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CHAPTER 2

SEEING SNAKES

On Delusion, Knowledge, and the Drug Experience

Were such things here as we do speak about?
Or have we eaten on the insane root
That takes the reason prisoner?
William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*,
Act I Scene III

Chemical Revelations?

Advocates of psychedelic drugs argue that they can induce experiences that are of great spiritual and philosophical value, and that they have the potential to "expand consciousness." But can drugs, as William James (1842–1910), Aldous Huxley (1894–1963), and Timothy Leary (1920–96) argue, allow us to see beyond the horizon of ordinary perception – that is, see things as they really are? To put the philosophical question more generally, can an artificial change (by the means of drugs, electrical stimuli, or psychosurgery) to the brain – to the mind's material foundations – reveal *knowledge* through the resulting experience? And could such a change actually provide an authentic religious experience, or rather, knowledge of what it is like to have an authentic religious experience? Or are such claims of instant enlightenment merely a mystical facade?

There is no doubt that some substances (such as nicotine and caffeine) can stimulate the mind and enhance concentration. It is also possible that a handful of philosophers have been *imaginatively* inspired by

their drug experiences. Yet many philosophers would find the claim of knowledge acquired through a drug experience deeply implausible, for two reasons.

First, the psychedelics disrupt mental processing, making it impossible, in the words of Immanuel Kant (commenting on intoxicants) for one's mind to order "sense representations by laws of experience."[2] Likewise, Michel Foucault (who had himself allegedly experimented with LSD) is scathing of the "fortunetellers" who ascribe to the drug revelatory powers, given that drugs "have nothing at all to do with truth and falsity."[3] Further, if any intoxicating substances induce experiences that are similar to religious ecstasies, suggests Bertrand Russell, so much for religious ecstasies: we "can make no distinction between the man who eats little and sees heaven and the man who drinks much and sees snakes. Each is in an abnormal physical condition, and therefore has abnormal perceptions."[4] Given the widely reported relationship between abnormal mental states and religious ecstasy, this objection is not easily dismissed. It has also been noted that there are a number of commonalities between the psychedelic drug experience and schizophrenia, in particular thought disorder, paranoia, delusion, and depersonalization. As we do not typically think of schizophrenia as granting access to otherwise inaccessible knowledge, it seems unlikely that drugs that may mimic schizophrenia (Dimethyltryptamine [DMT], LSD, cannabis) could do this either. The only knowledge that the drug experience could provide, according to this view, is of what certain mental anomalies must feel like.

Secondly, to hold some claim to be knowledge, rather than being merely a strongly held belief, we need some justification for it. The claims (like the claims of mathematicians or scientists that are considered knowledge) made by the users of psychedelic drugs of their revelations must be shown to have a source that has proven to be reliable in the past. As such, even if a psychedelic drug user were to make some drug-inspired claim about the world which was later verified by some other means, we would *still* not be able to say that she had therefore provided knowledge: the drug experience would still need to be shown to be a reliable source of a number of such independently verifiable claims. Were it to be shown that the drug experience could provide such knowledge, the implications would be serious. As Catholic philosopher Raphael Waters points out, "if the drugs reveal more of reality than would otherwise be available to the knower, we must call into question the knowledge that we already possess. For it is obvious that the dependability of our powers of knowing external reality would become questionable."[5]

The Veil of Maya and the Reducing Valve

In response, advocates of psychedelic substances argue that the drugs are *not* mere intoxicants. Merely because unusual states of consciousness are derived through artificial means, argue William James and G. S. Spinks, it does not follow that the resulting insights or experiences are invalidated: the end-product is to be judged, rather than the means. As James writes in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, mystic states of awareness, obtained by whatever means,

> offer us *hypotheses*, hypotheses which we may voluntarily ignore, but which as thinkers we cannot possibly upset. The supernaturalism and optimism to which they would persuade us may, interpreted in one way or another, be after all the truest of insights into the meaning of this life.[6]

James also emphasizes the profoundly philosophical nature of the insights he gained following his nitrous oxide experiments, remarking that the drug gave him a new appreciation of Hegel:

> Looking back on my own experiences, they all converge towards a kind of insight to which I cannot help ascribing some metaphysical significance. The keynote of it is invariably a reconciliation. It is as if the opposites of the world, whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles, were melted into unity. . . . I feel as if it must mean something, something like what the hegelian [*sic*] philosophy means, if one could only lay hold of it more clearly. Those who have ears to hear, let them hear; to me the living sense of its reality only comes in the artificial mystic state of mind.[7]

Later psychedelicists likewise explicitly reject the primacy of rational thought over intuition, and would agree with James's assertion that "the existence of mystical states absolutely overthrows the pretension of non-mystical states to be the sole and ultimate dictators of what we may believe."[8] Rather than rejecting the drug experience because it leads to irrational thoughts, the psychedelicists typically hold that the insights of the drug experience reveal reason's limits.

