

SOCIAL AND INTELLECTUAL ATTITUDES TOWARD DRUG-INDUCED RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

JAMES B. BAKALAR is Lecturer in Law in the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. He is the coauthor, with Lester Grinspoon, of *Cocaine: A Drug and its Social Evolution* (1976), *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered* (1979), and *Drug Control in a Free Society* (1984). He also has coedited a collection of essays, *Psychedelic Reflections* (1983), and has published articles and book reviews in various journals. He has been a consultant to the Hastings Institute of Society, Ethics, and the Life Sciences and to the Council on Research and Development of the American Psychiatric Association. His interests are historical and cultural features of drug use and intellectual history in general.

Summary

This article is a comment on the ambiguity of the psychedelic experience itself and the peculiarities of the modern social response to it. I discuss three kinds of attitudes toward psychedelic religious experience and compare them with three attitudes toward religious tradition described by Peter Berger. These are, roughly, materialist reductionism, defense of the purity of an orthodox faith, and religion as personal experiences given form and meaning by traditional interpretation. The effects of psychedelic drugs are used by some to discredit both drugs and religion, by others to discredit drugs while justifying a certain definition of religion, and by still others to accept drug-taking as one mode of religious experience broadly conceived. This last attitude is the one usually taken by psychedelic drug users themselves, but it raises the difficult question of what is definably religious about personal experiences before they are given form by a doctrine, ritual, and community. In this connection I discuss the common view of psychedelic experience as a foretaste or preliminary to a more serious religious regimen.

People who use psychedelic drugs sometimes think they have been brought closer than ever before to an appreciation of religious feelings and ideas and religious ways of life. These revelations or insights may turn into nothing more than psychedelic memorabilia

to be filed away and contemplated occasionally in an atmosphere of period nostalgia, especially given current American conditions, in which people tend to take the drugs in youth, during their rebellious adolescent adventuring. The word "psychedelic" now usually connotes little more than a certain mood of the late 1960s and early 1970s, certain kinds of popular music and decorative styles.

But there has always been more to psychedelic religiosity than that. These experiences have had serious effects on the lives of some people; a minority of drug users, no doubt, but more than is generally acknowledged, have had the direction of their activities and interests changed, sometimes subtly and sometimes dramatically (Walsh, 1982). One writer has said that for him psychedelic drug experiences and the study of religious concepts and traditions have been complementary, like intuitions and concepts in Kant's metaphysics: The concepts and traditions might seem empty without the experiences, and the experiences blind without the concepts and traditions (Clark, 1968).

In modern societies most people ignore drug-induced religious experience or fail to take it seriously; some fear it or hold it in contempt. And even people who undergo such experiences often have serious doubts about whether they are authentic or counterfeit and whether they are somehow second rate even if genuine. Three attitudes toward drug-induced religious experience can be distinguished: first, the hostile rationalistic and often mechanistic-materialist view; second, the view that genuine religion must be dissociated from drugs; and, third, the view probably most common among people who have taken psychedelic drugs and are interested in their religious properties, that this is a genuine religious experience that is nevertheless only suggestive, partial, and preliminary, and needs to be supplemented and then usually transcended or replaced.

The Protestant theologian Peter Berger, in his interesting recent book, *The Heretical Imperative* (1978), distinguishes three types of religious response to the crisis of modernity and secularization—what he calls the "relativization of plausibility structures" and the need to choose how to interpret religious experience and tradition. He calls the responses deduction, reduction, and induction; each of them corresponds to one of the common attitudes toward psychedelic religious experience.

The reductive approach assumes the cognitive superiority of modernity, as Berger calls it, and tries to translate religious

into secular terms. It corresponds in part to the rationalist or materialist judgment on drug-induced religion. Deduction, awkwardly named, is the neo-orthodox defense of the authority of religious tradition as an original self-validating revelation, a corpus of absolute truth, in the face of modern relativism, historical revisionism, and other reinterpretations of religious experience. This response is related, as we will see, to the view that religion should have nothing to do with drugs. The third alternative, induction, resembles the response of many psychedelic drug users to their religious experiments. Berger identifies this approach as that of liberal Protestantism and endorses it himself. It defines religion as a human experience whose object is another reality that, at certain times, breaks into consciousness and makes the reality of our ordinary lives seem a mere province or antechamber. Acknowledging it enables us to conceive the cosmos as a sacred order with redemptive meaning for us. The original experience of a religiously gifted person is incorporated in collective memory through traditions that preserve it for the religiously less adept, while necessarily distorting it somewhat in the translation. Each person has to accept religious beliefs on the basis of his or her own experience and the experiences embodied in the traditions. There is no absolute certainty and no final authority. Berger mentions Friedrich Schleiermacher, Rudolf Otto, and William James as thinkers who endorse something like this view.

The debunking rationalistic view of religious experience in general is exemplified by Voltaire's description of religious apparitions as "supernatural visions permitted to him or her who is gifted by God with the special grace of possessing a cracked brain, a hysterical temperament, a disordered digestion, or, most of all, the art of lying with effrontery." Voltaire's sarcasm is out of style today, but the attitude is recognizable. It can easily be extended to psychedelic experience as one more variant of humankind's eternal folly, presumably under the heading of cracked brains.

