

**A Study of Perennial Philosophy and Psychedelic Experience, with a Proposal to Revise W. T. Stace's
Core Characteristics of Mystical Experience**

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Aldous Huxley was the single most important figure in the development of the psychedelic movement and of how the psychedelic experience was understood in the United States after World War II. The term “psychedelic” itself was coined in 1956 by Dr. Humphry Osmond during a conversation he had by mail with Aldous Huxley, his close friend and associate, about how to describe their experience of LSD. In the 1950s Huxley was among the first to experiment with mescaline and LSD and to write about his experiences with them in his highly influential essays *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*. Huxley's interpretation of psychedelic experience was based on his understanding of the perennial philosophy.

The perennial philosophy originates in Renaissance Neoplatonism (a highly Christianized form of Neoplatonism) but was revived in the nineteenth century by Hindus and British citizens living in India who sought to unify India's many different religious groups into one nation. In its nineteenth century Indian-British form, perennial philosophy attempted to unify Advaita (non-dual) Vedanta (one of many different schools of Hindu philosophy and religious practice), Buddhism, and Christian apophatic theology into one universal religion. Perennial philosophy was introduced into the United States beginning in the late nineteenth century by Hindu teachers from India and made popular by Aldous Huxley in 1945 with the publication of his book *The Perennial Philosophy*.

It is the central claim of perennial philosophy that all of the world's religions—or at least all of the world's “great” religions, which do not include shamanism—share a common essence or core defined by the mystical experience of unitive oneness in which the “ego” as a determinate entity “dies” or disappears. In its Indian-British form, perennial philosophy further claims that unconditional love, in the sense of either the Christian concept of charity (*caritas*) or the Buddhist concept of compassion, is

both a prerequisite to and a consequence of achieving an authentic mystical experience of unitive oneness. Hence, in the 1950s, when most researchers in the United States believed that psychedelics either mimicked psychosis or produced nothing more than meaningless hallucinations and delusions, Huxley believed that psychedelics could produce an authentic mystical experience of unitive oneness and improve our moral character.

Huxley also believed that the Tibetan funerary text the *Bardo Thödol* could be used as a guide to navigate your way through the heavens and hells made manifest by psychedelics on your way to an authentic mystical experience of unitive oneness. However, the first translation of the *Bardo Thödol* into English and the one that Huxley relied upon was an orientalist text written by American Theosophist W. Y. Evans-Wentz in 1927 that mistranslated the title of the *Bardo Thödol* as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, inviting faulty comparisons to *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*. The Evans-Wentz translation also included an introduction by Lama Anagarika Govinda, a German convert to Buddhism who helped introduce Europeans and Americans to Tibetan Buddhism and meditation. Lama Anagarika Govinda interpreted the *Bardo Thödol* as a guide to navigate your way through the heavens and hells you might experience while engaged in Tibetan Buddhist meditation on your way to a mystical experience of unitive oneness. Since Huxley believed that psychedelics produce the same sorts of mystical experiences that are found in all of the world's great religions, he went one step further than Lama Anagarika Govinda and believed that in addition to being used as a guide to Tibetan Buddhist meditation, the *Bardo Thödol* could be used as a guide to psychedelic experience. The only fly in the ointment is that the *Bardo Thödol* was not written as a guide to meditation.

The *Bardo Thödol* was a collection of prayers to be recited by mourners at a funeral for the benefit of the deceased's soul. *Bardo* (the "between-state") *Thödol* ("liberation") is most accurately translated as *Liberation through Hearing during the Intermediate State*. The *Bardo Thödol* was therefore not so much about death in the sense of the disappearance of the ego ("ego death" or "ego loss") that

occurs in a unitive mystical experience, as it was about assisting the soul of the deceased in the state between two incarnations.

