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The Ethical Import of Entheogens

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

THE ETHICAL IMPORT OF ENTHEOGENS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

by

Joshua Falcon

2017

To: Dean John F. Stack
Steven J. Green School of International and Public Affairs

This thesis, written by Joshua Falcon, and entitled The Ethical Import of Entheogens, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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Florida International University, 2017

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS
THE ETHICAL IMPORT OF ENTHEOGENS

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Professor Steven M. Vose, Major Professor

The term entheogen refers to drugs—including the artificial substances and active principles drawn from them—which are known to produce ecstasy and have been used traditionally in certain religious and shamanic contexts. The entheogenic experiences provoked by entheogens are described by users in myriad ways, including in spiritual, religious, philosophical, and secular contexts. Entheogenic experiences have shown that they can create opportunities for individuals to generate meaning, including novel philosophical insights, which users claim to gain by way of experience. As such, entheogenic experiences exhibit the ability to influence a change in a user's fundamental philosophical commitments, or live options, including their ethical dispositions. Given that these new live options are rooted in experience, their veracity gains further credence for users than those commitments they have come to hold by way of abstraction. By philosophically investigating the phenomenology of entheogenic experiences, this work argues that entheogens have ethical import.

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Introduction

This investigation focuses on the phenomenology of entheogenic experiences had by persons living within the United States and the ethical implications which can be drawn thereof. In attempting to capture the ethos of this wide and variegated group of users who engage in consuming entheogens, some scholars have coined designations such as “Entheogenic esotericism” (Hanegraaff 2013), “Psychonaut religion” (Monteith 2016), and Neoshamanism. While it proves difficult to apply any homogenizing classification to such a diverse group of persons, what these individuals do share is their use of entheogenic substances for positively transformative meaning-making purposes. Although the term “entheogen” was created to denote drugs that have both traditional and contemporary histories of usage as ecstatic inebriants (Ott 1993, 15), this investigation into the ethical import of entheogens will nevertheless incorporate several source materials which have used a wide range of terms to describe the nature of these entheogenic experiences, including “psychedelic,” “mystical,” and “spiritual,” to name a few.

The purpose for not prescribing any of the aforementioned terms to the entheogenic experiences in this study is to avoid pigeonholing users’ entheogenic experiences, as some of the persons who engage in the ceremonial consumption of entheogens do not necessarily agree with the religious or spiritual connotations associated with their use, and may prefer to use the term psychedelic instead. Another reason for not attributing these terms to entheogen users is because some of the entheogen users I have interviewed consider themselves to be ideological anarchists in a sense, and have a kneejerk reaction to rigid structures or institutional hierarchies that are commonplace among organized traditions. Given these reasons, it seems unhelpful to designate any label to them, other than a loosely-descriptive term that I will call “entheogenic culture,” which simply refers to those who engage in entheogenic practices.

This work on entheogenic experiences as a standalone phenomenon will in part serve as a critique of both modern religious studies and spirituality discourses which have thus far failed to

do justice to these types of experiences. Entheogenic experiences are significantly meaningful for those who have them, and thus constitute primary and valid forms of human experience that should not to be reduced to a language which trivializes them. By collapsing entheogenic experiences under the headings of either spirituality or religion, they are essentially distorted to suit the logic of the commodity. Contrary to common opinion, the terms religion and spiritual, in all their variations, cannot be used as a means of objectifying or qualifying entheogenic experiences; rather, they can only be used as descriptive terms which inherently carry with them some level of interpretation. In other words, “to speak of the ‘religious perspective’ is, by implication, to speak of one perspective among others” (Geertz 1993, 110), and entheogenic experiences, like religious experiences, constitute unique modes of apprehension.

This is because it is impossible to address what qualifies as an “authentic” religious or spiritual experience in the first place, given that religious experiences themselves are irreducible to some essential elements without distorting unique individual experiences in some way. Furthermore, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1963) has pointed out, the terms “religion” and “religious”—and I would argue, “spiritual”—are inherently limited since they are unable to express what they intend to signify. Said another way, the terms religion and spiritual cannot capture the vastness of what they set out to describe since what they refer to is more than a phenomenon, feeling, or institution. Still further, these categories are often either imposed by an outer authority unto a minority, or used by persons as means of speaking about their experiences in a way that mainstream cultural discourse has sanctioned, which may not do justice to the experiences or practices themselves.

