

Psychedelic's Anti-therapeutic Promise

Psychedelics, the new drugs of promise.

“Turn on, tune in, drop out.”
— Timothy Leary

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Therapy

Psychedelics are quickly becoming a new drug of promise, not for what psychedelics can do, but for what mental health practitioners want.

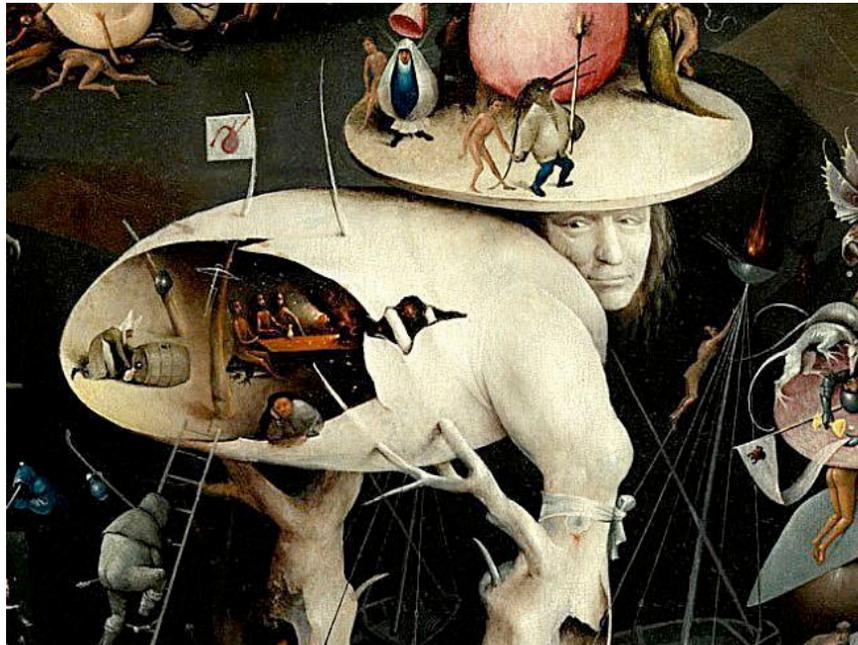
We don't know much about mental health. Most of what we know is based on symptoms. Mental health therapy is predicated on the assumption that there exists some state that's good for everyone. When you're mentally healthy it's presumed everyone is happy: you're happy, your family is happy, your government is happy, and all of the institutions are happy. This sounds absurd but it's pretty accurate. There are a lot of loose ends in this picture.

Psychedelics can alter your perception of reality, depending on what your perception of reality is. People who are experienced at navigating altered reality are less disrupted by psychedelics. I base this on my own experience, that of shamans, and other psychonauts. I can't speak for everyone or every substance, but experienced psychonauts seem less strongly affected and are more able to hold their center.

The people we call mentally or emotionally challenged are those who appear to be poorly grounded. That is, they are not secure in any reality. This may not be apparent to their friends and family, but to a counsellor or therapist it comes to light. Psychedelics disturb the balance, and for delicately balanced people this can be a challenge.

The central concept of mental health these days—and it changes with the times—is that mental health is a state of balance, and that the unhealthy have not found it. The tools of the mental health profession are largely chemical, intellectual, and behavioral. Outside of hypnotherapy, gestalt therapy, and psychedelics the tool of emotion is not widely used. That is to say, you're either argued, forced, or compromised into behaving normally. This can keep certain people from hurting themselves or others, but it isn't a solution.

What changes people is a change of heart, and that's not a chemical, intellectual, or behavioral change. For lack of a better word, psychedelics do what counsellors and psychologists can't do: change a person's heart. I'm omitting psychiatrists from this picture because they seem to have aligned themselves with pharmaceuticals and lost touch with reality.



Change of Heart

Psychedelics are attractive because they uncover emotion. This is a good thing for clients, but it's an area where counsellors and psychotherapists are weak. For the most part, psychotherapists are the wrong people to be leading clients into emotionally delicate territory, and we see this in the way psychologists are trained, which lacks emotional understanding. There are historical reasons for this, and you can see them all over the patriarchal world.

The most common mental health problems currently being addressed with psychedelics are depression, trauma, and addiction. It is the result of our confusion about these issues that we consider them separate. A deeper understanding of both depression and addiction reveals them both to be issues of the heart. Addiction is self-medication for depression, and depression is a prevailing sense of

worthlessness. These are reality problems.

Trauma is always depressing, and it's triggered by patterned perceptions and behaviors. There is good evidence to suggest that trauma has a structural element, having roots in memory and learned reflex. Trauma is certainly not intellectual. Its strong emotional threads lead back to one's perception of reality, or what one perceived at the time of the trauma.