One of the most respected forms of materialist reduction is psychoanalysis. Freud's account of religion is a development of Ludwig Feuerbach's idea that religious feelings and beliefs are projections of human relationships, and human beings who worship God are revering an ideal of humanity in an alienated and distorted form. Freud calls religion a universal obsessional neurosis. It is said to dramatize children's relations with their families on a cosmic scale, and its mysteries are said to be those of the unconscious mind in its infantile longings (Freud, 1961).

From this point of view, psychedelic drugs are at best one more way to gain access to the unconscious and evoke those infantile longings and fantasies. They are perhaps mind-manifesting, as the Greek root of their name implies, but the mind they make manifest is the one described by Freud; they tell us in principle nothing special about religion.

The drugs can also be considered a new weapon for rationalism. B. F. Skinner (1948) was the first person who claimed to evoke superstitious behavior in animals by experimental methods. More recently, Ronald Siegel (1983) has produced what he calls a religious experience in a pigeon by conditioning it with the help of LSD and a glowing cross. He describes the pigeon's behavior as functionally equivalent to a religious ritual. He also thinks that pigeons and other animals under the influence of LSD experience mystical states, as defined by the criteria of W. T. Stace (1960): unity, paradoxicality, deep positive mood, transcendence of space and time, sense of sacredness, and so on. Of course, animals cannot tell us about it; they can indicate it only through their behavior and then only very ambiguously, to say the least; a great deal of interpretation by the experimenter is required. This behavioristic approach, incidentally, is radically opposed to the psychoanalytic one; from that point of view strange behavior by animals has nothing to do with religion, which is a product of the prolonged human biological immaturity and accompanying family conflicts. But both versions of psychological reductionism are meant to expose the vanity of religious pretensions. The notion of animal religion in particular is reminiscent of what George Santayana said about mysticism: that it is probably felt by animals as well as human beings and "visits formed minds only in moments of intellectual arrest" (Santayana, 1962, p. 189).

There are other, more purely biological and chemical versions of reductionism. Francis Crick, who discovered the structure of DNA, is well known as a rationalist and materialist scornful of religion in all its forms. He opposes the building of chapels on university campuses, because he thinks it means using educational resources to promote ignorance and error. And he is understandably flush with confidence after having reduced a large part of the mystery of life to an arrangement of molecules. It is said that he has decided to take on other mysteries as well. He has conjectured that since LSD and other drugs produce such a plausible religious experience, they may be mimicking a body chemical designed for the purpose, which he calls "theotoxin" or god-poison.

Once the existence of this chemical is assumed, we can speculate about its adaptive function during the early evolution of the species (perhaps to give people the will to go on in desperate conditions), and its possible biological obsolescence. The evidence here is very slight. We know that LSD and some other psychedelic drugs resemble serotonin, which is a neurotransmitter, a chemical produced by the body to pass messages between nerve cells. Serotonin is only one part of a complex system of internal regulation and certainly does not have any such simple uniform function as suggested by a term like theotoxin. But it is true that psychedelic drugs act directly on serotonin-producing nerve cells in the brain stem, which is a primitive part of the brain, common to all creatures with a central nervous system. In fact, their relative potency is the same in all animals affected; LSD is several thousand times as potent as mescaline in both spiders and human beings (Witt, 1975).

It is hard to identify the precise physiological and chemical correlates of most religious experience, or mental states in general, and that has always been an obstacle to scientific reductionism. But here is a great opportunity for explaining or explaining away: a single molecule with a known structure and a known resemblance to a body chemical. At one time the materiality of drugs would not have made any difference: A god or sacred power or *mana* could be embodied in a bit of matter, including plant matter like a mushroom, cactus, or morning glory seed, without thereby becoming any less holy. Like the wine and bread in the Mass, a drug could be a sacrament. Until the nineteenth century, after all, almost all drugs were substances mysteriously produced by plants. But now, even more than the rest of material nature, drugs have been thoroughly desacralized by science and technology. We can duplicate the drug molecules in laboratories; the mystery has been dispelled. So today, when some people claim to get religion from a drug—especially one that the law has pronounced to be an extremely dangerous substance with no medical uses—others may regard this as tending to confirm that religion itself is purely humanmade, dangerous, and unhealthy.

Rationalist atheism is not precisely what Berger means by the reductionist approach to the crisis of religious belief, but there is a connection. The thinkers he is interested in want to retain the forms and practices of religion while assigning them a purely secular content. His main case history is the German theologian Rudolf Bultmann, who developed his theory of demythologization just after World War II. According to Bultmann, Biblical religion

could be acceptable to a mind formed by modern standards of scientific rationality only if the now unbelievable supernatural apparatus, the "three-tier universe" of the Bible stories, was reinterpreted in human terms. Bultmann himself chose the categories of Martin Heidegger's (atheistic) philosophy (Berger, 1979, pp. 95-124). Others have reduced Christian doctrine to a kind of ethical humanism. But, as Berger points out, if religion is really "about" some metaphysical or ethical doctrine that can be stated in purely secular terms, the religious forms become merely a symbolic veil and lose their justification, even their expressive potency. Demythologizing takes the religion out of religion; the attempt to save the doctrine by ethical or metaphysical reinterpretation has almost the same effect as trying to destroy it by psychological or chemical reduction. In either case the superiority of a modern scientific or secular way of knowing is assumed when it conflicts with a religious one.

