



AKADÉMIAI KIADÓ

Philosophy and psychedelics: Frameworks for exceptional experience

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BOOK REVIEW



ABSTRACT

The intersection between philosophy and psychedelics is explored in the book “Philosophy and Psychedelics: Frameworks for Exceptional Experience”. The authors aim to develop a dialogue between the two disciplines and explore the various frameworks for understanding exceptional experiences that psychedelics have afforded human beings. The book delves into foundational, ontological, and epistemological questions, including the hard problem of consciousness, the metaphysical understanding of the self, and the aesthetic meaning of the sublime in psychedelic experience. The book provides valuable exploration of questions concerning prevailing metaphysical frameworks, epistemic belief structures, and modes of inquiry, and the effort made by the authors to bring into dialogue multiple dialectics and practices, perspectives and methods is commendable.

KEYWORDS

psychedelics, philosophy, exceptional experience, aesthetics, ethics, ontology, epistemology and politics

INTRODUCTION

How might philosophy begin to comprehend the exceptional experiences that psychedelics have afforded human beings in various cultures throughout history? What do forms of philosophical thought and analysis have to offer to the project of understanding psychedelics and exceptional experience, and conversely, how might psychedelics inform and influence philosophical modes of thought and behaviour? In seeking to sketch various ‘frameworks for exceptional experience’, this volume identifies critical themes and produces varied and engaging connections. In titling the work, *Philosophy and Psychedelics: Frameworks for Exceptional Experience*, the authors value the bi-directionality of both philosophy and psychedelic experience as reciprocally informing undertakings. The intersection between philosophy and psychedelics is the focal point of this work, and its strength. This book offers an important entry into a potential discourse between the discipline of philosophy and the vast experiences which are documented and connected to psychedelics. It is an excellent and aspirational work which portends questions relating to the intersection between exceptional experience and a multitude of philosophical sub-disciplines, ranging from ethics and politics, through to metaphysics. What is apparent upon reading this work is the concerted effort made by the authors to bring into dialogue the multiple dialectics and practices, perspectives and methods that are particular to both the domains of psychedelics and philosophy. They offer valuable exploration of questions concerning our prevailing metaphysical frameworks, epistemic belief structures, and modes of inquiry; which disrupt the neat lines drawn between

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domains such as aesthetics, ethics, ontology, epistemology and politics. This book is a valuable inquiry into psychedelics and philosophy which in the current century calls for renewed exploration.

Contemporary philosophy has neglected many of the essential questions that psychedelics raise, and the authors of this volume address many of these questions with the attention they deserve. Neglect of these questions has primarily occurred due to the historical suppression of psychedelic studies in broader Western civilization since 1971. Though as the authors observe this suppression is merely a modern phenomenon, one absent in both ancient and traditional cultures. These cultures have a storied history of engagement with altered or exalted states of consciousness. It is for this reason that wisdom-based practices have long been bound to psychedelic experience and exploration. The intersection between psychedelic substances and wisdom can also be traced through Western philosophical traditions, whether it be Democritus' divine madness, Socrates' conception of intoxication as the greatest of blessings, the Dionysian festivals of the ecstatic, or the Eleusinian Mysteries. Much of the wisdom of philosophy may be indebted to the historical use of Kykeon, a fact commonly forgotten in light of the Apollonian bias of academic philosophy.

Though often forced to the margins, philosophers offering accounts of altered states continued to emerge. These thinkers began to develop interpretative frameworks for psychedelic substances and the experiences they promote. While these thinkers were already attending to the relationship between psychedelics and psychology, metaphysics, medical science and theology, such frameworks still remain partial. As a result of the obstacles to research and thinking in this domain, Western philosophy has yet to establish a standard framework through which to make sense of psychedelic experiences. Works such as *Philosophy and Psychedelics* are attempts to think through and develop meaningful modes of understanding and engagement with this terrain.

