

INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP EXPERIENCES

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Three points would appear to me in need of clarification. One is the relationship that the psychedelic experience has to the individual; secondly, the relationship it has to the immediate group, and groups going out from them; and thirdly, what relationship the experience has, theoretically, with organized religion.

We have heard a good deal of personal testimony during this meeting, so that we all know that the experience brings with it a heightening of reality; a higher sense of unity and a more profound sense of being, a sense of order and of beauty.

Thus, ecstatic experiences are achieved, because we have a sense of belonging to that which is. We have a feeling of participation, of being a part of the creativity that is the base of the universe. That experience is in itself valid. It is not unlike a mystical experience I had when I was about seventeen years old. That experience was similiar to an experience at the height of taking LSD.

I remember saying, after the adolescent experience, that I would never need to doubt God again. I think that may have relevance here in our discussion—because I did doubt after that. The unity of knowledge that I had then was not intellectually retentive. In other words, living in a secular, cynical society, as I did as a graduate student in Chicago, I swung completely away from this belief.

And I believe that that can happen to any of us who have taken LSD. We can doubt the validity of the experience. We can rationalize it in some way. But because we have had this

participation, we do have knowledge and belief; and that sense of security of belonging to the universe is what convinces us that what is basically ourselves is indestructible and will continue again.

Another aspect of the individual experience of which I think we ought to remind ourselves is in the area of the reduction of the ego; the area through which pain comes. I am sure you, who are professional psychologists, will challenge me when I use the word ego. What I mean is possibly the false self which has to be reduced. This strong sense of my personality had to be crucified to a certain extent. That was, of course, painful; at the height of the experience I did feel a considerable amount of pain. I remember thinking of Browning's lines, "Let our joy be three parts pain."

As to the relationship of this experience to the group, I think that as we have all said, there is a sense of belonging; a group empathy. Possibly affection for others in the group is kindled because we lose this sense of the separateness of self and realize that we are all a part of this unity which we have observed in the experience itself.

Personally, at the height of the experience I realized I could not have salvation alone; I saw that it was necessary for me to take others who were near and dear to me into this very experience itself.

As I subsequently thought of this desire to include others, I was reassured, because I think it is easy to say that this experience is a kind of joy ride, a kind of selfish, self-satisfying experience. It isn't at all. As we all know, at its height the experience carries with it this aspect of sharing.

Briefly, a word as to the application of experience to the organized churches. We have spoken of the behaviorists among the psychologists and of the logical positivists in philosophy. We have many orthodox people in theology. This is my field. I know something about the organized church, and some of my best friends are theologians. I know how awfully hard it is for them to break through the shell of orthodoxy. They verbalize, they intellectualize, and this is the spiritual experience, paradoxically, that they are talking about.

Possibly we will need a whole seminar devoted to this problem. How can we make it understandable to those who ought really, because of their professional interest, to be most concerned with it. I wish I had more time to go into it.

Fraser Nicol has made the following observation. He first described the reaction of many people to William James' "mystical experience" with nitrous oxide. He pointed out that they did not say, "this is the way to religion." Instead they were horrified because the implication had been that "religion was a function of a chemical compound." Likewise, Mr. Nicol continued, the same objection will undoubtedly occur in the case of LSD. "Religion," the organized church will say of those who proclaim the heightened spiritual value of the LSD experience, "is to be found . . . on the Hill of Calvary, not in the factories of Parke Davis and Eli Lilly."

I, in agreeing that this was an important point replied, "Knowing religious groups as I do, I am quite aware of the suspicion that they have intellectually of 'a spiritual experience.'" Salvation comes simply because there is a system to which you accommodate yourself, and if you follow the routine of the system, you achieve salvation.

Biblical theology, throughout the country, is suspicious of experience. So whether you have the mystical experience, noninduced by the drug, or the experience of spiritual reality induced by drug, you are open to suspicion. I made that point first.

The second one is that we should not by any means think that this is something we can discuss openly and willingly. No, because we will be doing great harm. But isn't it also quite true that you, Dr. Smythies, will have as much difficulty in trying to establish, among the orthodox in philosophy, and physiology that the brain is not the very center of the mind, as we would have in organized religion to try to demonstrate that the experience of religion, the significance of it, is embodied in this experience?

The third point I want to make is this: I am sure Gerald Heard felt that what he got from this was a verification of what he knew theoretically to be true. Therefore, if there

can be a practical exposition of the spiritual experience which we theoretically know into the practically felt and understood, we have, it seems to me, a basis, an empirical basis, on which to go to people who are skeptical.

[NOTE: Later Mr. Exman had the psychedelic experience a second time. While he still believes that what is revealed is of a super-sensible or spiritual nature, he is convinced that it should not be sought after, either to authenticate the religious experience or as a means of spiritual growth.]