The reductionist view, at least in its explicitly rationalistic and atheistic versions, admits the connection between drugs and religion and tries to discredit both. But religion can also be regarded as a genuine source of knowledge incompatible with drugged delusional states. The reasons given range from the trivial to the profound. Probably the most popular one is simply that drugs produce vice, disease, and degradation, if not in the short run, certainly in the long run. In 1952, Huxley warned that the price paid for transcendence by means of drugs was too high. Borrowing the terminology of an earlier French writer, he called it downward transcendence or transdescendence as opposed to upward transcendence (Huxley, 1952). Shortly afterward he took mescaline for the first time and changed his mind; mescaline was not addictive and did not cause the same problems as alcohol and opium, the intoxicants he had been thinking of when he referred to transcendence. But the attitude he abandoned is still a common one.

A related objection is that the mimicry of religious revelation by drugs can only be a technological confidence trick—a sort of black magic and a false illumination, as Baudelaire said of hashish (Baudelaire, 1974, p. 147). Timothy Leary once said provocatively that in the psychedelic era religion without drugs would be as pointless and unnatural as astronomy without telescopes (Leary, 1968). The Roman Catholic scholar R. C. Zaehner responded that, as this analogy suggests, psychedelic drug use extended soulless technology to the soul itself (Zaehner, 1974). The effect was to

reduce the deepest human experiences to a disarrangement of molecules, just as materialist antagonists of religion proposed.

In Stanislav Lem's satirical science fiction novel, *The Futurological Congress* (1974), a vast pharmacopoeia of fantastic psychotropic drugs is used to deceive the populace and preserve the social system of a world burdened by overpopulation and an ice age. One of the drugs, called "absolventia," is taken for the forgiveness of sins; just who forgives is not stated, and God is not mentioned. This is the perfect *reductio ad absurdum* of the idea of drugs as a religious technology. A famous verse by A. E. Housman goes, "Malt does more than Milton can/To justify God's ways to man." Mescaline or LSD, notoriously, can do even more in that line than beer—so much more that it becomes hard to treat as a joke, and that is precisely what some people see as the danger in psychedelic religious feelings.

A plausible response is that drug-induced religious experience does not deserve a special low status. From a purely materialistic and mechanistic point of view, much intense religious experience is the product of imbalance in the nervous system. Techniques such as fasting, breathing exercises, prolonged wakefulness, isolation, and so on are designed to alter the mind by altering body chemistry. Santayana called mysticism a "normal disease" (1961, p. 189) accompanying most artistic and intellectual creativity. Prince Myshkin in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* knows his epilepsy to be disease and therefore in a sense the lowest form of experience, yet he has to admit that it gives him "moments worth the whole of life" (Dostoevsky, 1965, p. 226) and is therefore also the highest form of experience.

The distinction between transcendence and transdescendence is of little use here. Chemicals in the form of neurotransmitters operate as a cause of all human experience and ideas—the healthy person's and the sick person's, the materialist's and the mystic's. Drugs are a means of altering body chemistry, and they evoke an abnormal state of the brain, but that does not set drug effects apart from many other religious experiences both spontaneous and deliberately induced.

A deeper argument for denying the religious merit of drug-induced experience is that it is too easy, unearned, and, therefore, second rate. Accessibility devaluates it. The person who lands on the mountaintop in a helicopter does not see the same view as one who struggles up on foot. The trouble with this argument is

that, however we might wish it, religious revelations in general are not granted only to persons of proved excellence after prolonged effort. It makes no difference whether drugs are involved or not. Huxley borrowed the Roman Catholic term "gratuitous grace" to describe mescaline, because he saw it as a gift that one cannot earn but is obliged to use properly. Anyway, psychedelic mystical experience is not at all necessarily easy or instant; on the testimony of drug users, an intense internal struggle is often required to attain it.

For many adherents of Western religions dominated by the figure of a single transcendent God, there is a still more radical objection to drug-induced revelations. Charles Baudelaire, who was a Christian of a sort, experimented with hashish but ultimately repudiated it because, among other things, the godlike feeling it gave him was an extreme form of the sin of pride. He decided that the drug was diabolical; it "allowed man to violate the laws of his constitution" in his taste for the infinite; it was a kind of cheating that destroyed the soul and suppressed the work of time (Baudelaire, 1974, p. 101).

This may seem like a rather melodramatic way to talk about cannabis, but it is connected with certain ideas about the proper human relationship to God and the substance of true religion. In the great monotheistic religions nature is desanctified. The unique God is beyond nature and confronts the human as a separate person. Revelations are addressed to specific people at certain historical moments. In some versions of Christianity, especially, religion becomes a realm apart, a matter for personal decision, an act of faith. Often the claims of a creed become central, and then feelings and symbolic affirmations are secondary.