The authors of this volume engage with the crucial subjects in the field and present exploration of foundational, ontological and epistemological questions that pertain to the topic; touching upon the hard problem of consciousness, metaphysical understanding of the 'self', epistemological inquiry into the 'truth' value of altered state experience, the aesthetic meaning of the 'sublime' in psychedelic experience, and the phenomenological significance of such experiences more generally. However, as will be discussed, there are many crucial areas, perspectives, and critiques that call for greater attention than can be offered in this volume. Notwithstanding, drawing together all the domains required to do justice to this project, is a Sisyphean task for anyone. This is the inevitable challenge which philosophically approaching an interdisciplinary field invites, especially given that each domain offers its own epistemic and ontological assertions. Any attempt to integrate disciplines, in the manner that this volume does, calls for an overarching metaphysical stance which is able to create an integrated

epistemic account. In the case of psychedelics, such a stance would seem to be at odds with the dominant ideals of reductive materialism. Therefore, a movement away from petit-materialism or reductionism requires broader conceptual engagement with the realms of science, philosophy, religion and spirituality. Nonetheless, this work is an important achievement in initiating the conversation between philosophy and psychedelics.

THE VOLUME'S SCOPE AND CENTRAL THEMES

This volume draws together a varied and eclectic range of philosophers from across traditions, offering different modes of analysis, evaluation and understanding to this inquiry. Philosophical engagement with psychedelic experiences may not only inform the emerging cultural debates concerning psychedelic legitimacy, but also simultaneously influence our understanding of human nature, truth, reality and society. The authors of this volume have produced a significant and important contribution to the emerging field of psychedelic studies, drawing on the rich resources that exist across the domains of philosophy.

In seeking a framework for exceptional experiences, the authors of this volume attempt to engage psychedelics in the context of their cultural and historical use through exploring the vast typology of these experiences; ranging from the intensely emotional and perceptually transformative, to the non-perceptual and supra-conceptual. As the editors Christine Hauskeller and Peter Sjöstedt-Hughes write:

[this typology ranges] From disembodied mind to interconnected physicality, from the loss or expansion of one's being to the intrusion of myriad apparent weird and wondrous beings, from the therapeutic to the threatening, from sublime love and light to the darkest of fears (2022, p.4).

The significance of this work has grown in light of the attention the field of psychedelics has received in recent years. The psychedelic renaissance requires and is calling for philosophical analysis in order to make sense of and support other domains of research, a task undertaken by the chapters in this volume.

We will consider, in brief, the ideas explored by the thinkers in this volume and the central themes around which these ideas turn. What is evident throughout this work is the need for a broad-based philosophical inquiry in this field, as a sense-making project for science, culture, philosophy and psychology. The intersecting and overlapping points of interest here constitute a rich and varied web. The focal points may be described as follows: (i) the medicalisation of psychedelics, (ii) science and psychedelics, (iii) phenomenological insight derived from psychedelic experience, (iv) epistemological expansion via psychedelic experience, (v) psychedelics and eastern philosophy, (vi) psychedelics and political praxis, (vii) psychedelic ontology and process ontology.



THE MEDICALISATION OF PSYCHEDELICS

An important part of the recent bloom of interest in psychedelics is due to their clinical application and utility. The clinical application of psychedelics has significant socio-political ramifications which raise questions pertaining to pharmaceutical uptake, psychiatric integration, the ethics of application, and the commercial commodification of these substances; all of these questions are rightly considered in the chapter by Christine Hauskeller. While these concerns are present in the text, they are examined in a manner that at times seems to be at odds with real-world clinical applications and motivations. In these moments, the application of critical theory seems to overrun the nuance and complexity of clinical work; this is the natural consequence of philosophising about a clinical field that is not inhabited by the philosopher in practice.

The distinction between psychedelics used as technologies for the exploration of individual consciousness and their therapeutic or clinical application, is a crucial categorical distinction which at times seems to become blurred within Hauskeller's chapter. It is important to demarcate these domains as separate in practice, form, and intention. For instance, in psychedelic assisted therapy it is the therapeutic register which is the primary focus, rather than the psychedelic substances or even the psychedelic experience. This focus diverges radically in the examination of psychedelic use as a dimension of exploration of human consciousness, where the substance and the experience are primary.