Four general approaches have been proposed to support this view. Firstly, Gerald Heard (1889–1971) and others have argued that the psychedelics provide insights that are intelligible within an intuitive paradigm, as opposed to that of "analytic" thought.[9] Charles T. Tart suggests

a computer analogy to illustrate this principle. Just as a computer can run different programs, argues Tart, the human mind can be put in an alternate state of consciousness in order to better appreciate different aspects of reality, from the perspective of (what Tart terms) "state-specific sciences."[10] Similarly, Heard describes the mind as having several "focal lengths." He notes the methods of meditation used by such thinkers as René Descartes (1596–1650), who would write as thoughts came to him while half asleep, William Harvey (1578–1657), discoverer of the mechanism of the circulation of blood, who would meditate in a coal mine, and the mathematician Henri Poincaré (1854–1912), who was acutely aware that many of his ideas came to him as the result of intuition, rather than through conscious intellectual labor. LSD is proposed by Heard as providing a more direct route to the subliminal faculties of mind and their creative powers, through bypassing the "critical filter" of ordinary, waking consciousness. Andrew Weil and James Kellenberger have also noted the relationship between altered states of consciousness and creative genius.

A related approach is the "reducing-valve" model proposed by the philosopher Charlie Dunbar Broad (1887–1971) and psychiatrist John Raymond Smythies (b. 1922), popularized by Aldous Huxley and adapted from the theory of mind proposed by French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859–1941). According to this view, in ordinary consciousness we do not see reality in an unadulterated way. Rather, the mind continuously filters out extraneous thoughts and perceptions, allowing only that which is useful to us to reach conscious awareness. Further, as Bergson notes, our mind is constantly composing reality through arranging and interpreting sensed phenomena in the light of our prior memories. For Huxley, psychedelic drugs "open the valves" of perception, allowing us to see the world in its true splendor, just as the great artists and mystics could. No longer yoked to the mundane needs of ordinary existence, advocates of the psychedelics also hold that intellectual and perceptual powers become greatly enhanced; that the user of LSD or mescaline will "reach philosophic conclusions of rare profundity";[11] that their eyes will "seem to become a microscope through which the mind delves deeper and deeper into the intricately dancing texture of our world."[12] Huxley also holds that psychedelic drugs can break through linguistic and cultural conditioning. As the excessively rational Western concepts of ordinary consciousness rob reality of its "native thinghood,"[13] reasons Huxley, the psychedelics are necessary "solvents for liquefying the sludgy stickiness of an anachronistic state of mind."[14] In a similar vein, Walter Houston

Clark suggests that the psychedelics improve one's morality by revealing the "unity of all peoples and all things."[15]

Thirdly, it has been suggested that, under the effects of psychedelics, one may become directly conscious of entities, objects, or principles that are described by natural science but are invisible to ordinary awareness. Leary and Ralph Metzner write of directly experiencing DNA, for example. Watts writes of an immediate sensorial understanding of Einstein's mass-energy equivalence. And Rick Strassman suggests that DMT allows one to see dark matter. This would suggest (it is implied) that what is perceived is objectively real, rather than being merely delusional. The case is perhaps most strongly made by Susan Blackmore, who, echoing the reducing-valve model, suggests that ordinary consciousness is not ideally suited to science or philosophy. With reference to the common psychedelic experience of becoming "one with the universe," Blackmore argues that this view "fits far better with a scientific understanding of the world than our normal dualist view. . . . We really *are* one with the universe. This means that the psychedelic sense of self may actually be truer than the dualist view."[16]

Fourthly, psychedelicists and their precursors note the long history of psychoactive substances used in mystery cults or religious practices; rites allegedly perfected and practiced over centuries to pierce through the illusory barrier of ordinary consciousness (the veil of Maya, as it is termed in Hindu philosophy), and to bring about union with absolute reality. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) writes of ancient Dionysian rituals in exactly these terms, noting that their participants used "narcotic potions" to attain oneness with both one's fellow man and with Nature:

