

Concordia Forum
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"Psychedelics and cultural conceptions of the self"
Massachusetts Hall

Present: Max, Jack O, Paige, Joe, Andrew, Brianna, Mike, Lauren,
Karen, Jack R, Nikki

Presiding: Mollie

Your correspondent: Lorenzo

7:15pm—Andrew remarks to someone nearby that Michael Pollen's work and the generally new cultural interest in psychedelics is actually just a rediscovering of what we already knew 50-60 years ago. Time is flat circle. Karen then interjects to ask about names, and after we all introduce ourselves, conversation begins.

Mollie begins by remarking that its strange/interesting that the scientists conducting these psychedelic trials are entirely uninterested in the metaphysical claims that their patients are making. Mike says, OK, but shouldn't WE try to evaluate these claims the patients are making? Truth matters!

Should we all do psychedelics? At this point it begins to become a bit clearer as to who has already tried psychedelics and who might be interested in trying them (and who is decidedly not interested in trying them).

Your correspondent points out that it seems to him the best way of maintaining/constructing the self, or the best way of bringing East and West together, is simply to inhabit the Western self and then take drugs.

We then get into discussing the question of whether or not taking psychedelics is "cheating." Can we drug ourselves into finding god? Yuck, says Brianna! We discuss meditation vs. drugs, trait vs. state change, and how psychedelics affect Buddhist Monks. We agree that DMT is a crazy drug.

Jack R brings up the Christian Mystics by way of the beloved Dallas Denery. He asks us what the goal is? Are we trying to transcend the self or are we simply trying to make the life within the self a bit better? Is our experience of brief enlightenment something to always seek to recover and reattain, or is it something which we can just use a tool to live a better life?

How does the culture we are in affect the "truth" we see in our trip? The failings of language are discussed.

Jack O wants to remind us that the way we think/talk about drugs is totally informed by the puritanical culture we are in. Andrew wants to know if this is the only reason we are reticent to take/believe in psychedelics. He invokes Tolstoy.

Paige says we need to build cognitive structures over time and Mike again reminds us that Truth matters (and exists) and that he doesn't think the claims people make on psychedelics are to be believed. Jack O says truth is relative and individual. Chomsky is then invoked and Karen says whoa, let's get back to the readings!

Brianna: "I want to humble myself, not stimulate myself, towards God.

8:10pm—we break for more Downton Abbey tea and Apple cake (which may or may not be laced with LSD)

We then turn to Confucianism and the other Eastern conceptions of selfhood. Andrew says he finds the relational construction of selfhood in Confucianism very compelling.

Max brings up the problem of even discussing the self-annihilation/nirvana/self-emptiness that is sought in various Eastern traditions because we must use the language of the self, the language of I, the language of desire, in discussing them but such language is antithetical to and indeed non-existent in the states that are trying to be reached.

Your correspondent brings up the question of freedom within various constructions of the self. Mollie says no, let's talk about happiness instead. What is it? Is it the end of life? Do certain conceptions of the self actually stop us from exercising our full range of human capabilities? There must be something more to life than merely the absence of suffering.

Jack O brings up the question of statecraft and conceptions of the self, and then we turn the discussion into a political theory class. The (false?) analogy between the soul and the city in the *Republic* is invoked. Some people become annoyed.

Karen brings us back to reality with a discussion of midlife crises and how the self must necessarily expand over time. (No one mentions it, but we seem to all be informed here by the wonderful Bertrand Russell quote in the Pollan reading where he describes the self changing overtime from narrow stream to horizonless sea).

Joe and Paige point out that the Confucianism may have been misrepresented by the author. However, Andrew again makes a defense of Confucianism by pointing out to us that social structures do not limit us but rather give us meaning—they don't weaken the self, they feed it.

Jack brings up the question of self-continuity, but we run out of time. To be discussed next time..

9:05pm—We adjourn for Moderation. Mike is the only professor to join the students (shame on the rest of you!). A better turnout is expected next time.