The difference between psychedelic-assisted therapy and consciousness exploration is further demarcated by the essential role of the therapeutic relationship, whereby the effects of psychedelic experience are transposed as well as influenced by the relational field. This is established as a key concern within psychedelic-assisted therapy, while it is true that relational dimensions are present in other forms of psychedelic use and experience, the therapeutic relationship is exclusively for and orientated to the patient within the therapeutic register.

Hauskeller rightly raises questions about the philosophical and ethical concerns associated with transferring pre-existing therapeutic and ethical sensibilities into the psychedelic field. As people struggle to make sense of this new and emerging field, a philosophical exploration of the various proposed models of psychedelic-assisted therapy is much needed. In psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy there are presently a number of manualized treatment approaches which have been utilised in clinical trials, all of which have differing and significant epistemic and thus practical implications, which call for greater philosophical rigour.

For instance, philosophical attention is required for evaluating clinical models which present the psychedelic substance as the exclusive therapeutic agent. This position attempts to remove all interpersonal dimensions and is built heavily on a reductive biological mode of psychiatry, which problematically poses a reduction of transcendent experience to mere material process.

Hence, it is not the biological processes of psychedelics alone that are efficacious in treatment, but rather the overall experience of treatment. A point evidenced in psychedelic trials through the correlation between the strength of mystical experience and clinical benefit (Garcia-Romeu, 2014; James, Robertshaw, Hoskins, & Sessa, 2020; Roseman, Nutt, & Carhart-Harris, 2018).

In contrast to the biological reductionism favoured in some clinical trials, another approach proposes a non-interference model which focuses on the therapist as a space holder for the process of the patient; this view was expounded by Grof (1980) and notably is used by Multi-disciplinary Association of Psychedelic Studies (MAPS) (Mithoefer et al., 2013). In seeking an explanatory mechanism of change, this model unconvincingly relies heavily on a homunculus fallacy with reference to as an 'inner healer'. This idea is problematic and requires extensive philosophical labour to offer a rationalised and coherent therapeutic stance. Perhaps most problematically philosophically is the trend of applying existing therapeutic models to psychedelic experience, as exemplified by Yale's incorporation of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) into psychedelic-assisted therapy for anxiety and depression (Guss, Krause, & Sloshower, 2020; Luoma et al., 2019). Once again, there is little philosophical attention paid to both the ontological and epistemological pre-suppositions present within this model. A clear factor of incongruity may be that ACT is built upon Relational Frame Theory (RFT) and its contextual approach to language. Yet, commonly within psilocybin experiences people report states of ineffability. What is the philosophical justification for using a language-based model to interpret experiences which transcend or evade language? What influence do such ideologies have upon people's experience?

While these concerns are implied throughout the volume as a whole, further explication and analysis of their implications is required. Failure to do so misses the opportunity to allow philosophy to deeply inform practice. Importantly, the domains of practice and philosophy may be mutually informative, as psychedelic experiences have the capacity to redefine how philosophers think about the world and how it hangs together. This type of thinking and problematisation of ontological and epistemic assumptions is something that the volume as a whole does well. These specific questions pertaining to clinical practice and clinical sciences as outlined above, bring into question the more general category of science and how it is engaged with throughout the monograph.

SCIENCE AND PSYCHEDELICS

The contemporary resurgence of psychedelics has largely been generated, not by philosophy but rather through science, and in particular breakthroughs in neuroscience, neurophysiology and broader clinical trials following scientific method. Yet, what remains for the philosopher to do in light of this resurgence is to think and reflect on the



implications in a philosophically rigorous manner. What is called for is not an account of the science itself, but rather a more direct philosophical engagement with the science, particularly speaking to what the philosophy of psychedelic science might look like. This is necessary as the science of psychedelics cannot give an onto-epistemic account of itself and thus requires philosophers to do this work.