> Now that the gospel of universal harmony is sounded, each individual becomes not only reconciled to his fellow but actually at one with him – as though the veil of Maya had been torn apart and there remained only shreds floating before the vision of mystical Oneness.[17]

Carl A. P. Ruck (b. 1935), Albert Hofmann (1906–2008), and R. Gordon Wasson (1898–1986) have further explored the relationship between ancient Greek religion and philosophy and the use of psychoactive drugs. Wasson and Hofmann hypothesize that the rites of the Eleusinian Mystery cult of ancient Greece incorporated a beverage that contained rye ergot (*Claviceps purpurea*), a hallucinogenic fungus. In keeping with Nietzsche's description above, Hofmann suggests that this substance was used to attain a mystic "experience of totality."[18] Further, it has been suggested

that such drug use may have inspired the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, given that both had written favorably of their experiences of the Eleusinian Mysteries.

The Insane Root

The case for drug-induced enlightenment is problematic, for a number of reasons. Firstly, the assumptions of Leary, Wasson, Watts, and other representative psychedelicists are loaded with a considerable amount of mystical baggage, suggesting that the "psychedelic revelation" is not complementary to the achievements of logic or physics (as Blackmore or Tart suggest) but explicitly *contradicted* by them. This irrationalism is found in the originators of the psychedelic view. Broad's seemingly scientific description of the "reducing valve," adopted unmodified by Huxley, is underpinned by the problematic assumption that each person "is at each moment capable of remembering all that has ever happened to him and of perceiving everything that is happening everywhere *in the universe*."[19] Such claims of drug-given omniscience and even supernatural powers appear in much of the psychedelic literature since Huxley, and could be said to be a defining trait of the genre. Psychedelic drugs have inspired in their advocates beliefs in extrasensory perception, the power to communicate telepathically with extra-terrestrials (or with psilocybin mushrooms, which Terence McKenna believes *are* sentient extra-terrestrials), time travel, and the ability to foresee the end of the world. Advocates have also asserted that the drug experience grants access to ancestral or prehistoric memories that are (according to Leary and others) encoded in DNA, reveals that the soul is immortal, or that it has lived through past lives. Equally beyond parody are the theories that have been inspired by the psychedelic experience (in the absence of evidence, or even any *concern* with the need of evidence): the view, for example, that human language originated as a result of psilocybin ingestion, that psychoactive drugs caused the defining leap in the evolution of human intelligence or language, could further stimulate human evolution, or will eventually replace philosophical analysis. In each of the cases cited above, the drug experience *itself* is presented as the key justification of these views.

In the absence of any evidence that ESP phenomena are real, we could be forgiven for taking claims of having experienced first hand such phenomena to be delusional. The same could perhaps be said of

many of the other drug-inspired claims about the real world noted above. Blackmore's suggestion that with hallucinogens one can experience first hand "cosmic oneness" is also problematic. Although psychedelics are known for inducing the *feeling* that "all is one," it is doubtful that anyone could *literally* experience a real "loss of ego" or "fusion," as there is still an ego – an experiencing subject – that observes the event. The division of subject and object is built into the very concept of experience, regardless of how things might feel at the time. Further, many psychedelic experiences inspire the opposite, *dualist* view: people on drugs may have the sense that they are entirely separate from their bodies.

Claims of moral or existential enlightenment under the effects of psychedelics are also questionable. Where a philosophy of life is expressed, psychedelicists can come across as merely flippant, somewhat undermining James's suggestion that the drug experience could provide some answer to the Great Question. McKenna states that the purpose of life is a "good party"[20] and Watts asserts that all the pain and suffering in the universe "are simply extreme forms of play," adding that "there isn't anything in the whole universe to be afraid of because it doesn't happen to anyone!"[21] Concerning moral enlightenment, for Huxley and Leary psychedelic drugs actually seem to *suspend* the moral sense. For Huxley, the mescaline had delivered him from "the world of selves, of time, of moral judgments and utilitarian considerations," adding that the mescaline user "sees no reason for doing anything in particular and finds most of the causes for which, at ordinary times, he was prepared to act and suffer, profoundly uninteresting."[22] For Leary, likewise, virtue and morality following LSD enlightenment are revealed to be just "part of [the] old con game."[23] Even cannabis has the capacity to temporarily suspend moral sensibility, according to C. R. Marshall's 1897 post-trip account: "I was devoid of feeling, fearless of death, and even insensible to the feelings of others: if the friend by my side had died I think I should [*sic*] have laughed."[24] None of these accounts, of course, demonstrate that psychedelics can *make* someone immoral, even temporarily, but they undermine any straightforward case for drug-inspired *moral* wisdom (assuming of course that moral wisdom is not the realization that morality *is* a myth).

