

Essay on Cranial Electrification and Empirical Clarification

by strannikov

Although decades have passed since I last tasted lysergic acid with diethylamide flavoring, I cannot fail to remember the tasting.

I sampled it only a few times, learning quickly that habitual use brought ruination of the conjured illusion. What finally put me off it entirely was not so much the provoked experience itself as the mischaracterization reported by others. (Obviously, not put off by the longstanding demonization of LSD or the villainy of its mischaracterization, I was challenged to investigate for myself.)

The echo of the clamor of the day, you may recall, was the persisting buzz from Leary, et al., about attainment of the cosmic and the transcendental that acid conferred, the mystic and the dread pantheistic. In the throes of it I was tempted to report and believe the same: but being in the throes was not the optimum position from which to launch analysis, no matter how much sobriety I carried into the experience. I soon learned to discount reports that LSD was itself capable of launching the well-dosed subject into the mystic.

I learned shortly later that also I could not endorse the views of trusted CIA analysts that LSD models schizophrenia, a public mischaracterization still sadly represented in dictionary entries provided by:

--Thorndike-Barnhart ("a hallucinogenic compound of lysergic acid that produces temporary symptoms of schizophrenia", a definition offered in 1963) and

--Merriam-Webster ("an organic compound . . . that induces psychotic symptoms similar to those of schizophrenia", an assurance offered as recently as 1991).

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I found reports of LSD's ability to generate hallucination not entirely reliable, either. My view that LSD does not necessarily induce hallucination consists of this weasly caveat: some effects of LSD can be construed innocently by some subjects as comprising actual hallucination: even a 200-microgram dose offers much opportunity for misconstrual, let us agree. On this provisional basis I do not without further qualification accept LSD's nominalization as "hallucinogen", in spite of another dictionary entry:

--American Heritage/Houghton Mifflin ("a hallucinogenic drug . . . derived from lysergic acid", "this drug taken as a hallucinogen", 1975).

(By point of comparison a toxic psychosis induced by amphetamine abuse does in fact model psychotic ideation and delusional and paranoid thought and hallucination in ways perhaps similar to what is found in diagnosed cases of schizophrenia: note how severely this limits the aesthetic appeal of toxic psychoses, however.)

("Psychedelic" is a fine name for LSD and its pharmacological associates.)

No, after a series of sedate intervening spells, I could not agree with any of the proffered notions that LSD models mysticism or schizophrenia, psychosis or hallucination. To my pedestrian and provincial mind, LSD does something else altogether.

For reasons yet obscure, for all my skill with living purely inside my skull, I remained grounded in the somatic: an unmerited triumph over idealism. My observations led me to think and to believe instead that the first or only thing that LSD recreates or models in the subject is something along the lines of a recapitulation of infantile perception.

Floods of perception overwhelming and stupefying thought itself, the vivid freshness supplied by every sense, transient synesthesia, the apparent abolition of time or the seeming collapse of temporality into a single moment or into moments of extended or distended duration, the indulgence of tactile examinations of convexities and concavities and textures--accompanied with an astonishing erasure

of subject-object distinctions and loss of depth perception: these similitudes are characteristic of the infantile mind reasonably fresh from the womb, they are patterns of infantile perception hungry for sensation, experience, and orientation.

Specifically with respect to the enduring purport of pharmacological mysticism: if you care to impute mystical quality or character to infantile perception or valorize infantile perspective with the crown of mysticism, go to: just don't neglect the intervening step. If the transient states offered by LSD suggest or comprise some of the attainments granted or imputed to the inspired mystic without recourse to Swiss pharmacology, so be it: but leaping over somatic reality with eager invocations of cosmic or idealistic speculation, simply because a temporary rewiring of the brain is wowing consciousness with startling synaptic leaps and arcs, is both premature and inexact. Any ascription of entheogenic properties to LSD is a function and illustration of volition, not any sound description of "mind" simply understood, unless we are persuaded by reductionist accounts of modern psychology that volition is nothing other than a function of mind or brain.

True, I misapprehended a few things but never considered that I actually hallucinated (it wasn't the ocean's fault it turned into an amoeba): but I was not always paying strict attention.

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