Huxley believed that in order to achieve a mystical experience and to have a positive moral effect it was necessary to do psychedelics in the proper set and setting, which meant doing psychedelics with the proper mental preparation and in the proper physical and social environment. Huxley did not believe that anyone should do a psychedelic without the proper mental preparation, and since only a few people have the proper mental preparation to achieve the mystical experience of unitive oneness, he believed that only a few people should do psychedelics. Although Timothy Leary disagreed with Huxley on this last point and is famous for advocating the widespread use of psychedelics, he agreed with Huxley that it was necessary to mentally prepare oneself properly before taking a psychedelic in order to achieve a mystical experience of unitive oneness. He also agreed with Huxley that the *Bardo Thödol* could provide the framework for such mental preparation and serve as a guide to psychedelic experience. Hence, in 1964 Timothy Leary and his colleagues Richard Alpert and Ralph Metzner published *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* to provide the necessary mental preparation for a unitive mystical experience, and dedicated their book to Huxley “with profound admiration and gratitude.”

In 1962 Walter Pahnke, who was then a student of Timothy Leary’s and working under his guidance, performed the “Marsh Chapel” or “Good Friday” Experiment. The hypothesis that was being tested was whether, given the appropriate set and setting, psychedelics could reliably produce a core mystical experience of unitive oneness. In a double blind experiment, conducted in Boston University’s Marsh Chapel, a group of seminary students including religious scholar Huston Smith—who would go on to become an important spokesperson for the perennial philosophy—were given either niacin or psilocybin. The results showed that psilocybin produced a core mystical experience in a much larger percentage of the subjects than would be predicted by chance.

In 1991 Rick Doblin of the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies published a 25 year follow up study of Pahnke's original experiment in which he identified methodological flaws in the double blind procedure and ambiguity in the core mystical experience questionnaire. However, in 2002 Roland Griffiths at Johns Hopkins performed a more rigorously controlled version of Pahnke's original experiment using the widely accepted Hood Mysticism Questionnaire, which had been developed in 1975, and achieved similar results. Roland Griffiths and his colleague William A. Richards at Johns Hopkins are psychedelic researchers working within the perennial philosophy paradigm. Richards was a close friend and professional associate of Walter Pahnke's until Pahnke's untimely death in 1971. In 2015 Roland Griffiths and two of his other colleagues published a proposal for a 30 item revised Mystical Experience Questionnaire (MEQ30) that used four factors instead of the three used by the Hood Mystical Experience Questionnaire (Barrett and Johnson and Griffiths, 2015). They argued that their MEQ30 questionnaire improved upon the Hood Mystical Experience Questionnaire and should be used in future research. However, both the Hood Questionnaire and MEQ30 are based on W. T. Stace's core characteristics of mystical experience.

Although Huxley is arguably the single most important figure in the development of popular psychedelic culture, W. T. Stace was a more precise, analytical and systematic thinker. Although Stace was primarily concerned with mysticism, not psychedelic experience per se, he argues that the means by which a mystical experience is obtained is irrelevant, and he includes examples of psychedelic experiences in his study of mysticism. According to Rick Doblin, who otherwise found defects in Pahnke's research, Stace's claim that mystical experiences brought about by psychedelics are no different than those brought about by other means is supported by Pahnke's experiment. Thus it has come about that psychedelic researchers who work within the perennial philosophy paradigm use questionnaires to measure the degree to which an experimental subject has had a "mystical" experience that are based on W. T. Stace's model of a core mystical experience rather than Huxley's more vague

and imprecise account of mysticism. Both the 1975 Hood Questionnaire and the 2015 MEQ30 are based on Stace's landmark 1960 work *Mysticism and Philosophy* where he identified and delineated the seven essential characteristics of a core mystical experience of unitive oneness.

Stace identified two types of mystical experience: the extrovertive and the introvertive. For each type he identified seven common characteristics. The two sets of characteristics are identical except that the introvertive mystical experience is non-spatial and non-temporal. Both types of experience are characterized by a unifying consciousness of the One. But whereas in the extrovertive type of experience the One is apprehended as dwelling within or behind the space-time manifold, in the introvertive type of experience the One is apprehended in and by itself.

The common characteristics of the extrovertive mystical experience according to Stace are:

1. The Unifying Vision—all things are One
2. The more concrete apprehension of the One as an inner subjectivity, or life, in all things
3. Sense of objectivity or reality
4. Blessedness, peace, etc.
5. Feeling of the holy, sacred, or divine
6. Paradoxicality
7. Alleged by mystics to be ineffable

The common characteristics of the introvertive mystical experience according to Stace are:

1. The Unitary Consciousness; the One, the Void; pure consciousness
2. Nonspatial, nontemporal
3. Sense of objectivity or reality
4. Blessedness, peace, etc.