Since the use of certain drugs are recognized by those who use them as types of self-medication in many cases, the study of those who engage in the consumption of entheogenic substances “belongs to anthropology and religion, rather than to pharmacology and medicine...” (Szasz 1973, xvii). The use of entheogens and the practices associated with them are what

Thomas Szasz (1973) would call “ceremonial chemistries” since they involve the both cultural and personal circumstances for either using or avoiding certain types of drugs. Furthermore, because entheogenic substances have been historically demonized due to their clash with Western ideologies and prejudices, those who have partaken in these entheogenic rituals may have had to graft their experiences onto the religious frameworks which were acceptable at that time. Szasz also argues that to make life meaningful and worth living, people have always depended upon religious traditions; however, an integral part of the practices within these religious traditions is that they have always depended upon the use of certain substances (xvi).

Insofar as entheogenic experiences are byproducts of ceremonial chemistries, the study of their phenomenology and the impact they have on users in terms of ethics warrant the grounds for this investigation. Also, it seems that entheogenic experiences become categorized under “religious” and “mystical” headings—and are often understood in these terms—given that modernity has rendered a wide range of experiential phenomena to these limiting categories. Since the entheogenic ceremonial chemistries partaken in by users constitute their own type of meaning-making practice, they can still be studied under the heading of Religious Studies while not being delimited to terms which places them in a specific genre, unless otherwise specified by the users or researchers themselves. Given that historical writings have often ascribed different phenomena to these restrictive categories, it is unhelpful to continue examining entheogenic experiences in solely these terms.

While entheogenic experiences need not be subsumed under “spirituality” discourse, and despite the refusal to categorize these experiences as “religious,” this study on entheogenic experiences still belongs within the discipline of Religious Studies since entheogenic practices and experiences are meaningfully regenerative, ceremonial, and often invoke quasi-religious terminology and connotations. Further, the dominant currents which run through the secular realm all too often marginalize religious, spiritual, and mystical experiences, and in separating

entheogenic experiences from these headings, they can be understood as *sui generis* experiences. Understood as experiences of their own kind, entheogenic experiences can then be studied using mystical, religious, and spiritual descriptions or frameworks, but have a clear distinction insofar as these experiences involve physiological changes which are brought about through the consumption of an ecstasy-producing substance.

Another reason that entheogenic experiences should be analyzed from the scope of Religious Studies is because if we understand religion to be meaning-making process (Bauman 2014, 22), we can then expand the boundaries of Religious Studies to include entheogenic experiences. Bauman (2014) argues that meaning-making practices—including religions—hold a central place in the formation of our identities, and that these identities arise or emerge in a continual state of becoming with other planetary bodies (84). From this planetary perspective, Bauman maintains, religion and science imply one another (7); the latter generates knowledge by way of deconstruction, while the former processes this knowledge into meaning (9). The way we make meaning will then materialize itself in the world around us (108), thus “humans make meaning and are made by this meaning” (22).

If meaning-making practices hold a central place in the formation of our identities, and entheogenic experiences are meaning-making practices, then it is vital to study entheogen users and their experiences to understand how these individuals identify themselves. This line of inquiry seems suited for the discipline of Religious Studies since it involves how a group of users creates their identities by way of certain meaning-making practices, which, in this case, involves the consumption of entheogenic substances. Furthermore, if the meanings made from entheogenic experiences have real effects that can be seen in the world—as Bauman holds—then it seems to lend further credence to warrant the grounds for investigating how users make meaning of their entheogenic experiences, especially in terms of their ethical implications.

As a final note, some scholars have argued that religion should not be used as a noun or adjective, but instead as an adverb, to describe what people *do* (Asad 1993). I contend that although the terms “entheogenic experiences” or “ceremonial chemistries” as standalone meaning-making phenomena only partially capture what constitutes an *entheogenic life*, they still aptly apprehend what type of practices entheogen users engage in to make meaning. In short, my aim for this project is to argue that entheogenic experiences reliably provide those who have them with phenomenological content that can regenerate their foundational philosophical commitments, including metaphysical and ontological insights, which can lead to new ethical commitments. As a consequence of this transformation, or shift in meaning, I argue that entheogenic experiences exhibit the potential to alter a person’s ethical dispositions. By philosophically investigating the phenomenology of entheogenic experiences, I will argue that: (1) Entheogenic experiences can create making-making spaces within which (2) meaning can be regenerated and (3) positive transformations can occur; (4) these new meanings can potentially create new live options for a person, (5) including options which have ethical import.