Neo-orthodox Christianity, described by Berger as the "deductive" response to the modern religious crisis, regards faith as a distinct and superior way of knowing derived from a specific past revelation that permits no compromise with secularism and modernity, but also offers no challenge to it. The doctrine of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth exemplifies in the most extreme form a rejection of all natural religion. He once wrote that the greatest enemy of Christianity was not skepticism or atheism, but generally religious feelings and ideas. For Barth, the faith of the New Testament is something quite apart from religion as usually conceived and also from nature and human experience. It is purely a gift of God's grace transmitted through the person of Jesus Christ and the words of the Bible. Faith is not a human

possibility; it is not something that people have a capacity to attain by themselves. The notion of each person finding a way to God by natural means is abhorrent (Berger, 1979, pp. 66-94).

Barth does not make it clear how faith is attained, but as Berger suggests, the only possibility seems to be the absurd leap recommended by Soren Kierkegaard in the nineteenth century. For Kierkegaard the social order was Christendom, which he contrasted with the true Christianity of the knight of faith, and mere religious feelings were romantic estheticism. The common religiosity of his day he regarded as a kind of automatism of custom. Ultimately, one had to choose between the religious life and the esthetic life—the life of passion and inclination, including passions and inclinations with religious-seeming overtones. Kierkegaard regarded mysticism as a form of spiritual estheticism that leaves all clear for the world, the flesh, and the devil by evading time and the finite. If he had known of drug-induced religious experience, he might have thought that it resembled both the automatism of conventional Christendom and the estheticism of Romantic passion-religion.

The third attitude toward drug-induced religious experience is harder to define than rationalist reductionism or the defense of faith as a realm apart. It includes a great variety of opinions, from a simple dim recollection that something has happened that you cannot quite bring yourself to explain away, to a conviction that you have been exposed to confirming evidence for some religious cosmogony or a foretaste of a state of the soul recommended as the aim of some religious practice or tradition. There is usually no question of the experience being absolutely self-validating or an end in itself. A character in T. S. Eliot's *The Cocktail Party* says,

A delusion is something we must return from.

There are other states of mind, which we take to be delusions

But which we have to accept and go on from.

Psychedelic experience, then, is not a delusion, because it is something we have to accept, at least tentatively, and go on from.

This interpretation of drug experiences is related to what Berger calls the inductive response to the modern crisis. Religious experience captures something real but obscure, which is translated differently in different traditions. Religion is no longer in competition with science to predict and control the environment, and it is not defined by creedal truths. Certainty and authority

of the kind proposed by neo-orthodox interpretations of God's word are impossible. No revelation should be rejected a priori, and the source of the experience does not matter. As William James insisted, we must judge by fruits, not roots.

Unfortunately, this tolerant criterion leaves it uncertain which experiences qualify as religious, and how true or good religion can be distinguished from false or bad religion. James said the pragmatic tests were immediate luminousness, philosophical reasonableness, and moral helpfulness. But immediate luminousness is obviously subjective; the most varied and peculiar beliefs have been regarded as philosophically reasonable; and in modern society we are in doubt not only about what is morally helpful but about what morality is. One person's moral majority is another person's moralistic fanaticism.

Friedrich Schleiermacher, one of the founders of liberal Protestantism, put forth as his candidate for the core religious experience something he called a sense of absolute dependence (Schleiermacher, 1843). But this does not seem to be central to all religious traditions; in Buddhism, for example, all dependence is regarded as conditional. And it would be easy to argue, as Kierkegaard did, that the sense of absolute dependence is common to all sentient nature rather than specifically human; those allegedly religious laboratory pigeons might be experiencing it.

Berger has no better answer. As he admits, defining religion as experience ultimately makes the choice of a religious tradition subjective. But worse, inductive formulations are unstable and easily transmuted into reductive ones. As long as beliefs and rites are excluded from the core of religion, it is not clear what makes the residue specifically religious. We cannot be sure that there is a single country from which all the travelers are sending back their inconsistent reports. No mere collection of variously interpreted experiences can guarantee our participation in a sacred order of the universe.

James writes that there is a sixth sense of "objective presence," which perceives things in a way one cannot help regarding as a genuine apprehension of reality, not to be discredited as the level of ordinary discourse (James, 1929, p. 58). But a sense that told you that what it perceived must be real would not be a sense at all, but a mechanism for making judgments—in general, false ones. In fact, James also says that mystical and other religious experiences are as much subject to evaluation and correction as what is delivered by the external senses. The sense of certainty serves

only the moment and establishes nothing. There is no immediate way to distinguish between a vehicle for access to a deeper or wider reality and what has been called a local experience machine (Nozick, 1982) fully equipped with a device for evoking objective presence.

A compromise terminology has evolved from the ensuing doubt and hesitancy. Instead of making insistent claims to truth, we speak of consciousness expansion, which implies something more than mere feelings and sensations but less than a direct line to the heart of reality. Now there is an even more noncommittal term, altered states of consciousness, which suggests not expansion but diversion of the mind. The claims made for the experience become more and more modest; and the implications are what Berger would call reductive, as the categories are purely secular and the connection with reality is left vague.

The inadequacy of conceiving religion as experience may seem a rather theoretical issue, but it is related to what most troubles users of psychedelic drugs: the fear that drug use may become a trap that prevents people from realizing their resources by binding them to an external, alien agent onto which they project powers that are really their own. They are left in a state of illusion, taking the same trips over and over, and eventually ceasing to learn anything new.