As the editors Sjöstedt-Hughes and Hauskeller note, attempting to establish a framework for sense-making around a variety of exceptional experiences is a significant undertaking. Such an undertaking raises questions pertaining to a multitude of philosophically oriented problems, such as: the role of culture and these substances within the scientific discipline, the role of expectation effects; and how we account for set and setting within a scientific paradigm? Additionally, an investigation into a philosophy of science for psychedelics poses fundamental questions such as: in what way does the type of scientific method employed effect how we may come to understand psychedelics and human experience; are we best to work towards states of maximal abstraction in the study of psychedelics — as the ‘hard’ sciences attempt to do; or, should the study take the form of a first-person science given the primacy of experience within the various domains of psychedelic investigation.

While the study of psychedelics done within a classical scientific register may provide significant insights into natural kinds of psychedelic substances and their pharmacologically-mediated experiences, Hauskeller and Sjöstedt-Hughes suggest that a broader engagement with the concept of psychedelics is required as there is more involved “than a set of defined molecules” (2022, p.5). In asserting as much, the editors implicitly take a stand in defence of a notion of transcendent experience within the psychedelic frame, as something not merely reducible to chemical or biological processes. This is an important contention in light of the current materialistic scientific frame, yet this focus on transcendence risks becoming oppositional to materialism without engaging the significant offerings of the sciences. However, this is an important contention that the editors should be commended for addressing from so many varied perspectives.

Science needs philosophers to interpret and understand the meaning of experiences, in particular, those that sit outside the domains of ordinary experience, and therefore ordinary science. However, while a number of chapters in this volume refer to the experiential aspects of psychedelics, further rigour is required in addressing both the phenomenological framing of these experiences and the ways in which they intersect with scientific knowledge. We will explore the approach taken to psychedelics and phenomenology in what follows.

PHENOMENOLOGY AND PSYCHEDELIC EXPERIENCE

The authors attempt to draw psychedelics into dialogue with phenomenology, which is a worthy and necessary goal.

However, there is a greater need for a more thoroughgoing integration of the precepts of phenomenological philosophy in order to fulfil the ambition of the text. To illustrate, Taline Artinian uses a phenomenological frame of investigation to explore the potential for psychedelics to contribute to our understanding of gratitude, connectedness, unity and a sense of losing one’s ‘self’. She suggests that psychedelics can enhance our understanding of emotions by proffering an account of transpersonal gratitude arising from psychedelic use. Yet, as [Varela and Thompson \(1991\)](#) have suggested, a first-person account is not a first-person science: the act of introspective reporting is not equivalent to the difficult work of first-person science, which calls for developing a reliable methodology. While this issue is addressed in the volume in a philosophically meaningful way, it is at times elided.

In general, the notion of phenomenology is used in a variety of ways throughout the monograph. In most cases it is used as an explanatory framework for experience, which is valid, useful and interesting. However, phenomenology proper is more than an explanatory framework, rather it is a means and method of investigating experience with a rich variety of approaches. These range from eidetic and transcendental phenomenology as explored by Husserl, to the hermeneutic phenomenology of Heidegger. Additionally, and importantly for psychedelic research, the approach of neurophenomenology as outlined by Laughlin and made notable by [Winkelman’s investigations into psychedelics and shamanism \(2010\)](#) offer much value in establishing a phenomenological method.

As [Zahavi \(2021\)](#) has suggested, in order to be truly philosophical, phenomenology must be more than the assumption of a naive realist affirmation of the natural attitude. Which is to say that, phenomenology is more than merely a surface expression of immediate accounts of experience. The concept of a phenomenology of altered states is one that is necessary and important, but perhaps in order to best make use of this means of enquiry the varieties of phenomenology need to be applied as a form of first-person science. If the central tenant of phenomenology is, in [Husserl’s \(1913\)](#) words, a call to return ‘back to the things themselves’, then phenomenology must be approached not just in name, but in practice.

Critical to the field of psychedelic studies is the need for a more rigorous first-person approach, applied in conjunction with both second and third-person research methodologies ([Varela & Shear, 1999](#)). The foundation of second-person phenomenological approaches is the assertion that I-you relations are central to human life, furthermore this requires a methodology that supports the exploration of this I-you relation. An adequate account of any human phenomena must begin by investigating the ways in which existence is always already shared. While this monograph may not complete this task, it is valuable for its stimulation and problematisation of the areas of first-person experience and interrelationship in the context of psychedelic research. Thus, the authors pave the way for the integration of first-person and second-person sciences as outlined by [Varela and Thompson \(2001\)](#).