Research Methods

The entheogenic experiences I have chosen to examine here have undoubtedly delimited the scope of this investigation to those experiences which have been reported by the entheogen users themselves as being positively transformative in some way. The entheogenic reports that I have selected to incorporate into this work have intentionally focused on those entheogenic experiences which I believe resulted in ethical import. What this means is that I have selected instances where users describe their experiences in a way which they believe enhanced their sense of empathy, or instances where users had a profound experience of interconnectedness with others, the environment, the universe, or even God. These are reports often similar in phenomenological content to those described by Stanislav Grof as *transpersonal* (Grof 1993, 83)

or by Arthur Deikman as a conscious state that can be called nature-mysticism, where a fusion between self and environment takes place that is both perceptual and conceptual (Weithaus 1996, 105). Since the content and variables in any given entheogenic experience are virtually incalculable, I have chosen to focus only on these experiences since I believe these are the entheogenic experiences which are the most fecund in terms of ethical transformation.

My first source of data is comprised of the academic research that has been published on both psychedelics and entheogens, which has allowed me to contextualize what entheogens are, and how they have been used and written about, including both the stigmas and benefits that they concomitantly bring to this investigation. During my research, I only came across two brief works which specifically address the relationship between entheogens and values, and these perspectives are summarized in Chapter 1. My second and third means of acquiring data have been ethnographic in nature, as I have conducted in-person interviews and gathered information from “trip reports” posted on online forums and databases. By using in-person interviews and self-written reports to complement the academic perspectives compiled here, the aim is to use the ethnographic data to fill in the qualitative lacunae which could not be dealt with otherwise. The purpose of this ethnographic fieldwork was to gain a sense of: (1) the range and diversity of persons who use entheogenic substances; (2) the phenomenological details of the psychedelic experiences; and (3) how these experiences have impacted their lives in terms of ethical changes.

The motive behind focusing on the phenomenological content of these experiences is because the studies which have been conducted on entheogens for medicinal purposes typically marginalize the phenomenology of the experiences, and instead focus on their quantifiable results. It seems that the positive outcomes which result by way of these experiences are a direct result of the phenomenological content of the experiences themselves, and this warrants an investigation into just what is happening during entheogenic experiences that makes them so meaningful, transformative, and profound. By studying entheogenic experiences and their

implications from the domain of Religious Studies, this investigation and others like it can begin to reshape the manner in which the phenomenology of religion is spoken about, and thus allow for a more inclusive study of religion and other meaning making practices.

My second source of data consists of in-person interviews I conducted throughout my research period. These reports (R21-30) were gathered without promoting or advertising anything, and came about naturally by way of everyday conversations about my research. After hearing about my research interests, each of these participants felt comfortable enough to tell me about their entheogenic experiences, which I proceeded to record and present here. These interviewees consist of distinguished faculty members, graduate students, undergraduates, as well as others whom I had met through university-related events.

There are two websites that comprise my final source of information for this study. One of these is the online database, Shroomery (shroomery.org), which I used to draw data from regarding entheogenic experience reports. As an online community, shroomery is entirely self-sufficient and has active moderators and site veterans which support the overall workings of the website. The site's catchphrase, "Magic Mushrooms Demystified," aptly captures its prismatic nature; as an online space, it occupies a specialized niche in providing these culturally dissident personalities a likeminded environment in which to flourish. Part of Shroomery's mission is to spread informed knowledge about magic mushrooms so that "people can make informed decisions about what they put in their bodies," and the site offers forums with links to mushroom preparation, cultivation, experiences—basically anything mushroom related (Shroomery).

The other online source from which I acquired entheogenic experience reports was Erowid (erowid.org). Founded in 1995, Erowid is arguably the largest and most reliable non-profit educational resource for information about psychoactive drugs, harm reduction, and other related topics. Upon entering the "vaults" of erowid, the seemingly infinite complexity of the website becomes immediately evident, with hundreds of links that connect to other links in what

seems like every conceivable topic related to drugs. I have drawn many of the entheogenic experience reports used in this investigation from the “Erowid Experience Vaults,” which have supplied me with invaluable ethnographic data about the types of entheogen users, the contexts in which they use entheogens, and how the phenomenological and processing stages are described by them.

