD," *Life*, March 25, 1966.
7. Robert Forman offers the following definitions: constructivism denotes "the view that mystical experience is significantly shaped and formed by the subject's beliefs, concepts, and expectations." Conversely, the perennial school maintains "that mystical experience represent[s] an immediate, direct contact with a (variously defined) absolute principle." In Robert K. C. Forman, "Introduction: Mysticism, Constructivism, and Forgetting," in *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*, ed. Robert K. C. Forman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 3.
8. Walter N. Pahnke, "Drugs and Mysticism: An Analysis of the Relationship Between Psychedelic Drugs and Mystical Consciousness" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1964), 161; Walter N. Pahnke, "LSD and Religious Experience," in *LSD, Man and Society*, ed. Richard C. DeBold and Russell C. Leaf (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), 73.
9. For such a discussion, see Harry Oldmeadow, *Journeys East: 20th Century Western Encounters with Eastern Religious Traditions* (Bloomington, Ind.: World Wisdom, 2004), 245–69; Harvey Cox, *Turning East: The Promise and Peril of the New Orientalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977); and R. C. Zaehner, *Zen, Drugs, and Mysticism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 66–135.
10. This is not to efface the foundational differences that separate sixties political activists, like Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) or the Black Panthers, from the psychedelic counterculture. In fact, Leary came under attack from the SDS camp for advocating his "drop out" axiom, which included an absolute refusal to play the "game" of politics. While many in the counterculture did explicitly reject any political orientation, others, as this article hopes to suggest, came to understand their religious awakening as a call to political praxis in the form of social justice projects.
11. Beyond sociocultural shifts (which remain works in progress)—including women's rights, civil rights, gay rights, and children's rights—the counterculture's broad ethos of social concern influenced our modern environmental movement, current health debates and standards, and helped refocus, to the extent possible, modern concerns with the "self" and relation to "others." New age movements often stress personal development and harmony with one another and nature. See, for example, Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, *Daughters of Aquarius: Women and the Sixties Counterculture* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009); Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); and Timothy Miller, chapter 7, "Legacy," in *The Hippies and American Values* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

12. In a 1968 "ethnographic sketch" of Haight-based hippies, authors Fred Davis and Laura Munoz note the difference between "heads" and "freaks." A "'head' essentially is thought to be someone who uses drugs—and, here, it is mainly the hallucinogens that the speaker has in mind—for purposes of mind expansion, insight and the enhancement of personality attributes, i.e. he uses drugs to discover where 'his head is at' . . . as a *means* for self-realization or self-fulfillment, and not as an end in itself." Conversely, "the term 'freak' refers usually to someone in search of drug kicks as such, especially if his craving carries him to the point of drug abuse . . . [which] is so excessive and of such purely hedonistic bent as to cause them to 'freak out,' e.g. become ill or disoriented, behave violently or erratically, give evidence of a 'paranoid' state of mind." In Davis and Munoz, "Heads and Freaks: Patterns and Meanings of Drug Use Among Hippies," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 9, no. 2 (1968): 160.

13. Originally cited in Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD: The CIA, the Sixties, and Beyond* (New York: Grove Press, 1985), 81.

14. R. C. Zaehner, "Rot in the Clockwork Orange," in *Our Savage God* (London: Collins, 1974), 19–73.

15. R. C. Zaehner, "The Wickedness of Evil," in *The City Within the Heart* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 41.

16. Sidney Cohen, *The Beyond Within: The LSD Story* (New York: Atheneum, 1964), 107.

17. On October 24, 1968, the federal government passed the Staggers–Dodd Bill (Public Law 90-639), which amended the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, officially banning possession of LSD.

18. Originally cited in Stevens, *Storming Heaven*, 279.

19. Oldmeadow, *Journeys East*, 266–67.

20. Roszak, *Making of a Counterculture*, 145, 155–56.

21. Whitall N. Perry, *Challenges to a Secular Society* (Oakton, Va.: Foundation for Traditional Studies, 1996), 7–16.

22. Cox does not deny the profound power of psychedelics, reflecting on his own experience with mescaline as the "sign of a universe that throbbed with love." However, Cox directly denies his experience as mystical; profound yes, but its mysticism is merely part of the psychedelic set and setting. In *Turning East*, 47–49.