Phenomenology is a method and a means of reasoning and the basis of phenomenological argumentation is founded in the value of showing, not telling. As such, the contributions of authors such as Artinian, González Romero, Moen and Odin are valuable in that they show how psychedelics may create alterations in an individual's meta-cognitive capacity, particularly in the way psychedelics alter the view of the relationship between self and other.

An interesting extension of this may be to explore the psychedelic state itself and the manner in which it produces disruptions to the experience of temporality, spatiality, relationality and motility; and the subsequent changes in the onto-epistemic stance of the experiencer. In brief, what is called for is a phenomenological account of the components, vectors, and qualities of the mind; and the resultant alteration to experience induced by psychedelic substances that lead to therapeutic or transformative outcomes.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL EXPANSION VIA PSYCHEDELIC EXPERIENCE

A key feature of psychedelic experience seems to be the manner in which it can facilitate the expansion of an onto-epistemic view. This is characterised by the experience of seeing more vividly or deeply into oneself or reality, and may include recognition of the symbiotic and interconnected features of reality.

These themes are explored interestingly and meaningfully by Jussi Jylkkä who draws on Frank Jackson's (1986) famous philosophical thought experiment, 'Mary's Room', in relation to the phenomenology of unitary psychedelic experiences. Jackson's well-known thought experiment asks: could Mary — a hypothetical expert neuroscientist, who due to some congenital condition has only ever seen in black and white — know what it is like to see the colour red, if she knew everything about the neurophysiology of the colour? This 'knowledge argument' has been drawn upon to demonstrate a gap between experiential and scientific knowledge; and has called for a nuanced understanding of both our physicalist ontology and quantitative epistemologies. Jylkkä adapts Jackson's thought experiment by applying it to the psychedelic experience, asking: could Mary know what it is like to undergo a psychedelic experience based on an understanding of the neuroscience of the event alone? By revisiting this thought experiment the author points to key problems that require consideration in the emerging science of psychedelics. Namely, how does one unify the seemingly incompatible onto-epistemic stances generated through reductive scientific accounts, with those phenomenal accounts generated by extraordinary state experience. Jylkkä's contention is that extraordinary experiences cannot be adequately understood by empirical science, given that science is not in the business of offering accounts of first-person experiences. Rather, science as it is practiced in the area of psychedelics is focused on understanding molecules, networks, synapses, and other

quantifiable substrates; which are important and connected to psychedelic experiences but cannot explain the experience in totality. This chapter is of particular significance for the manner in which it problematises theory of mind, the nature of human consciousness, and the role of experience as the humanity's major means for encountering the world.

These themes are present in John Buchanan's exploration of the 'reality' of psychedelic experience. This chapter examines the expansion of the human onto-epistemological frame through amplified perceptual capacities as afforded by psychedelic experience. Buchanan's contention is that while the philosophy provides a frame for the experience, the experience in turn fortifies the frame.

Professor Ole Martin Moen examines the relationship between psychedelic experience and hallucinogens, importantly suggesting that it is frequently unjustifiable to consider psychedelic experiences to be hallucinatory. When considered from within a purely psychiatric frame, given that psychedelic experiences rarely involve a collapse in decentrative metacognitive functioning, this is almost certainly true. Which is to say that those experiencing psychotic style hallucinations and delusions believe their experiences to be universally representative of an accurate shared reality.

Moen extends and strengthens this criticism by moving into a philosophical register and challenging a naïve realist perspective by raising questions about *the myth of the given*. Through examining aspects of psychedelic experiences—such as colour phenomenology, synaesthesia, experienced beauty, love and trust—Moen contends we are mistaken to characterise psychedelic perception as intrinsically 'distorted'. This chapter offers a provocative demonstration of the manner in which a philosophy of psychedelic experience has the potential to recursively inform philosophy; and thereby also inform other disciplines which are built on pre-existing onto-epistemic frames, such as those involved in clinical practice.