In several of the entheogenic experience reports used in this study, important details about the user such as their age during the experience, or their religious upbringing were not always provided by the participants, and therefore are not given in all of the reports used in this investigation. In 19 of the 30 reports where this information was provided, the calculated average age of participants at the time of their experience was approximately 30 years old, with the youngest participant being 18-years-old, and the oldest participant being 60-years-old. Of the 30 participants, 23 identified as male, and 7 identified as female, equating to approximately 23% female participants and 77% male participants. Of the reports where dates were provided by the users, the oldest report is from 2001, while the most recent reports were from 2016.

Chapter Outline

In the ensuing chapter (Chapter 1), I begin with a brief overview of the history of psychedelics, focusing particularly on their history within the United States. After providing a brief note on the human relationship to drugs, I then summarize and analyze several perspectives which have claimed that there exists Western biases against entheogens and entheogen users. Following this section, I proceed to provide discourses which show how the classic psychedelics have been used in ceremonial contexts. Moving on from their ceremonial usage, I highlight some aspects of the early research conducted on the classic psychedelics, including how these initial investigations led to the widespread non-native use of these substances. After reviewing some of the features of the early research conducted on psychedelics, I move on to show how several thinkers during the

mid-nineteenth century made links between psychedelic, religious, and mystical experiences based on the similarities between their phenomenology and transformative effects as described by those who have had them. In the next section, I present several sources of scientific literature which have recently been published on the therapeutic potential of psychedelics—a movement which has been referred to as the “Psychedelic Renaissance.” I end this chapter by presenting some of the contemporary scholarship which has been written on the relationship between entheogens and ethics.

The next chapter (Chapter 2) will deliver details on the theoretical frameworks I have used to help me describe and analyze both the phenomenological and processing afterward stages of entheogenic experiences. In terms of the phenomenology of entheogenic experiences, I use William James’ (1902) categories of mysticism, as well as Ralph Metzner’s (2010) categories of transformation, in helping to describe and categorize certain dominant features which recur in entheogenic experiences. I also use James’ commentaries on religious conversion and contrast them with entheogenic experiences given the parallels which arise in the aftereffects of both entheogenic experiences and what James refers to as experiences of “conversion.”

Another important theoretical consideration I draw from is Victor Frankl’s (1946) monumental work, *Man’s Search for Meaning*. Frankl argues that meaning is the fundamental driving force which motivates human action, and also claims that between any external circumstance and one’s reaction to that circumstance, a space exists in which one can create new meaning. I use this idea of a “meaning-making space” and apply it to what I believe is happening during entheogenic experiences; namely, that entheogens can cultivate a space in which new meaning can be made that can then influence one’s notions on how one ought to act in the world.

Chapter 3 will provide the accounts of entheogenic experiences that I have gathered from both in-person interviews and online databases. The entheogenic experiences provided in this chapter are solely based on those which seem to have the most poignant ethical import. This

chapter unfolds by first explaining that entheogenic substances involve a complex admixture of elements which makes them difficult to predict or categorize. After explaining the various elements which can influence an entheogenic experience, I give the 30 phenomenological accounts—20 drawn from online, and 10 from in-person—while emphasizing excerpts which I believe have the most ethical import.

In the final chapter (Chapter 4), I argue that, based on the phenomenological content of the data reported by users of their entheogenic experiences, new philosophical commitments arise for those who have had these experiences. This chapter will argue that entheogenic experiences have catalyzed new “live options” (James’ term) for these individuals, ultimately leading to new or regenerated ethical dispositions that are based on a notion of interconnectedness. I use several theoretical frameworks to make this case (see Chapter 2), and after concluding my argument, I supply three ethical theories which I feel entheogen users may feel drawn to given the nature of their entheogenic experiences and the ethical insights they gained as a result.

Important Terminology

Throughout this work, several terms will be referred to frequently, and in the subsequent section I shall provide elucidations on what these terms will stand for in this investigation. Given that many of these terms are subject to various interpretations, and because they inevitably allow for several angles of vision to be read into them, I will provide clarifications as to how I will employ these terms in the present work. For each of the terms presented here, the elucidations I provide will be how I have chosen to interpret each of these terms, and shall serve as a reference for the reader to understand exactly what I mean when I use them.