William James's latitudinarian conception of religious experience included certain drug effects—specifically, experiments with nitrous oxide conducted by himself and his friend Benjamin Paul Blood. James derived a kind of religious or at least metaphysical illumination from nitrous oxide; it inspired some interesting reflections on Hegel's philosophy. Blood went further; he took nitrous oxide periodically throughout his life and actually said that the anesthetic revelation, as he called it, had become his moral sustenance. How was Blood different from someone who depends on alcohol or opium for moral sustenance, and what in his practices could be called religious? After all, James himself said that drunkenness was the mysticism of the poor in spirit. At the level of mere experience, the distinction between Blood's practices and an ordinary drug dependency looks like a matter of taste rather than religious authenticity.

By this standard, reliance on psychedelic drugs is a subtler trap than alcoholism or addiction, but still ultimately a mistake. Drugs are regarded as alien to the self in a way other religious practices are not. That may seem dubious; the internal is not so easily

marked off from the external, or what is alien from what belongs to the self. No self exists apart from an environment, no internal experience is without external causes. But the complaint about dependence on external aids is not just a rephrasing of the objection to drugs as vicious and degrading. It has roots in the belief that drugs too often strike an unprepared mind. Unpreparedness is what makes some drug experiences feel like a jolt from an external force instead of something integral. And that is also why people fear that the experience will become an obstacle to the mind's self-education; you find it so easy and pleasant to land on mountaintops in helicopters that you never take the trouble to climb yourself.

Max Weber distinguished between routine or mass religiosity and the virtuoso religiosity of prophets, saints, and mystics. Psychedelic religion has some features of virtuoso religion: the intensity and the sense of startling insight. In this analogy (which Kierkegaard would have repudiated as "esthetic") the religious person is both performer and instrument. But maybe the experience loses its quality when democratized; instead of a Heifetz with a Stradivarius, a beginner is trying to play a masterpiece on a badly made and ill-tuned violin. In the phrase Weber used to describe himself, some people are "religiously unmusical." Others are simply unpracticed. Maybe that is one reason why psychedelic religiosity often fades into period nostalgia. But that is not necessarily a reason to scorn it. Playing or listening to masterpieces in any circumstances could be regarded as better than not doing it at all, and any hearing may whet the appetite for a better version. That is the way some psychedelic drug users have seen it.

An interesting variation on this idea is found in the work of the German literary critic and philosopher, Walter Benjamin, who experimented with hashish and mescaline under medical supervision in the 1920s and 1930s. Benjamin's combination of interests was unusual: mystical theology and Marxist doctrine. He emphasized as a limitation the solitariness of drug intoxication, and he called it a preliminary course or primary school education that had to be completed by other means, just as speculative philosophy and even the religious hopes of humanity are supposed to be fulfilled and transcended through the Marxist dialectic of social revolution. Benjamin called the fulfillment "profane enlightenment," implying a transfiguration of the ordinary suggestive of Zen. In his attempt to reconcile theology and materialism, Benjamin took both sides equally seriously, so his approach is an

unusual mixture of the reductive and the inductive (Benjamin, 1972). It is not surprising that drug experiences promoted this speculation.

The moral is, again, that experiences alone, especially individual experiences, do not constitute religion. Unpreparedness or bad tuning often is connected with an absence of tradition and discipline. In his introduction to *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James deliberately excludes institutional religion and theological ideas from consideration. He says that for the purposes of the book, religion will mean "feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude insofar as they see themselves in relation to something they call divine" (p.31). He adds that it must involve a person's "total reaction upon life" (p.35) insofar as it is not trifling or cynical but grave and serious. He goes on to quote much fascinating testimony. But it has been complained that what some of James's witnesses call their relation to the divine is mostly personal eccentricity or delusion. And despite James's attempts at moral and metaphysical validation, these criticisms cannot be refuted solely on the evidence of what goes on in solitude.

Rudolf Otto, one of Berger's theological mentors, distinguishes between the numinous and the religious (Otto, 1950). The numinous (from a Latin word meaning spirit) is the holy minus its moral and rational element. It is usually encountered as a tremendous sensation of dread, frenzy, bliss, serenity, shuddering awe, and so on. One form of the numinous is a mana or power embodied in objects, including psychoactive plants. But to make this into religion requires what Otto called, after Kant, schematization by morality and reason; it also requires a tradition, a discipline, some practice or ritual, and a community or fellowship that allows the sense of the holy to be communicated and transmitted. The word "religion" is apparently derived either from a Latin word that means "binding" or from one that means "being careful." The adverb "religiously" suggests these origins. To do something religiously is to do it scrupulously, faithfully, conscientiously (Freud would have added "compulsively")—terms never used to describe a moment of intense experience. Otto would probably have admitted in drug trips at most a hint of the numinous.