This issue of onto-epistemic frame in clinical practice is explored by Johanna Hilla Sopenan who examines Jung's *Liber Novus* as a possible template and metaphor for understanding psychedelic process and journey. Jung's exploration and articulation of his personal visionary experience and movement through the unconscious, is perhaps unparalleled in Western psychiatry. Sopenan offers a positive interpretation of Jung's analytic psychology, positing a potential for providing tangible and useful clinical applications in the field of psychedelics. We share Sopenan's hopefulness about the value of Jung's work, yet, this view is one which Jung himself was unlikely to have shared; and as such, we believe it is important to take seriously Jung's reservations about the navigation of inner space. As Jung cautioned in his 1954 letter to Victor White, one must be wary of wisdom that is unearned. As such, one of the important questions that Sopenan's chapter raises in its attempt to integrate an analytical psychological perspective with psychedelics is: how can a sequential and stable set of developmental features within the mind be established, features which allow for productive development and



growth through psychedelic experience? This chapter's engagement with onto-epistemic questions is perhaps more clinical than philosophical but it offers another good example of the rich intersections between philosophy, psychedelics and clinical practice.

Michel Weber offers a fascinating chapter in which he challenges the onto-epistemic dominance of logic axioms. He contends that psychedelic experience potentiates a liberation from the legislature of axioms. In particular, Weber stipulates that this freedom includes the laws of identity, contradiction and the excluded-middle; thereby freeing logic and its associated structure of thought-building in philosophy and science to allow for innovative adventures in thinking. These chapters by Buchanan, Sopanen, Moen and Weber all demonstrate the manner in which psychedelic experiences offer the possibility of challenging and extending the suppositions of the foundations of how the world hangs together, through examining onto-epistemic axioms.

An interesting extension of these onto-epistemological questions, including those surrounding logic, may be that they problematise the relation between post-formal development and psychedelic experience. In this vein, the question of development and cognitive capacity is perhaps best articulated within various neo-Piagetian theories, particularly those espoused by Wilber and his account of post-conventional logics. It seems apparent that psychedelics frequently generate experiences that yield para-consistent logics (Priest & Tanaka, 1996), which are associated with higher order metacognitive views, as outlined by Brown and Elliott (2016). Yet, from a developmental perspective, it is unclear how these transient state experiences may be stabilised into developmental stages.

RELATING PSYCHEDELICS AND BUDDHISM

A number of chapters explore the potential intersection between eastern contemplative traditions and psychedelics, this is frequently done through the view of Buddhism as a general category. Jussi Jylkkä's aforementioned chapter explores the relationship between unitary psychedelic experiences and Zen Buddhism. He posits that the insight derived from non-dual experiences, such as those achieved through Buddhist mediative practice, may offer a means by which to navigate and understand psychedelic experience. At times, Western science may adopt an ahistorical fixation on new frontiers of discovery, which risks overlooking the offerings of long-standing systems of knowledge from other cultures. Thus, the inclusion of Buddhism in this chapter and the volume in general is welcomed as a remedy for the myopia of a psychedelic scientism.

Steve Odin continues to investigate the theme of the potential explanatory capabilities of Buddhism in relation to psychedelics; which he does through the exploration of cartographies of mind and consciousness, and their relationship to psychedelic phenomena. Odin draws on the Zen Buddhist framework presented by D. T. Suzuki, the

psychedelic research conducted by Stanislav Grof, and the ground-breaking work of Aldous Huxley in *The Doors of Perception* (2010). He contends that experiences of satori, as described in Zen traditions, map to the phenomena reported by participants in Grof's trials. Odin uses this contention to suggest that psychedelics have the capacity to advance our understanding of the capabilities of mind, suggesting that the insights generated from psychedelic use can be matched and paralleled with the insights derived from Buddhist mediative experiences.