5. Feeling of the holy, sacred, or divine
6. Paradoxicality
7. Alleged by mystics to be ineffable

It is reasonable to suppose as a hypothesis (subject to further empirical and phenomenological investigation) that there is something common to all psychedelic drug experience because while set and setting varies between individuals and cultures, there are features of the human brain that psychedelics act upon that do *not* vary between individuals and cultures. We know, for example, that LSD acts upon the serotonin and dopamine pathways in the brain, and that these pathways serve similar functions in all human brains. However, the difficulty lies in separating what is common to all psychedelic experience from what varies due to differences of culture, life experience, and individual biology. A similar problem exists with regard to mystical experience.

Stace's approach to solving this problem was to compare descriptions of mystical experience found in different historical religious traditions and contemporary reports of mystical experience so that he could separate out what is common to them all from their differences. However, in pursuing this method, there is the danger of committing the logical fallacy of "cherry picking" data to suit one's desired result. Stace can't possibly include all reports of mystical experience that have ever been recorded in his study. He must be selective. Moreover, the record is not uniform. Not only are there many differences between reports of mystical experiences but there is nothing they all share in common, which makes it problematic to even label them all with the same word, such as "mystical."

Stace's solution is to assume *a priori* that some reports of mystical experience are more genuine than others. He particularly likes examples of mystical experience taken from Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism. But even within those traditions he prefers Meister Eckhart over Teresa of Avila, Vedanta over other strains of Hinduism, and the Mahayana over the Hinayana. Shamanism, which is by far the

oldest and most widespread tradition that has utilized psychedelics to induce altered states of consciousness, is not considered at all. Stace assumes that mystical experience requires a high level of cultural and intellectual development that is lacking in shamanism and even somewhat deficient in certain mystics of the “great religions.” For example, he claims that St. Teresa of Avila is overly emotional and intellectually weak compared to Meister Eckhart and that therefore her reports of mystical experience are not to be trusted to the same degree as Eckhart’s. So clearly, in Stace’s eyes, not all mystical experience is equal. But then we are left with the possibility that what we are getting is Stace’s conception of a mystical experience rather than what is objectively a mystical experience.

Indeed Stace’s conception of a mystical experience is not derived from his examples but from the perennial philosophy, which originates in Neoplatonism. Stace’s best examples come from the Neoplatonic mystical tradition, which includes Plotinus, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, and Meister Eckhart. All of these mystics rely upon negative or apophatic theology in both their meditation practice and in their intellectual conception or interpretation of mystical experience.

Apophatic or negative theology originates in a brief remark made by Plato that the Good, which is the pinnacle of the realm of eternal forms, is “beyond being.” In Plato’s allegory of the cave, the Good is represented by the Sun. It is impossible to look directly at the Sun. Analogously, it is impossible to “know” the Good. However, the light of the Sun is what makes it possible for things to live and grow, or to “be,” and for us to know them. Analogously, according to Plato, without the Good nothing would “be” and we could not know anything. The Good is what makes beings and our knowledge of them possible but it is not itself a being that can be known. In that sense, the Good is “beyond being.”

Apophatic or negative theology may also be found in Aristotle’s notion of the active intellect. According to Aristotle, the rational soul consists of two parts, the passive intellect and the active intellect. The passive intellect is the part of the soul that contains concepts, which are determinate forms. A determinate form is what it is and *not* something else. The passive intellect is like Aristotle’s

notion of prime matter insofar as it is in itself merely the potential to exist and does not actually exist until it receives a form. Once it receives a concept, it exists with the determinate form of that concept. The active intellect is the act of consciousness apart from its content, pure thought apart from its object. Lacking content, it has no determinate form. According to Aristotle, since God is fully actualized and has no unrealized potential, God has no passive intellect. God is active intellect or pure thought without any content. God is the act of thought reflecting on itself, “thought thinking thought.” As active intellect, God is no-thing, if by “thing” we mean something that has a determinate form (something that is this, but not that). Because God is fully actualized and has no unrealized potential to be anything more than what it already is, God is the ultimate end or purpose of being. God is the most perfect being and the highest good, or, in Cicero’s Latin, the *summum bonum*.