Without some social supports, religious experience easily becomes merely esthetic, eccentric, or even delusional. Max Weber (1958, p. 280) wrote scornfully, "At present it matters little in the development of a religion whether or not modern intellectuals feel

the need of enjoying a 'religious' state as an 'experience,' along with other sorts of sensations, in order to decorate their internal furnishings." As a sociologist, Weber is especially conscious of religion's need for community. Another sociologist, Émile Durkheim, identifies the sacred order of the universe revealed in religious experience with the social order that validates the experience and is validated by it (Durkheim, 1915). But even Kierkegaard's leap of faith, undertaken after an intense private consultation between God and the individual soul, is no leap in the dark; it is a way of joining a community of belief and worship. In modern times it has been hard to incorporate the use of drugs into a community of that kind.

All these matters throw some light on another question often raised about psychedelics. Why do interpretations of drug experiences tend to draw on Eastern religion and philosophy? One favorite explanation is that in Western industrial society people who take the drugs have already been disappointed by their culture and its ways of thinking, including established churches and theologies; they are searching for something exotic, and the mysterious East looks like a plausible alternative. The drugs themselves then heighten suggestibility so much that these hopes and expectations define how the drug effects are perceived. It is all a matter of set and setting.

Others believe that drug experiences and the religions of India have a genuine, substantial affinity. The spread of Hindu and Buddhist terminology in the drug culture—the talk of *maya*, *karma*, reincarnation, *satori*, nonattachment, and so on—was not just a fashion. The West had never paid much attention to the experiences on which these ideas are based, much less sought a vocabulary and intellectual context for them. They were not systematically cultivated or interpreted in any way that would cast doubt on Western religious concepts. Eastern spiritual masters had explored and mapped territories of the mind labeled by Western cartographers as domains of heresy and madness beyond the edge of any inhabitable human world. Drug users were now reaching some of these regions along different routes and with a different means of transport. A Buddhist or Hindu world view could not validate drug experiences, or vice versa; but the convergence might point to important and pervasive aspects of the human universe not usually recognized in the West. When drug users found an intellectual tradition in which these matters were taken seriously, they almost had to use it to try to master experiences that would otherwise be overwhelming and disorienting.

There are good arguments against both views. If the turn East is merely a product of expectations, it is hard to explain why so many people say they took the drugs for the first time with no preconceptions and little knowledge of Indian religion, but found later that some variety of Hinduism or Buddhism made sense of what they had been through. If, on the contrary, there is an elective affinity between psychedelic drugs and Eastern religions, why have all those drug-using American Indian cultures not evolved religious doctrines that more closely resemble those of India? Some of them—the Mazatecs in southwestern Mexico and the Plains Indian peyote eaters in the United States—are formally Christian. And many Christians and others in the United States who used LSD or mescaline in the last thirty years did not change their religious beliefs even when they attained what they regarded as a religious insight.

The truth probably lies in between. Culture and expectations help to define the experience, but the experience itself also leads to new ideas. There is a certain mild antipathy, if not formal incompatibility, between the interior religion or mysticism of the infinite often encountered in drug experiences and the monotheistic religions of the Middle East that are the source of Western religious ideas. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam deny that there are gods in nature and do not attribute divinity to the cosmos itself. God is ultimately separate from us and from the universal order that He has created and to which He gives laws. He confronts humanity, addresses it, and demands a response from us as willing and speaking beings like Himself. He is a god of projects; He makes things happen in the world; in particular, He grants special revelations at unique historical moments. To worship in one of the monotheistic traditions is to make oneself part of a community that derives a sense of its mission from one or more of those historical events.

In Indian religion, on the contrary, history matters very little. The divine is not beyond nature but within nature and within us; it is beyond the purely personal, and in its ultimate form without attributes, identical with both the cosmos and the mind: "That am I" is the formula of the Upanishads. In some versions of Indian religion the accomplished human being, the spiritual master, is exalted above those projections of mind, the gods, for the gods cannot become enlightened.

The concept of the divine within, and even integral mysticism, are of course not absent from the monotheistic religions. In fact, Albert Hofmann, the inventor of LSD, suggests that psychedelic

drug users in the West who are looking for an intellectual tradition should turn to thinkers like Eckhart and Boehme, the German mystical theologians, rather than to the exotic writings of India (Horowitz, 1976). But in the West the interior divine spark remains a secondary manifestation, and metapersonal mysticism has never been fully accredited, because it always yearns toward the dangerous heresy that any person can be God; for Christianity man has been God only once, and for Judaism and Islam human beings can never be God. A thinker like Boehme struggles to find an acceptable language for his experiences, and often cannot avoid sounding more like a Hindu than a Christian.

As Berger points out, in Western religion integral mysticism has to be carefully circumscribed; its place is a subordinate one; it is interpreted as a preliminary devotional practice, a purification of the self to make it ready to receive the love of a personal God. One must not allow oneself to be carried away into self-inflation. Indian religion usually has it the other way around; devotion to a personal savior is at most a device for getting a preliminary grasp of the nonpersonal infinite that is also oneself.

Under the influence of psychedelic drugs there is a tendency—not a uniform or universal one—to read the nonpersonal experiences as deeper and more fundamental than the personal ones. This may be a fact of neurophysiology or the psychology of ego dissolution. Zaehner has gone so far as to say that drugs are inadequate religious vehicles because they can produce a sense of the holy, a sort of nature-mysticism, and even a glimpse of a timeless and selfless state resembling the Buddhist Nirvana, but they cannot enable anyone to realize the love of a personal God, with accompanying feelings of gratitude and humility; and for a Christian that must be the highest form of religious experience (Zaehner, 1973).