23. Roszak, *Making of a Counterculture*, 166, 145. Elsewhere, Roszak attacks Alan Watts and Aldous Huxley for producing a "barbarous and superficial fascination" among the young whose minds are "too small and too young for such psychic adventures." *Ibid.*, 159.

24. Jacob Needleman, *A Sense of the Cosmos: The Encounter of Modern Science and Ancient Truths* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 163.

25. Roszak, *Making of a Counter Culture*, 160.

26. Martin Buber, "What Is Common to All," in *The Knowledge of Man: Selected Essays*, ed. Maurice S. Friedman (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 100.

27. See David Felton, *Mindfuckers: A Source Book on the Rise of Acid Fascism in America, Including Material on Charles Manson, Mel Liman, Victor Baranco, and Their Followers* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow, 1972); and Gary Lachman, *Turn Off Your Mind: The Mystic Sixties and the Dark Side of the Age of Aquarius* (New York: Disinformation, 2001).

28. Originally cited in Jacob Needleman, "Winds of the East: Youth and Counter Culture," in *Mystery, Magic, and Miracle: Religion in a Post-Aquarian Age*, ed. Edward F. Heenan (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Spectrum, 1973), 78–79.

29. Roszak, *Making of a Counter Culture*, 160.

30. See, for example, Nadya Zimmerman, *Counterculture Kaleidoscope: Musical and Cultural Perspectives on Late Sixties San Francisco* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 158–59.

31. John Passmore, “Paradise Now: The Logic of the New Mysticism,” *Encounter*, November 1970, 8, 14. While Passmore challenges the altruistic coherency of psychedelics, it is important to note that his criticism follows a general distrust (and troubling Eurocentric reading) of both mysticism and Zen Buddhism.

32. Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception; and, Heaven and Hell* (New York: Harper, 2009), 22.

33. R. C. Zaehner, *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 7.

34. Oldmeadow, *Journeys East*, 267.

35. Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, 17.

36. Zaehner, *Mysticism Sacred and Profane*, 22.

37. *Ibid.*, 27–28.

38. R. C. Zaehner, hardly a perennialist, recognizes that evidence in mystical texts points to a “grand pattern of the universal mystical tradition,” which could constitute a “common mystical tradition of mankind.” However, this commonality is tempered by Zaehner’s emphasis on a tripartite approach to mystical states (“panenhenic,” monistic, or theistic). In Zaehner, *Concordant Discord: The Interdependence of Faiths* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 337, 140.

39. Zaehner, *Mysticism Sacred and Profane*, 21.

40. Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy: An Interpretation of the Great Mystics, East and West* (New York: Perennial Classics, 2004), vii–viii.

41. *Ibid.*, vii.

42. *Ibid.*, 15; see also 11, 35–36, 44, 77–78, 160.

43. Frithjof Schuon, “The Nature of Religion,” in *The Essential Writings of Frithjof Schuon*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Rockport, Mass.: Element, 1991), 67. The Traditionalist School (often called generically perennialism), most commonly associated with a school of thought that believes generally in a transcendent unity as the primordial origin of all religion, emerged most directly in the writings and teachings of French metaphysician René Guénon, and was subsequently influenced by the work of German–Swiss philosopher Frithjof Schuon and Ceylonese–British scholar Ananda Coomaraswamy, both of whom built off of Guénon.

44. In particular, Harry Oldmeadow challenges Huxley’s perennial philosophy for being “seriously marred by all manner of disabling modern prejudices and assumptions.” See “Metaphysics: East and West,” in *Touchstone of the Spirit: Essay on Religion, Traditions and Modernity* (Bloomington, Ind.: World Wisdom, 2012), 232. Such assumptions, according to Clinton Minnaar in his introduction to *The Underlying Religion: An Introduction to the Perennial Philosophy*, ed. Martin Lings and Clinton Minnaar (Bloomington, Ind.: World Wisdom, 2007), spawn from the willingness “to compromise the forms of religion in order to further their pointedly postmodern political and sentimental agendas. They forget,” Minnaar stresses, “that the religious forms—as inalienable symbols of the essence—are dispensed with at great spiritual peril” (xix).