According to Oden, Psychedelics and Zen practice present a tangible pathway which allows for access to these supra dimensions of mind and consciousness. These dimensions of mind may be accessed by connecting to or accessing an extended field of mind which lays present within all minds, but often only as unconscious possibility. While the use of D. T. Suzuki's work is understandable, given his connection to psychoanalysis and the Western philosophical tradition, it is important to note that perhaps Zen practice is not the best of the Buddhist traditions to achieve what Oden proposes – which is due to the absence of formalised completion practice within the tradition. Given the value of Oden's proposition, it may be advantageous to see Oden extend these ideas into a system such as Dzogchen which has a documented and tangible pathway to completion.

Finally, though not directly concerned with Buddhism, Peter Sjöstedt-Hughes addresses some comparable themes in attending to the phenomena of unitive psychedelic experiences. Sjöstedt-Hughes offers a means of sense making for experiences of enlightened unity with nature, as reported in both global mystical traditions and psychedelic experiences. He does this by establishing a framework that utilises a Spinozian metaphysics. Sjöstedt-Hughes extends this Spinozian frame by developing an inclusive account of pantheism, panpsychism, nature, and God itself.

Sjöstedt-Hughes then provides a phenomenal account of the unitive states generated by psychedelic substances, drawing comparison with the ontological aspects of 'Spinozism'. Sjöstedt-Hughes arrives at a Spinozan-Psychedelic symbiosis, a reciprocal means of understanding, according to which psychedelic states may be understood "through the Spinozan system, and the Spinozan system can be intuited through certain psychedelic states" (p. 213). Sjöstedt-Hughes continues to establish himself as one of the most important philosophers in psychedelics. In turning his mind to the philosophical problems posited by psychedelics, Sjöstedt-Hughes demonstrates a continued ability to develop an innovative means of thinking, which demonstrates his ability to think with key figures of the philosophical pantheon.

PSYCHEDELICS AND POLITICAL PRAXIS

One of the central issues which arises when considering the ethics of psychedelics is how ought various indigenous



traditions and epistemologies be handled within a Western framework? This question invokes the necessity for clear ethical philosophical thought. Which is to ask, can non-indigenous people, whether they be researchers, scholars, patients or psychonauts, rightly engage with psychedelics in a way that is culturally sensitised and appropriate?

A consideration of cultural context and the use of psychedelics in various settings necessitates a full conceptualisation of the role of psychedelics across a variety of cultures, spanning those of Western, Eastern, and indigenous peoples. There exists in the emerging dialogue around the issues of cultural factors and sensitivity, a risk of bifurcation. Psychedelic usage is by no means exclusive to non-Western cultures, yet within the current Western social milieu adopting overly simplistic views about the ownership of psychedelics and their culturally relative significance is problematic. This simplification often leads to accusations of either theft and appropriation of indigenous knowledge or the corresponding retaliatory gesture of dismissing such critical thought as 'woke nonsense'. The reality is that psychedelics are culturally specific in their practice and use, yet universal in their roles and functions across history and cultures. IN that they have been used consistently as sacraments for initiation, insight and healing.

Reflection upon the social, political, and cultural implications of psychedelics occurs in several chapters. This inquiry is instigated by Hauskeller, who draws upon the Frankfurt School and its central concepts of alienation, individuation and colonization, to examine the science and economy that is shaping the emergent psychedelic renaissance. She examines the ethical problematics present in the 'clinical appropriation of psychedelics'; this include the instrumentalization and appropriation of extraordinary personal experiences and indigenous knowledge practices for clinical and commercial purposes. Her concern is that rather than liberating us from the alienation and disconnection caused by capitalist structures of society, the assimilation of psychedelics into the 'medical-industrial complex' may continue to restrict individual freedoms (albeit in novel ways); and through cultural appropriation, allow large corporations to derive financial benefit from seeking to annex and restrict access to what has been freely and naturally available for millennia. The vital concern raised by Hauskeller is that in misconstruing and attributing the problems of society to ill individuals, we run the risk of the medicalisation and ringfencing of legitimate psychedelic use, which thereby constrains use to the clinical space. Reducing psychedelics to a medicine for ill individuals negates the potentiation of psychedelics to transform societies and cultures, as well as the minds of individuals within society that are not relegated to the category of sick.