Strictly speaking, Zaehner is wrong. Many psychedelic experiences are perceived and interpreted theistically, with a full sense of creatureliness, gratitude, humility, and love. If that were not so, Christians, including the peyote eaters of the Native American Church, would not be able to reaffirm their faith with the help of these drugs. But in another sense he is right. Indian religion is in many ways less removed than the great monotheistic religions from the mass of religious and mythical thought of humanity since the Stone Age. It was monotheism that first disenchanted nature, separated God from the Creation, and distinguished clearly between the supernatural and the natural.

In these ways most drug-using American Indian cultures are probably closer to Buddhism or Hinduism than to Christianity. Even the peyote church has been under suspicion by the orthodox as too intimately involved with the cactus deity to be authentically Christian.

The issue of reduction in general is also less pressing for non-Western religions, as they are less concerned about setting apart a realm of the specifically religious from other kinds of experience and knowledge. Berger says that religious experience arises from the penetration of our ordinary reality by another reality that turns it into a "finite province of meaning." But for Eastern religion the other reality is and always has been our ordinary reality; our minds are the cosmos in one of its aspects. In Zen Buddhism ordinary waking consciousness is Nirvana; if we but knew it, we are in Nirvana now. There is no danger of vitiating religious experience by reducing it to psychology, because religion has never been set apart from psychology.¹ There are no leaps into faith, no bridges to cross between God and man, no gaps to be filled with knowledge of the supernatural. The problem of reconciling reason and revelation, or, in its modern form, science and revelation, does not arise in the same way.

Making a connection between the biology and social nature of the species and its religious experience is also less awkward for the nonmonotheistic religions. In Buddhism, for example, all creatures are said to have the Buddha-nature, so the notion that a pigeon might have a religious experience (with or without LSD) is presumably less scandalous than it is for Christianity. Kierkegaard could scorn the Danish society of his day as Christendom, antithetical to the true Christianity of the knight of faith; but Huichol religion without Huichol culture and society makes no sense at all. Because premodern and preindustrial cultures have few do-it-yourself or go-it-alone inclinations in matters of religion, depending on drugs as a source of religious experience can be less embarrassing for them. The Huichols are presumably not disturbed by the thought troubling many psychedelic drug users in the United States, that they alienate their spiritual powers by projecting them in the form of a chemical.

Anthropologist Weston La Barre has criticized North American Indian cultures for just that reason; he says that their original psychological dependence on the great hunter has been transferred to Indian traders, missionaries, federal bureaucrats, and, for some, the medicine power of peyote (La Barre, 1970). And it

is worth remembering that in *Brave New World*, published in 1932, long before he took mescaline, Aldous Huxley portrayed soma as a nonaddictive, physically harmless sacramental drug, whose users sit in a circle and chant ritually about melting into the Greater Being, also called the Social River. It is as though Huxley is applying Durkheim's analysis of primitive religion as the self-worship of society to a science fiction dystopia in which the worshippers themselves make it explicit. Elsewhere, Huxley called this kind of socialized religion horizontal transcendence, as opposed to upward and downward transcendence.

Things that seem harmless in preindustrial societies are made to appear horrifying in Huxley's fictional world, where even human beings are cultured in laboratories. In modern conditions drugs are mass-produced artifacts and not natural wonders with a natural divinity inhering in them. More than other religious practices, drug use comes to have the look and feel of a local experience machine, with the emphasis on "machine."

So the association between drug use and religion is permitted only in certain fringe areas where modernity has not completely penetrated. For example, in the early twentieth century, when assimilation of Indians was government policy, peyote was regarded as a drug abuse problem. It did not fall under the federal narcotics laws, but regulations were issued to suppress it under the Volstead Act as an intoxicating liquor, and many western states had their own laws against it. Now state and federal courts have approved the use of peyote in the Native American Church on the basis of the guarantee of religious freedom in the First Amendment. The rationale is that the Native American Church is an organized traditional religion in which the use of the drug is essential to the form of worship. The decisions came in the 1960s, at a time when Indians were being allowed to reclaim their cultural identity.

We have agreed to let Indians mix drugs and religion, as long as the idea does not become legitimated in the surrounding society. The exception made for the Native American Church will be broadened very little. The courts have found an overriding government interest in the suppression of drug use that will be hard to overcome by claims to religious freedom. In *Leary v. the United States* the petitioner said that his use of marijuana was part of his religious practice as a Hindu. A federal appeals court declared that marijuana use was not an essential part of Hindu worship, and that no merely personal religious inclination or belief could

be used to claim exemption from the drug laws. Leary had in fact written a playful essay called "Start Your Own Religion" (in Leary, 1968), a title that would probably have intensified the judges' suspicions if they had heard of it.

If religion reduced to individual feelings and ideas tends to lose its specifically religious character, the tendency becomes particularly noticeable when drugs are involved, because the modern world defines them as mere machinery for producing or reproducing states of mind—soulless technology. So the courts have pronounced that at least this one form of religious or numinous experience will not be legally permitted except within a traditional community and discipline. Although the courts expressly refuse to define what qualifies as religious, the practical effect of their decisions is that as long as drugs are involved, religion will be defined by institutions and a shared way of life, not by any individual experience or conviction.