Further, the association of altered states of awareness and scientific insight is not compelling; only a handful of historical cases are given of this relationship, and none of those cited involve drug use. Rather, they all involve highly learned researchers who were ready for inspiration when it came to them, whether when wide awake or half-asleep. Lester Grinspoon and James B. Bakalar suggest that an important

distinction has been missed in this analogy – "withdrawing reason's watcher at the gates" through some meditative technique may well work for some, but this is a far cry from the radical distortion of cognitive processing that the psychedelics induce.[25]

Also problematic is the association between the Eleusinian Mysteries – hence, the origins of Greek thought – and psychoactive drugs. While it is true, as Carl A. P. Ruck notes, that the hallucinogenic properties of rye ergot were well known in the classical world, its very toxicity also made it a potent chemical weapon, on account of the horrific visions it could induce, and because it made one's limbs turn black and then fall off. Nor is there much evidence that rye ergot was ever used ritualistically, despite its use for millennia in obstetrics. Further, experimental trials of rye ergot suggest that its visionary potential is limited: even a barely psychedelic dose is toxic enough to cause painful leg cramps.

Other suggestions as to the intoxicated origins of Greek philosophy are not much better supported. Yet *even if* drug use could be associated with the insights of a particular great philosopher (Plotinus' use of opium, for example), this still would not constitute *philosophical* insight as such; that is, the fruit of systematic intellectual labor. Nor does it show that any such particular insight counts as knowledge. Such evidence would simply show that early Greek philosophy had not entirely distinguished itself from mysticism.

Finally, the psychedelicists' case against ordinary logic and conceptions of reality is essentially rhetorical. James gives us nothing but his word to support his assertion that nitrous oxide inhalation grants "illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance" that "carry with them a curious sense of authority."[26] The same is true of later writers. Watts contrasts, for example, "pedestrian consciousness" against "multidimensional superconsciousness," Huxley similarly dismisses "rationalistic philosophy" as "bumptious," and Leary dismisses the ordinary worldview as a "system of paranoid delusions."[27] Similar dismissals in defense of psychedelic "truth' are given by McKenna and Gottfried Benn. Others have proposed a new category of "knowledge" to account for the holding of beliefs that have no other basis than the drug experience. Walter N. Pahnke (1931–71), for example, defines the "known" as something that is "intuitively felt to be authoritative, requires no proof at a rational level, and produces an inward feeling of intuitive truth" – thereby dissolving the distinction between knowledge and delusion.[28]

The psychedelicists are essentially proclaiming that their own, drug-inspired worldview is a better guide to reality than the combined efforts

of all scientists and philosophers, in fact the worldview of anyone whose thinking has not been permanently modified by a psychedelic drug. Yet the reasoning offered to support this claim is correspondingly outrageous. Leary insists that one must use the drugs themselves to assess the claims of their powers, yet rejects out of hand the testimony of those who have tried psychedelic drugs and remained unconvinced. Watts even attempts to seize the moral high ground, comparing the refusal to accept the psychedelic doctrine with racist bigotry.

As Sidney Cohen notes, there is no *doubt* in the accounts given by the psychedelicists; no acknowledgment of the need to account for one's views. As Benjamin Paul Blood (1832–1919) puts it, referring to the inhalation of nitrous oxide, the "anaesthetic revelation" is "the satisfaction of philosophy."[29] The psychedelicists's view – Watts makes this very clear – is that philosophical questioning simply dissolves in the blinding light of the Experience; explanations "are just another form of complexity."[30] As such, it does not seem implausible to suggest that a sufficiently large dose of some hallucinogen could simply silence the philosophical muse.