The theme of psychedelic commodification is continued by Fernando Huesca Ramon who explores how capitalism possesses the capacity to commodify anything that attempts to escape its strictures. In this sense, psychedelic experience creates the prospect of freedom, yet anything that is free is exploitable within the market. Ramon draws out these tensions between freedom and capital working with thinkers

such as Hegel, Marx, Benjamin and Marcuse. Psychedelics can offer different ways of not only perceiving but also of reflecting upon inculcated values and forms of experience. As such, they may contribute to the necessary re-valuation required for an emancipation from the socio-economic status quo.

Kyle Buller, Joe Moore, and Lenny Gibson together provide an historical account of the troubled relationship between exceptional experience and the United States. They offer an examination of the conflict between psychedelics and the prevailing global power structures of the 20th century. This chapter explores the perception of psychedelics as problematic and socially disruptive, as evidenced by the banning of psychedelic substances in the 1970s. Buller et al. examine the potential for psychedelically induced exceptional experience to potentiate shifts in American culture, through facilitating a pathway for healthier and more connected communities.

The themes of critical inquiry, psychedelics and political praxis run throughout the text, demonstrating that the ethical and socio-political relations of human beings and the world, dictate the state of human possibilities. It is this state of possibility that is central to the psychedelic experience. If nothing else, psychedelics facilitate a radical alteration to one's sense of the possible.

PSYCHEDELIC ONTOLOGY AND PROCESS ONTOLOGY¹

Michael Halewood explores the sense of the possible as occasioned by psychedelics. He draws on Whitehead's process philosophy, with particular attention to the themes of potentiality and novelty. Halewood uses these themes to reconceive of the 'soul' as a process, rather than as a static substance. He suggests that psychedelics allow for the extension of Whitehead's propositions, offering novel ways of configuring our place in the world. It is exactly this reconfiguration of the world as process, rather than things, that would form the kind of metaphysical reorientation required for an integrated account of psychedelics. So too does Matthew Segall argue for a shift away from dualism and representationalism, as typified in Cartesian thought, and in so doing emphasizes the value of process philosophy and the notion of organic realism in seeking to reframe the psychedelic experience.

Given the predominance of Western materialism in psychedelic research and literature, inadequate attention has been given to the role of process thinking in understanding

¹Process ontology, or ontologies of becoming, are metaphysical systems that identify processes, change and relationship as the foundational elements of reality. Traditionally thinkers seen as having a process-oriented view include Nietzsche, Heidegger, James, Whitehead, and Merleau-Ponty. More contemporary thinkers include McGilchrist, in his works fusing philosophy and neuroscience, and Yunkaporta's work which demonstrates indigenous process thinking. These thinkers help to enrich our understanding of process and its foundational role in religion, philosophy and science.



the psychedelic experience. For this reason, we applaud the authors of this volume for offering a valuable inquiry into this subject. The dialogue around process and psychedelics requires greater attention and we affirm the need for an understanding of indigenous and non-European alternative ontologies and epistemologies, which have much to offer in developing our understanding of exceptional experience.

CONCLUSION

This work is diverse, eclectic and thought provoking. Not only does it offer important and valuable contributions, but it draws together the connections between psychedelics and philosophy of mind, and contemplative science and practice. The work also recognises the critical issues of social and political context in psychedelic use, including their social and political history.

The areas that would benefit from further elaboration within the volume pertain to matters of the clinical application of psychedelics. While the volume thematically addresses this topic, it at times seems to lack an internalised understanding of the motivations and relational dimensions of clinical practice. This allows ideologies of criticism to obscure the realities of clinical practice. This notwithstanding, overall the text offers a mode of inquiry in which psychedelics and exceptional experience can be philosophically understood. The text problematises philosophy and what is known. Thus, much of the text proposes the need for shifts in the ontological and epistemological foundations of life, thinking and healing. This work is timely, both constituting a critical movement in philosophy and also positing a re-evaluation of the role of psychedelics. The work constitutes a foundationally important contribution to philosophising about psychedelics and the ways in which they may influence the minds and lives of individuals and society for the better.

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