45. Huxley, *Perennial Philosophy*, 301.

46. Huston Smith, *The World’s Religions* (New York: HarperOne, 1991).

47. Ibid., 388–89.
48. Ibid., 11.
49. D. T. Suzuki, *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2002), 18–19, 8.
50. Alan Watts, *Behold the Spirit: A Study in the Necessity of Mystical Religion* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), xii.
51. Ibid., xiii, 4–10, 50.
52. Ibid., xviii.
53. Ibid., xxv.
54. Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, 53.
55. Watts argues that the main effect of LSD is its capacity to remove “certain habitual and normal inhibitions of the mind and senses, enabling us to see things as they would appear to us if we were not so chronically repressed.” In Watts, “The New Alchemy,” in *This Is It, and Other Essays on Zen and Spiritual Experience* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 144.
56. Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religion* (Wheaton, Ill.: Quest, 1984).
57. Timothy Leary, “She Comes in Colors,” in *The Politics of Ecstasy* (Berkeley, Calif.: Ronin, 1992), 133.
58. Alan Watts, *The Joyous Cosmology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), xvii–xviii, 48.
59. Watts, “New Alchemy,” 151. See also Alan Watts, *Two Hands of God: The Myths of Polarity* (New York: George Braziller, 1963), 49, 185.
60. Huxley, *Perennial Philosophy*, viii.
61. Ibid., ix.
62. Ibid., vii; Aldous Huxley, “Drugs That Shape Men’s Minds,” in *Moksha: Aldous Huxley’s Classic Writings on Psychedelics and the Visionary Experience*, ed. Michael Horowitz and Cynthia Palmer (Rochester, Vt.: Park Street Press, 1999), 154.
63. Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, 73.
64. Huxley, “Drugs That Shape Men’s Minds,” 154; Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, 23.
65. Huxley, “Drugs That Shape Men’s Minds,” 154; Aldous Huxley, “Heaven and Hell,” in *Doors of Perception*, 155.
66. Zaehner, for example, attacks the monistic basis of Huxley’s understanding of mysticism, arguing that Huxley relies on a proposition in which “the individual soul is substantially and essentially identical with the unqualifiable Absolute.” This move, from body to spirit, occurs, Zaehner argues, at the expense of Huxley’s phenomenal source for mystical consciousness. See *Mysticism Sacred and Profane*, 29.
67. Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, 35.
68. Richard Maurice Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1969), 12–18.
69. Huston Smith notes that, while variations in religious interpretations definitely manifest, “if we pass a strainer through the world’s religions to lift out their conclusions about reality and how life should be lived, those conclusions begin to look like the winnowed wisdom of the human race.” In Smith, *World’s Religions*, 387. Smith develops this thesis more thoroughly in *Forgotten Truth: The Common Vision of the World’s Religions* (San Francisco: Harper, 1976).
70. Katz goes further than Zaehner by structuring his analysis through modern interpretative devices: without a study of language and culture, it is not only impossible, but exceedingly

naive, to speak of a common religious experience. Accordingly, Katz declares that “all experience is processed through, organized by, and makes itself available to us in extremely complex epistemological ways. The notion of unmediated experience seems, if not self-contained, at best empty.” In Steven T. Katz, “Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism,” in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 26.

71. Three Initiates, *The Kybalion* (Chicago: Yogi Publication Society, 1940), 95.

72. Huston Smith, “Do Drugs Have Religious Import?” *Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 18 (1964): 524. See also Huston Smith, *Cleansing the Doors of Perception: The Religious Significance of Entheogenic Plants and Chemicals* (Boulder, Colo.: Sentient, 2003).