You can't argue a person to a different reality. Reality is perceptual while intellect is conceptual. You can alert a person to misperceptions and misunderstandings. That can help a great deal in successfully organizing a person's thoughts, but you can't change the feelings associated with experience through the use of reason and argument. These people already have their reasons and arguments, and their conclusions depress them.

Psychedelics expand experience perceptually and associatively. You experience the world differently and you remember differently. You gain new sight and new insight, and this can change your emotional topography. Everything changes when your sight changes. Emotions that previously washed you down the drain can catapult you over obstacles and to new heights. But unlike euphorics, which pass like sugar, psychedelics can un-traumatize you.



If It Looks Good, It is Good

Psychotherapy is all about what makes you happy. But what if what makes you happy is not the root of the problem? What if alleviating marital discord is not really the issue, or if kicking your amphetamine addiction leaves you back where you started? Since therapy doesn't understand your problems in the first place, how will therapists know if the use of psychedelics solve them?

The traditional answer is science, or the somewhat warped version of science that pervades psychology. It's assumed that if enough people act happy for long enough, then the problem has been solved. This is the basis on which amphetamines are administered to children with ADD/ADHD: if enough parents and school administrators are happy, then the problem has been solved. It appears that a somewhat similar approach is being used to support psychedelics. The results will be different, in this case.

Psychedelics might work. It's plausible that addicts just don't have a clear picture of their human potential. A visceral trip through psychedelic purgatory might clear their vision. Alternatively, a chemically-induced rewiring of their brains might provide permanent relief. New patterns can be

learned through practice. You can train people to not be depressed using brainwave training, by the way, but few people talk about this because there's not enough profit in it. These are not intellectual skills, but they can be established with practice, nonetheless.

It's possible that psychedelics can offer a healing prescription for certain people with certain issues. It's likely that they would be more effective if they acted in conjunction with changes in one's environment, which means either changing the behavior or others, or changing those others with whom one associates.

Changing this infrastructure is the hard part of any mental health solution, and it can be done most effectively when the person who needs this changes also wants this change. If psychedelics are to help heal mental illness, then they're going to need to be taken not only by the person in distress, but by the other people who enforce the distressing container they inhabit. That's unlikely.



Debasing Psychedelics

Psychology is a business that's driven by money, not altruism or empathy. If you are a therapist, you may disagree, but you have no evidence for it. Unless you work for free, the existence of a commercial market is what makes your profession sustainable.

There has never been a shortage of altruism or empathy in the therapeutic profession. There is probably too much, as it's often a personal need for empathy that attracted practitioners in the first place. But these positive emotions have not revived the use of psychedelics. What's different now is money. The drive to present psychedelics as a new solution for old pathologies is profit motivated.

If not directed according to the profit motive, psychedelics could do much more. If they were under the control of users rather than therapists—as they have been during the illegal years—they would be used for what people want, not what therapists need.

People want various things. Certainly, some do want healing, and some want entertainment, but some also want liberation from the normality that psychology aims to restore. The only “bad trip” I ever had was in the presence of psychologists, and I feel that was because they did not contribute good energy to the setting. It will take a training to enable psychologists to use psychedelics therapeutically, but that won’t get them beyond the therapeutic model.

To see the full power of psychedelics one must be able to see the higher realities they unlock. These are most definitely not power or profit oriented, and they are not institutional, by any means. The power of psychedelics is to elevate people above the unhealthy visions of society. But many of these unhealthy visions are at the foundation of our institutions. This is anarchic and spiritual power. It destroys both the social container and its servant, the ego.

The full power of psychedelics is metamorphic, and that follows a blueprint that already exists within us. The only person capable of completing this journey is the psychonaut, and the only person capable of helping is someone who’s been there. The shamans have been there, and that’s why the shamans don’t attempt psychotherapy. Shamanic healing is not therapeutic healing, and psychedelic psychotherapy is not shamanic.

Psychedelics are at a splitting point where there is a choice is between spiritual evolution and subservience to authority. This is a familiar intersection. Psychologists think that psychedelics can be used to treat mental illness, but here’s the surprise: psychology is a mental illness too!

I support the renaissance in mind-altering drugs. They will help those people whose mental realities are stuck. Some of these people are labeled mentally ill, others are labeled psychologists, but most of these are just normal people.

I expect things will follow much the same course as before. That’s what generally happens. But this time, it looks like more people will be exposed to the new realities that our society needs. I hope they’ll face less punishment.



“Most things in the world are hype. Most things in the world are oversold and under-delivered. But, in my experience, sex, music, and psychedelics deliver. They are actually ‘better than advertised.’ ”

— Terrance McKenna

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