

On Drugs

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dice and institutional fears of sponsoring that kind of research.

There are large areas that just cry out for research. One has to do with the striking disappearance of allergies in people that have taken psychedelics. I've seen people who can walk on sharp stones under the influence of hallucinogens and not only not feel pain from them but not have any marks on their feet. Now there are all sorts of ways that you can explain their not feeling pain in strange mental states but the lack of marks on their feet implies that nerves and muscles are working in a different way. I think there's a possibility with the use of psychedelics of producing states of tremendous relaxation and freedom from tension that it is important for medical science to find out about. It's especially important given their absence of physical toxicity. We use so many drugs routinely in medicine that are much more toxic than hallucinogens.

Do you see this failure to alter our states of awareness as being a dangerous thing?

Yeah, I do except I think we all alter our awareness in one way or another, whether it's through athletics, the rush of downhill skiing for example, skydiving, scuba diving, sex, music, dancing, being out in the wilderness if you grew up in the city, yoga, meditation, there's no end. But yes, I think that if you are prevented from doing that it would be similar to being prevented from dreaming at night. If you stop people from dreaming they become anxious and depressed.

I think that what we have to do in this society is teach people ways of doing this that are safe and that aren't anti-social.

In cultures where hallucinogens are used profitably the people depend on a great deal of ritualization and mental training. How do you see that happening in our culture?

Well, first of all by finding people who are analogies of shamans in our society. People who by their own experience are qualified to teach other people how to use hallucinogens. The advantage of having people like that around is that

they can reassure you that nothing has gone wrong. Most bad trips are not going crazy but thinking you're going crazy. You feel the drug acting on you and you misinterpret it and get upset about what you feel.

The great advantage of ritual is that it minimizes the risk of a bad reaction by standardizing the setting in which you take a drug. It also shapes your expectations and helps to channel them in a positive direction.

Another important thing in creating a good experience is having a source of drugs that inspires confidence. I think our attempt to regulate drug behaviour through prohibition has driven better forms of drugs out of circulation - more dilute natural forms - while at the same time encouraging highly concentrated black market forms.

Variable doses and fears of not knowing what you are getting have deterred a lot of people from taking psychedelics. That's why I feel that the dissemination of information about psilocybe mushrooms is important because for the first time in North America people have access to a pure natural form of a psychedelic.

You've said that people who collect their own drugs have a better relationship with them. Do you think that legalizing the cultivation of marijuana but not the sale of it would encourage people to develop a good relationship with that drug?

Absolutely. If you look at people who grow their own marijuana they tend to use it more carefully and thoughtfully than people who just buy it. That's true of all drugs. If you go to all the time and trouble of growing your own plant it's going to be more special to you and therefore you're going to think more carefully about the ways in which you use it and why. Marijuana is a low impact drug and so there's always a danger that you'll use it casually.

For a medical doctor you have a rather novel attitude toward disease. Do you think that all diseases are simply manifestations of psychological states?

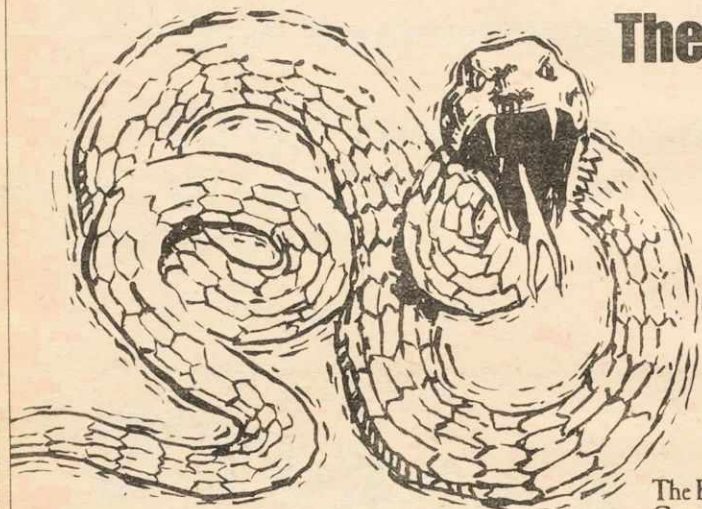
Well, that's too simple. I think that I said all disease is psychosomatic and I'll stick by that. That doesn't mean it's not real. It's become a popular attitude that if you get cancer it's because you didn't express your anger. I don't believe that. Psychosomatic is a badly used word. It simply means mind/body.

What I'm saying is that all disease has a mental component and a physical component. There are physical causes of disease, bacteria, viruses, etcetera, but you don't get a disease because you meet up with one of them; you get a disease because you meet up with one of them in a susceptible state. Now a susceptible state can originate in the mental sphere.

There is a psychological component to disease and it's something that western medicine has not really explored. We're overbalanced in our preoccupation with the physical

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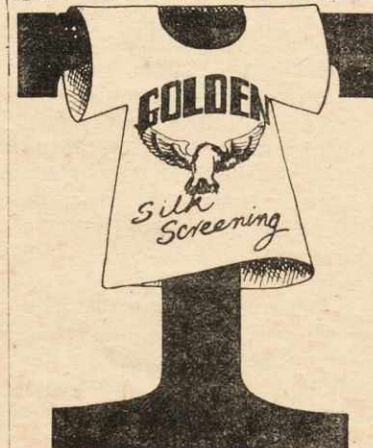
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