73. Pahnke’s experiment, while significant, was hardly unique to the 1960s. For other examples, see Bernard S. Aaronson and Humphry Osmond, “Introduction: Psychedelics, Technology, Psychedelics,” in *Psychedelics*, ed. Aaronson and Osmond; Walter Houston Clark, *Chemical Ecstasy: Psychedelic Drugs and Religion* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969); and R. E. L. Masters and Jean Houston, “Religious and Mystical Experience,” in *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience* (New York: Dell, 1966), 247–313. See also Steven J. Novak, “LSD Before Leary: Sidney Cohen’s Critique of 1950s Psychedelic Drug Research,” *Isis* 88, no. 1 (March 1997): 87–110.

74. From the Grecian Eleusinian Mysteries to the biblical manna to South American shamans, sixties psychedelic mysticism represents but one version. For a historical outline of the religious use of psychoactive substances, see R. Gordon Wasson, Carl Ruck, and Albert Hofmann, *The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries* (Berkeley, Calif.: North Atlantic Books, 2008); Terence McKenna, *Food of the Gods: Search for the Original Tree of Knowledge* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993); Dan Merkur, *The Psychedelic Sacrament: Manna, Meditation, and Mystical Experience* (Rochester, Vt.: Park Street Press, 2001); and James Arthur, *Mushrooms and Mankind: The Impact of Mushrooms on Human Consciousness and Religion* (Escondido, Calif.: Book Tree, 2000).

75. The term was first proposed in 1979 to distinguish “the religious nature of these substances and the experiences they evoke from their effects in other contexts, for which there are other terms, psychedelic or hallucinogen.” In Robert Forte, introduction to *Entheogens and the Future of Religion*, ed. Robert Forte (Rochester, Vt.: Park Street Press, 2012), 1–2. For the term’s first appearance, see Carl Ruck et al., “Entheogens,” *Journal of Psychedelic Drugs* 11, nos. 1–2 (1979): 145–46.

76. Foretelling the constructivist hermeneutics of Katz, Stace removes mysticism from logical proofs and culturally relativistic claims, arguing that a core truth of mystical experience leads to a perennial revelation of union and unity. He seeks, then, to rescue mysticism as it is and, from this, to rescue the heuristic value of mysticism, which Stace, like Zaehner, understands as love. See W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1960), 29–30; and W. T. Stace, *The Teachings of the Mystics* (New York: Mentor, 1960), 14.

77. Walter N. Pahnke, “Drugs and Mysticism,” in *Psychedelics*, ed. Aaronson and Osmond, 148.

78. Walter N. Pahnke and William A. Richards, “Implications of LSD and Experimental Mysticism,” in *Altered States of Consciousness*, ed. Charles T. Tart (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1972), 409.

79. Pahnke defined mysticism according to the following nine characteristics: (1) "unity"; (2) "objectivity and reality"; (3) "transcendence of space and time"; (4) "sense of sacredness"; (5) "deeply-felt positive mood"; (6) "paradoxicality"; (7) "alleged ineffability"; (8) "transiency"; and (9) "positive changes in attitude and/or behavior." See Pahnke and Richards, "Implications of LSD and Experimental Mysticism," 411–17.

80. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study of Human Nature* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 1902), 20, emphasis added to "practice."

81. Pahnke and Richards, "Implications of LSD and Experimental Mysticism," 425.

82. *Ibid.*, 426.

83. Clark, *Chemical Ecstasy*, 77.

84. Paula Jo Hruby, "Unitive Consciousness and Pahnke's Good Friday Experiment," in *Psychoactive Sacramentals: Essays on Entheogens and Religion*, ed. Thomas B. Roberts (San Francisco: Council on Spiritual Practices, 2001), 64.

85. Pahnke, "Drugs and Mysticism," 158.

86. *Ibid.*, 161; Pahnke and Richards, "Implications of LSD and Experimental Mysticism," 410–11.

87. Rick Doblin, "Pahnke's 'Good Friday Experiment': A Long-Term Follow-Up and Methodological Critique," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 23, no. 1 (1991): 22.