Whether due to a gross overvaluing of an intense aesthetic experience (as suggested by Robert A. Oakes), a profound drug-induced suggestibility, or a well-researched capacity of the psychedelic drugs to *impair* cognition, perception, and concentration, their revelatory powers are clearly exaggerated. Given these facts, the real question is perhaps "what knowledge is only accessible to the individual through chemically degrading one's capacity for rational thought?" If one simply assumes that the acquisition of knowledge (that is, sound understanding that something is true) requires rational thought, the question is absurd. Watts, Leary, and Huxley all write of the insight acquired through the psychedelic experience as a *direct apprehension* of some deep truth, rather than through *intellectual* insight. Without an argument as to how such a direct, drug-induced experience can warrant such certainty, Watts, Leary, and Huxley are essentially appealing to their own authority.

The Peacock in the Mirror

The discussion above, perhaps, demystifies the issue over the psychedelic drugs, yet there still remains the issue of "psychedelic spirituality." Advocates of psychedelic drugs argue that they can induce mystic states of consciousness of spiritual value, and give two reasons for this view.

The first argument is that the drug experience *feels* mystical or religious, in particular to those qualified to make a judgment: religious people. One famous study supporting this claim is the so-called Good Friday Experiment, in which Pahnke gave psilocybin to ten Protestant divinity students at Boston University in 1962 (another ten were given a placebo). Most of those who were given psilocybin reported having a deeply religious experience. Secondly, Huxley, Watts, and Leary have noted striking parallels between the psychedelic drug experience and classic accounts of mystic experience, both Christian and Buddhist. Both types of experience, it is observed, produce a profound feeling of "oneness," or the sense that one is encountering a "great presence" or the "ground of being."[31] Watts and Leary have also noted the similarities between the LSD experience and the state of *satori* that is attained in Zen meditation.

However, for some religious skeptics, this association between the drug state and mysticism may well be trivial. The psychedelic drugs are known to inspire uncanny experiences and non-rational beliefs, and religious experiences tend towards, by definition, that which goes beyond what can be scientifically or logically verified. To note the similarity between the two types of experience simply compares (for the religious skeptic) two different but equally delusional worldviews. As for the Pahnke experiment, it is only natural that religious people who accept the possibility of a divine encounter through drugs will interpret the drug experience to be authentically religious. Indeed, for a skeptic, the similarities of drug states and religious states could simply reinforce the association of religious belief and neurosis. Psychedelic drugs also raise the possibility that any given exotic, paranormal experience, unless corroborated by a number of witnesses to the same, objectively verifiable event, is potentially the work of non-divine intervention.

Yet it would be fallacious to assume that all unusual states of awareness are cut from the same cloth, and one does not need to be a religious skeptic to suspect that there is something wrong with the case for psychedelically induced religious experience.

First is the lack of fit with religious tradition. The association made between psychedelics and Buddhism is questionable, and not merely because one of the five key precepts of Buddhism is abstinence from intoxicating substances that may cloud thinking. It is true that hallucinogens may give a sense of timelessness and "oneness with the universe" that roughly corresponds with some Buddhist accounts of absolute reality, but the similarity may be superficial. Buddhist writings emphasize that meditation requires steady, focused concentration and *emptying*

thought of all content, suggesting that psychedelic drugs would simply get in the way. Critics have also questioned the accuracy of the accounts of Buddhism given by both Watts and Leary. Further, as the Catholic thinker R. C. Zaehner (1913–74) notes, a number of mystic traditions are incompatible with the psychedelic experience, given their assumption that God is unknowable to the intellect and hence cannot be perceived.

There are also serious problems with associating the psychedelic experience with Christianity. Unlike an authentic mystic union, the psychedelic experience arguably does not lead to a religious transformation of character. It has also been remarked that the drug experience is simply too hedonistic, or too amusing; the traditional means of attaining a mystic union (with Jesus, Christians argue) requires a necessarily difficult and painful process.

There are also differences between biblical accounts of divine encounters and those reported by people suffering hallucinations. Whereas schizophrenics, epileptics, and people on drugs often describe encounters with God or angels face to face, Otto Doerr and Óscar Velásquez note that the angels described in the Torah and New Testament conceal their identity, which is only made apparent after they have left the scene. Further, note Doerr and Velásquez, the God of the Torah never appears to humans directly (Exodus 33:20).

