

tained by scientists, and that is why I urge them to read these two books. Those who do so will minimally see the need for more investigations of near-death experiences.

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**Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered** by Lester Grinspoon and James B. Bakalar. New York: The Lindesmith Center, 1997 (originally published 1979). 385 pp. ISBN 0-9641568-5-7.

When this book was written in 1979, the intense debate and sensational rhetoric about psychedelic drugs was still recent memory. The time was surely ripe for a book such as *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered*, which struck a welcome note of sobriety after a decade or more of polemics.

*Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered* is a comprehensive survey of all aspects of the psychedelic question. All its subject matter is accessible to the lay reader, encompassing history, sociology, pharmacology, subjective and medical effects, and therapeutic use of psychedelic plants and synthetic drugs.

Although the scope of this book is vast, its concise writing style, careful organization, and judicious editing make it an eminently accessible survey of the field—circa 1977. As a reprint and not a genuine new edition, some of the book is significantly dated. The pharmacological information it provides is easily updated for those so inclined and generally is consistent with contemporary knowledge. More serious is the sociological datedness. This book was written before the Reagan era, before the War on (some) Drugs and the concomitant mushrooming of the prisons and erosion of civil liberties, before the explosion of the rave scene. Psychedelic drugs occupy a different niche in society than they did in the 1970s. To understand the cultural significance of these substances in the 1990s, one will have to look elsewhere.

*Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered* scrupulously maintains at least a superficial objectivity throughout. The authors themselves recognize that impartiality is a problematic goal, as virtually all the language used in the psychedelic debate has become freighted with associations that embody the views of one side or another. Even the label “psychedelic”—meaning “soul manifesting”—is controversial. Advocates of psychedelic drugs obviously prefer it to “psychotomimetic” (simulating psychosis), an earlier term with less-than-benign connotations.

The authors mitigate this difficulty through consistently high standards of scientific integrity. They are not afraid to cite studies that go against the general direction of their conclusions, and they ruthlessly criticize flaws in stud-

ies in their favor. If anything, they tend to be overcautious, offering only qualified conclusions when their evidence seems overwhelming. Such intellectual probity lends credibility to their reportage and conclusions, as do their careful citations and impeccable documentation. The bibliography can only be described as “compendious”; especially useful is the separate annotated bibliography of several hundred titles, which, although dated, would be an invaluable resource for those pursuing a deeper knowledge of the field.

Despite the scrupulous impartiality of the authors in attempting to present only the facts, one sometimes suspects that they are concealing their true opinions. They go to great lengths to make the book palatable to a skeptical audience (according to the jacket cover, even Carl Sagan approved). The rigor of its arguments and its careful documentation make the book ideal for the open-minded scientist with little understanding of the field. True believers will be disappointed, however, for *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered* assiduously avoids committing to any paradigm-shattering conclusions. For example, the work of Stanislav Grof is cited extensively, but even though Grof (who started his career as an orthodox psychiatrist) argues persuasively that the evidence of psychedelic psychotherapy demands a radical rethinking of the present scientific worldview, Grinspoon and Bakalar shy away from such conclusions. They prefer to sit on the fence with assertions such as, “When someone says that under LSD he has relived a past life as an ancient Egyptian embalmer and produces an accurate formula for constructing a mummy (Grof, 1975, p. 170), he has probably read the formula somewhere, even if he cannot remember doing so.” Yet one detects an underlying sympathy for the views of Grof and countless others who believe that the psychedelic experience cannot be subsumed under the rubric of conventional science.

They are less equivocal about advocating a resumption in psychedelic research and therapy. Thousands of studies were published in the 1950s and 1960s, many in mainstream scientific journals, only to disappear entirely by the 1980s. Today, when a handful of fledgling ibogaine (a powerful psychedelic alkaloid derived from the African shrub *Tabernaemontana iboga*) and LSD studies are fighting for survival, their arguments could well prove useful to advocates of these studies. They remain current, if only because virtually no new research has been conducted since the book was published. If the authors are right, then the politically impelled cessation of psychedelic research was profoundly unscientific.

Although the overall tone of the book is scholarly and reserved, the authors introduce anecdotes and extended quotations that convey something of the power and wonder of the psychedelic experience. These users’ stories animate an extremely sophisticated discussion of the subjective effects of psychedelics. Withholding judgment about the more mystical psychedelic revelations, they persuasively argue that “These phenomena deserve to be placed in a theoretical framework rather than dismissed with casual psychiatric epithets and ad-hoc explainings-away on the one hand or affirmed as self-evident reve-

lations of the highest truth on the other” (p. 153). Any reader who conceives of LSD as a “hallucinogen” will find their old preconceptions untenable.

For 25 years now, any hint of tolerance or advocacy for psychedelic drugs has been anathema to established political and public opinion. Therefore, in spite of the authors’ carefully cultivated objectivity and balance, it is unlikely their work will have any greater impact on policy than it did in 1979. For most of the ideological spectrum, psychedelics are a closed issue. This is unfair. Today, even more than in 1979, aspects of the psychedelic experience are cropping up in fields as diverse as ufology, holistic medicine, death and reincarnation studies, transpersonal psychology, and anomalies research, demanding that we do as the book’s title suggests—reconsider psychedelics.

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**The Meaning of Consciousness** by Andrew Lohrey. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1997. 301 pp. ISBN 0-472-10821-2.

To be fair to the author, I may not be the right critic to provide an unbiased review of his book. I am, to put my cards on the table, an unreconstructed Cartesian dualist when it comes to the mind–brain problem and a follower of Popper and Eccles, who come in for criticism in this book. The author, on the other hand, as Katherine Hayles makes clear in her foreword, “develops a perspective radically different from a presumed separation between subject and object. Instead of seeing a world ‘out there’ separate from an observer, Lohry emphasizes the mutual construction of world, subject and discourse” (p. xii). And our author, in his own introduction, confirms what she says when he writes: “a science of consciousness should rely, not on reason or empiricism and their attendant conventions, which asks how consciousness arises from matter, but on a perspective paradigm which reverses the question to ask how matter arises from consciousness” (p. 2). Later, he adds that his book both develops and works from a new, non-rationalist and non-materialist framework or paradigm which challenges much in the scientific and Cartesian tradition of analysis. This paradigm, he points out, owes more to the new discipline of discourse analysis.

Having thus laid his cards on the table, the author presents a glossary so that we should be in no doubt as to exactly how he is using the 22 key words or phrases that will crop up in the text. The book is scholarly, and the author knows the literature and is familiar with the controversies it has generated. He has read his Sheldrake, although Sheldrake is taken to task for “his lack of a definition of and a lack of structural content for his notions of habit and morphic resonance.”