Plotinus took these ideas from Plato and Aristotle and turned them into a religion, perhaps to provide a pagan alternative to Christianity, even though the reverse occurred. Christianity coopted Neoplatonism, and Neoplatonism became the philosophical basis of Christian theology and mysticism.

According to Plato the Good was the source of harmony and unity, and without harmony and unity nothing could “be.” Without harmony and unity there would be only chaos, the absence of form, which is nothing. Plotinus takes Plato a step further and considers the Good to be not only the source of unity and being, but to be unity itself, to be the One. For Plotinus, the Good is Aristotle’s God, the Supreme Being. The One is not like the beings with a small “b” that are made visible by the light of the Sun, nor is it the determinate forms that the rational mind knows. The One is God, the One, Being with a capital “B.” The difference between beings and Being is known as the “ontological difference.” The ontological difference can be found in the German mystic Meister Eckhart and in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, who was influenced by Eckhart. Heidegger agrees with Aristotle and with apophatic theology that Being is not a being with a small “b” because it is not a determinate form. But Heidegger’s

entire philosophy is based on his objection to Aristotle's belief that Being is a thing that either endures through time or transcends time altogether.

According to Plotinus it is not possible for the ego to know the Good or the One by attending to it as a determinate object of its consciousness. But it is possible to know the Good or the One by joining in ecstatic union with it—by becoming One with it. This is the mystical experience of unitive oneness. The method used to achieve this experience is known as the *via negativa* or negative way of apophatic theology. Like some forms of Asian meditation, the method consists in removing all of the contents of consciousness. One by one, the method removes every “being”—every determinate thing—from consciousness until nothing is left but pure consciousness (Aristotle's active intellect without content), which neither contains nor is a determinate thing. The One is not one in the sense of being a whole composed of parts. It is one only in the sense that there is nothing else besides it: the one and only.

According to Stace, each of the major world religions that he considers interprets the mystical experience of the One differently, but what they all have in common is the One itself. The Christian mystics interpret the One to be a personal God. The Vedantists interpret the One to be Brahman, the Universal Self. In Samkhya, Yoga and Jain philosophies, the One is interpreted to be the pure consciousness of the individual ego. According to Stace (p. 107), in some respects Mahayana Buddhism “exhibits the character of a return to the world view of the Vedanta philosophy as it is found in the Upandishads. Buddhism had emerged from Hinduism. And the Mahayana has its metaphysical conception of ultimate reality—unlike Hinayana which rejects all metaphysical speculation as unprofitable--” Thus, Stace interprets Mahayana Buddhism to be similar in some respects to Vedanta. Whether this interpretation of Mahayana is accurate or not is certainly debatable, but it has become popular in the psychedelic movement and in New Age circles. Hinayana Buddhism presents a special problem for Stace, which he addresses in a separate section. Hinayana Buddhists, who are atheists and who adhere to the doctrine of *anatta* or no self, do not interpret the One to be either God or the

Universal Self or the individual ego, but simply consciousness removed of all contents, i.e., emptiness or “*sunyata*.” This would seem to contradict Stace’s claim that at the core of all the world’s great mystical traditions lies the experience of the One or of Undifferentiated Unity. But Stace argues that emptiness is Undifferentiated Unity.

Stace argues that once all contents are removed from consciousness, there can no longer be any distinctions or boundaries between things, because there are no determinate things, and that this absence of distinctions or boundaries is the same thing as Unity, because Unity is the absence of all distinctions or boundaries that would produce a multiplicity. Thus he claims that the Hinayana Buddhists also recognize undifferentiated Unity at the core of mystical experience.

It’s debatable, however, whether Unity is the same thing as the absence of distinction. If Unity has a positive meaning and is not the same as absence or emptiness, then the Hinayana concept of *sunyata* would not be the same thing as undifferentiated Unity, and Stace would have failed to show that all the great religions share a common mystical experience of undifferentiated Unity. Equally serious doubts can be raised about whether the Hindu concept of Brahman or Universal Self is the same as the Neoplatonic One, and about whether the pure consciousness of the individual ego is the same as the One, and even whether the God of the Christian mystics is the same as the Undifferentiated Unity. Stace massages the concepts in all of these traditions to fit them into his Christian-Neoplatonic mold.