88. *Ibid.*, 23.

89. Roland Griffiths spearheaded a 2006 follow-up experiment at Johns Hopkins University, which showed that two months after psychedelic sessions, 79 percent of participants indicated, via a questionnaire modeled from Pahnke, that their sense of well-being and satisfaction had clearly increased. See R. R. Griffiths, W. A. Richards, U. McCann, and R. Jesse, "Psilocybin Can Occasion Mystical-Type Experiences Having Substantial and Sustained Personal Meaning and Spiritual Significance," *Psychopharmacology* 187, no. 3 (2006): 268–83; and R. R. Griffiths, W. A. Richards, U. McCann, R. Jesse, and M. W. Johnson, "Mystical-Type Experiences Occasioned by Psilocybin Mediate the Attribution of Personal Meaning and Spiritual Significance Fourteen Months Later," *Journal of Psychopharmacology* 22, no. 6 (2008): 621–32.

90. Doblin, "Pahnke's 'Good Friday Experiment,'" 23, 13, 14.

91. *Ibid.*, 2, 13.

92. Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert, and Ralph Metzner, *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (New York: Citadel Press, 2007), 3. See also Pahnke, "Drugs and Mysticism," 153.

93. The "experience of an undifferentiated unity," Pahnke and Richards suggest, "is the hallmark of mystical consciousness"; and, in line with Stace and perennialism more generally, it is exceedingly problematic to place proscriptions around the conceptualization of "an undifferentiated unity." In "Implications of LSD and Experimental Mysticism," 411.

94. Pahnke, "LSD and Religious Experience," 81, 65.

95. While Leary's mass proselytizing in the late 1960s complicates his spiritual positioning, Alpert and Metzner remain active in both alternative spiritual practices and psychedelic discussions. Metzner continues to advocate for the alchemical and entheogenic quality of psychedelic substances. After experiencing mystical consciousness through the aid of psychedelics, Richard Alpert traveled to India in 1967, becoming a student of Neem Karoli Baba,

who bestowed Alpert with the name he is now better known by, Ram Dass, which means “servant of God.” For an introduction to both figures, see Metzner’s and Ram Dass’s reflections in *Birth of a Psychedelic Culture: Conversations About Leary, the Harvard Experiments, Millbrook and the Sixties* (Santa Fe, N.M.: Synergetic Press, 2010).

96. Leary, Alpert, and Metzner, *Psychedelic Experience*, 3.

97. *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

98. Lāma Anagarika Govinda, introductory foreword to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead; or, The After-Death Experiences of the Bardo Plane, According to Lāma Kazi Dawa-Samdup’s English Rendering*, comp. and ed. W. Y. Evans-Wentz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), lix.

99. See Evans-Wentz, preface to *ibid.*, xiii.

100. Pahnke, “LSD and Religious Experience,” 73.

101. Pahnke, “Drugs and Mysticism,” 158–59.

102. Pahnke and Richards, “Implications of LSD and Experimental Mysticism,” 417. Pahnke goes even further in a 1967 article, writing that “if psychedelic drugs really can change people’s goals, values, motivations and needs for achievement, the impact could be considerable on our society, in which there is so much stress on money, power and status.” In “LSD and Religious Experience,” 77.

103. Huxley, “Drugs That Shape Men’s Minds,” 154.

104. Huston Smith, “Do Drugs Have Religious Import? A Thirty-Five-Year Retrospect,” in *Psychoactive Sacramentals*, ed. Roberts, 14–15.

105. Rev. Mike Young, “If I Could Change Your Mind,” in *Psychoactive Sacramentals*, ed. Roberts, 1, 4–5. Reverend Young warns, however, that without the proper set and setting, psychedelic mysticism risks devolving into an “obsessive ideology” that “merely multiplies dogmatism.” *Ibid.*, 5.

106. *Ibid.*, 5.

107. *Ibid.*

108. Watts, *Joyous Cosmology*, 100.