These arguments may appear to some as being culturally chauvinistic, given that some Central American Christian groups actually use hallucinogens in their traditional rites. The debate also hinges on assertions that are perhaps impossible to verify, given that they require some independently verifiable criteria of authenticity (that is, proof that God exists and that the drug experience gives a true experience of God's existence). For all we know, one could argue, God *does* exist, *and* no one tradition has the complete picture. But there is no escaping the strangeness of the assertion that one could attain an experience of the Divine Presence through a drug, or for that matter by any physical means at all. Put simply, no omniscient being, by definition, could be summoned by whatever worldly means against her or his will. To suggest otherwise seems more in keeping with those South American shamanistic traditions that hold that supernatural forces can be summoned through ritualistic use of hallucinogens.

Further, the case for psychedelic spirituality is open to the charge of sample bias: many recorded psychedelic experiences are not merely unpleasant, but positively Lovecraftian, and there is at least one case of LSD *reducing* the religious belief of a subject. One of Strassman's DMT research subjects went through the hallucinated experience of being raped

by a crocodile; another hallucinated that "insectoids" simultaneously had sex with and ate him.[32] Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80), following a horrific mescaline experience in February 1935, had a persistent hallucination of a lobster stalking him days later, and both Henri Michaux (1899–1984) and Stanisław Witkiewicz (1885–1939) (again on mescaline) reported perverse, nightmarish visions. Huxley's suggestion that such non-"Beatific" experiences are somehow due to a lack of spiritual preparation only begs the question.

For those who wish to retain the concept of the drug-induced religious experience, but without retaining the idea of God or gods, these arguments may all seem beside the point, and some have taken exactly this approach. But the outcome of this view scarcely qualifies as a concept of religion. Leary explicitly defines religion as the practice of achieving states of ecstasy; for Huxley, religions are merely failed attempts to escape reality, and should be replaced with "chemical vacations from intolerable selfhood and repulsive surroundings."[33]

As Zaehner notes, Huxley and Leary are essentially promoting "an extension of soulless technology to the soul itself."[34] Whereas Leary and others insist on the *transcendental* nature of the drug experience, its very possibility simply reinforces the view that our very minds are embodied in the world, and are thereby *controllable* (consider Leary's proposal to use LSD to "cure" homosexuality or suppress criminality, for example). Psychedelic drugs demonstrate just how thin the ice of reason actually is, and how easily the very citadel of the mind can be stormed. The use of psychoactive agents as tools of war or coercion in fact goes back centuries, and the experimental use of psychedelics by the Nazis (mescaline, at Dachau), the CIA, and other agencies is now well known. The great pharmacologist Louis Lewin (1850–1929) notes that the uses of drugs for psychological control and for ritual use need not be distinct: datura and other psychotropic drugs have long been used "by religious fanatics, clairvoyants, miracle-workers, magicians, priests, and impostors" in the course of religious ceremonies.[35] We already know of at least one cult leader who has used LSD as a tool of psychological control over their followers (Shoko Asahara, responsible for the 1995 sarin attack on the Tokyo subway system). The very characteristics of the psychedelic drugs that have led to their mystical veneration – the power to disrupt cognition and attention, to warp perception, to leave the subject wide open for new ideas and beliefs, to flood consciousness with imagery of stultifying beauty – make them and more purpose-specific substances (such as the chemical weapon Agent BZ) potent incapacitating agents. The idea that

involuntary ingestion of such a substance could lead to union with a benevolent and omniscient God is absurd, yet the psychedelic doctrine cannot rule this possibility out.

How to account for the attribution of divinity with something so potentially dangerous? It may be that the drug simply triggers a deep intuition that the very beautiful must be divine. If so, the irony is profound. As some researchers have suggested, the intense aesthetic experience created by psychedelic drugs is perhaps brought about by their ability to disclose to consciousness the mind's normally occulted machinery of perception, hence the geometric patterns and fantastic architectural forms that are often reported by psychedelics users (temporal lobe epilepsy and delirium tremens can cause similar visions). According to this view, a feedback loop of sorts is established between the conscious mind and mental processes: the very evolved machinery of perception that makes aesthetic pleasure possible breaks through into the theatre of consciousness, creating seemingly preternatural visions. To borrow Charles Baudelaire's metaphor of hashish as being a mirror of the natural, rather than the divine, the "psychedelic mystic" is like an unwittingly resplendent peacock that mistakes its own reflection in the mirror for something else.

NOTES

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