And not just any institution will do. The Native American Church gets an exemption from modernity because it is Indian and does not wholly belong to current American culture (although it is less than a hundred years old). It produces nothing floating free that might spread everywhere—nothing with the implications of a term such as consciousness expansion. Proposals have been made for psychedelic centers where people could go to take LSD and related drugs in a safe and helpful environment. But the proponents are not sure whether to conceive these centers as analogous to resorts, amusement parks, psychiatric clinics, religious retreats, Outward Bound expeditions (in this case Inward Bound), or scientific research institutions. The very ambiguity is enough to create suspicion and hostility; we prefer our categories clearly defined. That a similar ambiguity is inherent in all religion conceived as experience has not been any help to advocates of drug-induced religious experience.

In a way, this ghettoizing or marginalization of drug-induced religion solves a problem. If we have trouble defining what is really religious in modern societies, here is one place in which a line can be clearly drawn and, better still, enforced by law. Drug sharing, in the form of passing a peace pipe or passing a joint of marijuana, a coffee break or a beer with buddies, often serves as a ritual expression of communion and solidarity. If drug users are persecuted or threatened, they may want to fortify that solidarity with a set of ideas, and religion is a good fortifier. The so-called drug culture of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when it was not

using Hindu or Buddhist language, often favored talk about the virtues of primitive community and the religious use of drugs by primitive societies. But in practice building modern religious institutions based on drug use has proved difficult, even aside from the legal harassment. There may be lessons to learn from older forms of religious drug use: how to shape the experience purposefully by means of ritual, how to balance democracy and authority in allowing access to it. But it is hard for us to learn these lessons, because we lack the traditions and consensus that would make the consciousness changes produced by drugs religious phenomena in the old sense.

In his last novel, *Island* (1962), Aldous Huxley imagined a utopian society in which psychedelic drug use is an essential part of a true religious culture, not just an experience to be enjoyed or endured. The drug called *moksha*-medicine, a virtuous counterpart to the soma of *Brave New World*, is used by the dying and in initiation rites. Huxley avoids the danger of excessive individualism in drug use by an emphasis on community, discipline, and tradition. He borrows some ideas from preindustrial societies but tries to avoid the limitations of primitive myth and primitive community. Modern science has an important place in his utopia, along with a tolerant religious philosophy derived in its essentials from Buddhism. Huxley was trying to embody in this community what he had earlier called "an everyday mysticism underlying and giving significance to an everyday rationality" (Huxley, 1977, p. 156). His utopia is stable and successful, but only because it has been isolated from the forces of modernity by the ocean and a benevolent government. In the end it is taken over and its culture is destroyed by a nearby tyrant who represents a combination of all the worst features of capitalism, communism, and Third World nationalism. Huxley almost seems to be admitting that in the modern world his dream is a hopeless one.

Intoxication can no longer be sacred for us in the ancient sense, however intensely religious it may seem as pure experience. Too much has been changed by the intellectual and social revolutions of the modern age. We may respect the distinction made once by a Mexican Indian between aspirin, which is a drug, and peyote, which is divine; but most of us cannot accept it for ourselves. There is no use in mourning the loss, if it is one. But then nothing is sacred for us in the old sense. The main difference between drug use and other religious practices is that the industrialization of drugs allows us to see the problem more clearly. We cannot

quarantine drug-induced religious experience in an intellectual isolation hospital to help prevent doubts about religion in general from spreading.

An anthropologist has written that in shamanistic religion, at least ideally, "the otherwise unfettered power of the world beyond human society is harnessed purposefully and applied to minister to the needs of the community" (Lewis, 1971, p. 189). That is what technology, including drug technology, is supposed to do in our societies. But we have to conceive the world beyond in terms of natural laws rather than shamanistic powers. So Albert Hofmann has suggested that instead of the Indians' religious awe of psychedelic drugs, we should cultivate a reverence based on scientific knowledge of their unique properties (Horowitz, 1976). Anyone who considers this substitute unsatisfactory should remember that religious deliverances from other sources have become problematic in the same way. There are perceptions and feelings for which only a religious interpretation seems acceptable, and yet we no longer know what religion is. A special source of interest in psychedelic religious experience is that it may force us to think about these matters, and tolerate the resulting uneasiness and ambiguity.

NOTE

1. It is interesting that psychiatrists using psychedelic drugs therapeutically often have found themselves turning to Jungian theories and even to Eastern mind-training practices for inspiration. There is a growing literature on the ideas and techniques shared by primitive shamans, Eastern spiritual teachers, and modern psychiatrists. The word "cure" refers to both treatment of disease and the care of souls, and all psychotherapy that relies on insight resembles a religious conversion in certain ways. Jung even compared psychoanalysis to an initiation rite. But for most Western psychiatrists, ministers, and priests any tendency to confuse religion and psychiatry has to be guarded against, so the pronouncements of drug enthusiasts are under strong suspicion.

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Reprint requests: James Bakalar, Massachusetts Mental Health Center, 74 Fenwood Road, Boston, MA 02115.