Stace also argues that the One is Infinite. Finite things are determined by their limits or boundaries. The One is Infinite because an undifferentiated unity has no limits or boundaries. If something has a limit or boundary then there would be at least two things, each on one side of the limit or boundary. But then there would be a multiplicity or many, not a One. Therefore, the One has no limits or boundaries. But if the One has no limits or boundaries it must be infinite. But according to Kant’s First Antinomy the infinite is inconceivable. Stace could argue that Kant’s argument doesn’t apply to his notion of infinity because Kant’s notion of infinity, like Aristotle’s, is that of an infinite series. But Stace

offers no alternative concept of infinity. Ultimately Stace's claim that the One is Infinite is not based on logic but on his cross cultural comparison of mystical experience. But the concept of the infinite is not found in all cultures. Plato and the ancient Greeks had no concept of infinity. The concept of infinity was introduced into European culture by the Christians, who believed their God was infinite.

Even if Stace succeeds and shows that all of the world's religions share a common experience of the One, it remains problematic what that would mean. Since the One is completely undifferentiated and can be known only by becoming One with it, any knowledge we could have of it would also be completely undifferentiated. We could not say anything about it because language depends upon distinctions, beginning with the distinctions between phonemes and letters of the alphabet. Hence, it is "ineffable." Nor would the rules of logic apply to it, since logic presupposes binary opposites, starting with truth and falsity, and boundaries between sets (as in Venn diagrams) that determine what is in a set and what is not in a set. Hence, the One is paradoxical. If we can't say anything about it, and it has no logically coherent meaning, does it have any meaning at all? Would we even be conscious in such a state? How could anyone remember such an experience or report it to anyone else?

In fact, millions of people have had psychedelic experiences outside a laboratory setting and the vast majority make no claims about having had an introvertive mystical experience of undifferentiated Unity or of the One. What is much more common, however, is the claim to have felt "at one with the universe." But the history of the psychedelic movement in the United States suggests that many people describe their experience in this way because they have been led to expect this type of experience by psychedelic popularizers such as Aldous Huxley and Timothy Leary who were devoted to the perennial philosophy.

In Stace's schema, the experience of feeling "at one with the universe" is an extrovertive mystical experience, as opposed to an introvertive mystical experience. In an extrovertive mystical experience the mystic retains awareness of a multiplicity of things extended in space and time but senses an

undifferentiated unity within or behind the many. Stace (p. 63) gives as an example the following experience described by Meister Eckhart:

All that a man has here externally in multiplicity is intrinsically One. Here all blades of grass, wood, and stone, all things are One. This is the deepest depth.

And an example from N. M., an anonymous contemporary of Stace's (p. 72), which resembles many modern psychedelic experiences:

. . . everything appeared to have an "inside"—to exist as I existed, having inwardness, a kind of individual life, and every object, seen under this aspect, appeared exceedingly beautiful. There was a cat out there, with its head lifted, effortlessly watching a wasp that moved without moving just above its head. Everything was urgent with life . . . which was the same in the cat, the wasp, the broken bottles, and merely manifested itself differently in these individuals (which did not therefore cease to be individuals however). All things seemed to glow with a light that came from within them.

Stace interprets N. M.'s experience to be essentially the same as Eckhart's. He equates the "light" and the "life" within all things with Eckhart's One. But another reading is possible. N. M. is simply describing how his perceptual, aesthetic and emotional response to the things around him was enhanced during his experience. Everything seemed more alive, full of energy and light, and more beautiful. No doubt everything seemed to be alive with the same energy, because that energy came from the same source: his own enhanced nervous system. Perhaps what N. M. sensed in all things was the pure consciousness of his own individual ego.

But according to Stace (p. 132) extrovertive experience is inferior to introvertive experience:

the extrovertive experience, although we recognize it as a distinct type, is actually on a lower level than the introvertive type; that is to say, it is an incomplete kind of experience which finds its completion and fulfillment in the introvertive kind of experience. The extrovertive kind shows a partly realized tendency to unity which the introvertive kind completely realizes. In the introvertive type the multiplicity has been wholly obliterated and therefore must be spaceless and timeless, since space and time are themselves principles of multiplicity. But in the extrovertive experience the multiplicity seems to be, as it were, only half absorbed in the unity. The multiple items are still there, the "blades of grass, wood, and stone" mentioned by Eckhart, but yet are nevertheless "all one."

So the extrovertive experience is merely an incomplete introvertive experience. If there were or could be no introvertive experiences of the One, there could be no extrovertive experiences either, because extrovertive experiences are just incomplete introvertive experiences, diluted visions of the One filtered through the hazy image of the many extended in space and time. What Stace describes as an extrovertive experience would be something else. Therefore, even if it could be shown that psychedelics reliably produce something like what Stace describes as extrovertive experience, unless it could also be shown that it is possible to have an introvertive experience, we could not conclude that it is possible to have extrovertive experiences either, with the aid of psychedelics or by any other means.

The final chapter of Stace's *Mysticism and Philosophy* is devoted to ethics or morality. In this chapter he demonstrates his commitment to Christian morality, undermining his claim to universality. He claims that mystical experience is the psychological source of moral feelings and the empirical justification of moral values. Moral values, he says, derive from the mystical experience of the highest human good—the summum bonum—which is union with the One or Universal Self.

Stace equates morality with altruism and immorality with selfishness. Moral behavior is selfless service to others, or *charity*. Moral action is motivated by feelings of love and sympathy—by *agape* and *caritas*—that ultimately derive from the desire to dissolve the individual ego in the One or Universal Self. He builds his argument upon Plato’s theory of *eros*, but what he really has in mind is the Christian concepts of *agape* and *caritas*, which he equates with the Mahayana concept of compassion, because altruism and charity are his moral standards. In combining Plato’s concept of *eros* with the Christian concepts of *agape* and *caritas*, Stace follows the Renaissance Neoplatonists, such as Marilio Ficino, who also found Christ in Plato.

Altruism is a key component of the perennial philosophy rooted in the concept of the One. Since the mystical experience of the One is the ultimate source of moral feelings of love and sympathy for others, a genuine mystic will be found engaged in altruistic action.

Stephen Gaskin (1935-2014), known as the “acid guru” of San Francisco, was a psychedelically inspired mystic in the Haight-Ashbury hippy scene of the 1960s who held regular discussions known as the Monday Night Class, which attracted upwards of 1500 students from around the Bay Area. In 1970 he established the Farm, one of the largest and most enduring hippie communes, in Tennessee. Between 1978 and 1984 he was one of 35 members of the Farm who ran a volunteer ambulance service known as Plenty in the South Bronx, filling a desperate need for ambulance services until the City of New York trained and hired a sufficient number of ambulance drivers.

Gaskin’s psychedelically inspired mystical teachings were based on the perennial philosophy of unitive oneness as described by Aldous Huxley. Psychedelics were a holy sacrament that revealed our essential oneness with one another and therefore our duty to serve, to be our “brother’s keeper.” Gaskin and the Farmies rejected the hedonism and social withdrawal that is often associated with psychedelic drug use. They led an austere lifestyle and lived according to strict moral principles such as selfless work, marriage, traditional family life, and social service. They ate a vegan diet. Coffee, alcohol,

and artificial drugs, including LSD, were discouraged or banned, but natural plant based drugs such as marijuana and psilocybin mushrooms were not.

Gaskin's morality may (or may not) be commendable. It is not, however, a universal product of mystical experience, however that may be defined, let alone of psychedelic experience. Gaskin's morality, like Huxley's and Stace's, is a product of Christianity. Not even the claim that morality is universal is universal. The claim to universal morality is found only in religions that arise out of imperial regimes—such as the Roman Empire—that impose a uniform set of moral rules across different regions and cultures.

All is not lost, however. As I argued above, given the fact that all human brains share common characteristics and that at least part of the psychological response to psychedelics is due to the chemical action of psychedelics on those brains, it's reasonable to suppose that there will be common characteristics of psychedelic experience. It's just a mistake to look for those common characteristics in Neoplatonic metaphysics or the Christian religion. As a working hypothesis, I propose the following revision of Stace's lists of the common characteristics of extrovertive and introvertive experiences, minus the Neoplatonism (the "One") and the use of Christian religious concepts ("holy," "sacred," "divine," and "blessedness").

Common Characteristics of Extrovertive Psychedelic Experience

1. The Unifying Vision—an apprehension of all things as parts of a whole; a gestalt or pattern.
2. An enhanced perception and aesthetic appreciation for all things; a heightened sense of beauty; an enhancement and intensification of emotional response.
3. A feeling of truth; vision or insight; a feeling that one has found the answers; that one sees things as they really are; reality.

4. A profound sense of peace, fulfillment, completeness, and happiness; a feeling of having reached your goal; absence of striving or struggle.
5. A feeling that one's experience is of supreme value, precious, the "summum bonum;" a "peak experience."
6. the experience is emotional, nonverbal and without much linear, analytical reasoning, but can be described verbally and logically.

Common Characteristics of Introvertive Psychedelic Experience

1. The Unitary Consciousness; all is one Mind; apparent telepathic communication; generally has verbal, imaginal or affective content.
2. Transported to an alternate reality; Nonspatial; loss of orientation in space; no sense of location in space; no sense of calendar or clock time, but the specious present—the flow of time from past to future in the present extended moment—remains.
3. Extreme intensification of emotional response; may include the full range of emotions; may include intensely positive affect, including intense release of libidinal energy; sexual pleasure; love; may also include negative affect.
4. A feeling of having pierced the veil of maya, the web of illusions, of having pulled back the curtain to see what was always there but previously unseen.
5. Altered state of consciousness; difficult to translate into terms that can be understood in an ordinary state of consciousness, but not impossible, not inherently illogical or ineffable.

There are two methods that may be used to test my hypothesis: statistical analysis of empirical results and phenomenology. Statistical analysis of empirical results is the most commonly used method

in modern psychology, but phenomenological methods have also been used, starting with William James, and more recently by Francisco Varela.

My claim is that W. T. Stace's model of mystical experience is not theoretically sound. If my claim is true then any statistical, empirical study of mystical experience that is based on Stace's model would lack construct validity. This would include studies of psychedelic experience such as Pahnke's famous Marsh Chapel experiment that seek to show that psychedelics can reliably produce a mystical experience.

By modifying Stace's model of the core mystical experience I hope to have produced a model that is theoretically sound and that will therefore provide a better basis for statistical, empirical studies. But I do not claim to have identified the core characteristics of mystical experience. I claim to have identified the core characteristics of psychedelic experience. I leave open the question as to whether the concept of mysticism is valid. Most scholars today take the constructionist position that there is no universal concept of mysticism, but that the concept of mysticism—if it exists at all—is constructed differently in different cultures and historical periods. Indeed, the concept of mysticism that is popular today only appeared in the early modern period. Therefore, there cannot possibly be universal characteristics of mystical experience.

There can, however, be universal characteristics of psychedelic experience—providing that we allow for variations within those common characteristics according to set and setting—because psychedelic experience is not only a cultural construct. It is also a product of neurochemistry. If, for example, emotional response is associated with certain neurochemical processes, then chemically altering those processes will alter emotional response. If the orienting response to novel stimuli is associated with certain neurochemical processes, then chemically altering those processes will alter the orienting response, perhaps inhibiting the response and causing us to enter a trance or hypnotic state.

Therefore, unlike Stace's model of mysticism, which refers to an unstable social construct, my model of psychedelic experience has a culturally invariant objective referent.

The other way to test my hypothesis is the phenomenological method. The purpose of the phenomenological method is to discover the invariant structures of consciousness. The advantage of the phenomenological method over the statistical, empirical method is that it is a first person study of consciousness. Therefore no special facilities, funding, staff or equipment are necessary to perform a phenomenological analysis of psychedelic consciousness. All that's necessary is some rudimentary training in the phenomenological method. For that purpose I recommend Don Ihde's excellent how-to manual of phenomenology, *Experimental Phenomenology*. Once armed with the phenomenological method, the reader can test my hypothesis for him or herself.

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