Psychedelic

“Psychedelic” refers to a special group of psychoactive substances—most of which are derived from plants and fungi—which cause changes in consciousness (Rätsch 2005, 9) or brain

chemistry and which also affect behavior, perception, and mood. In pharmacological literature, psychedelics are classified under the umbrella term “hallucinogens.” Etymologically, the term psychedelic seems innocuous, denoting “mind manifesting” (Smith 2007, xvi). However, the counterculture movements of the mid-twentieth century in the United States inadvertently ended up casting a negative light on these substances and those who used them, ultimately leading to the federal government’s Schedule 1 classification of psychedelic substances. The drugs listed under the Schedule 1 classification are drugs that the government considers to be highly addictive and which have no known use for medicinal purposes. This designation has by and large shaped the perception of psychedelic substances for several decades up to the present day.

Although psychedelic substances are classified as “hallucinogens,” this group of psychoactive compounds comes in such a vast variety that it proves difficult to find a single term that can adequately demarcate them. Psychedelic substances are characterized in ethnopharmacological literature by their ability to “produce deep changes in the sphere of experience, in perception of reality, in space and time, and in consciousness of self” (Schultes, Hoffman and Rätsch 1998, 14). For the purposes of limiting the scope of this inquiry, I will be focusing on a specific group of psychedelic substances known as the *classic* psychedelics, which include lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), psilocybin, mescaline, and dimethyltryptamine (DMT). Since psychedelic substances have largely been correlated with recreational drug use and hedonistic tendencies, many researchers have decided to create a new term, “entheogen,” to refer to psychedelics in a way that they believe better reflects their value as ecstasy-producing, transformative, and meaningfully regenerative substances.

Entheogen

The term “entheogen” was created by a team of scholars including Jonathan Ott, Carl A. Ruck, and Gordon R. Wasson—all of whom had researched and experienced psychedelics themselves first-hand—to stand as a neologism for the term psychedelic. It refers to drugs which are known

to produce ecstasy and have been used traditionally in certain religious and shamanic contexts. Both the artificial substances and active principles which are drawn from these entheogenic drugs and used outside of these known cultural contexts are also classified as entheogens given their ability to produce ecstatic experiences (see below). The impetus behind the creation of the term entheogen was multivalent: first, those who advocated the use of psychedelics felt the need to delineate it from the aforementioned associations made between recreational use and abuse of psychedelics; second, these same scholars realized that many psychedelic substances actually had a history of usage as shamanic inebriants; and third, the term psychedelic had other pejorative connotations that scholars wanted to step away from, such as “hallucination” and “psychosis” (Ott 1993, 15).

The etymology of the term entheogen renders its English translation to be read as “God-generating,” however, some scholars have suggested other renderings, such as “God-enabling” (Smith 2007, xvii) or “evoking the divine within” (Rätsch 2005, 10). According to Huston Smith and countless others, entheogens are “virtually nonaddictive drugs that seem to harbor spiritual potentials” (Smith 2007, xv). For the purposes of this investigation, I will be using the terms entheogen and entheogenic interchangeably with psychedelic throughout this work. While entheogen, by definition, has quasi-religious connotations, I still use the term psychedelic as a substitute depending on the historical context. This is because those who have preferred to use the term psychedelic over entheogen still recognize psychedelics for their ability to provoke ecstatic experiences—in a non-religious sense—as well as for the transformative potentials they seem to have on users.

Ecstasy/Ecstatic Experience

The terms “ecstasy” and “ecstatic experience,” according to the scholars who coined the term entheogen, stand for “an ineffable, spiritual state of grace, in which the universe is experienced more as energy than as matter” and a “spiritual, non-materialistic state of being” (Ott 1992, 59).

Ott (1992) claims that entheogenic substances essentially confer the experience of ecstasy, and that ecstatic experiences are not properly understood in the West since they have been historically eradicated by cultures—including religions such as Christianity—which maintained a sharp divide between humans and the rest of nature (60).

Ceremonial

“Ceremonial” is a term borrowed from Thomas Szasz, who defines the term as meaning, “...action, behavior, or conduct governed by prescribed rules, usually of a traditional sort...synonyms of ceremonial are conventional, religious, ritual, and symbolic; and its antonyms are personal, scientific, technical, and idiosyncratic” (Szasz 1974, 31). While it can be argued that the use of entheogens can also be individualistic and personal endeavors, they nevertheless often entail a preparation of some sort that the user engages in to enhance the experience. Some examples of the techniques which might be used in conjunction with the consumption of entheogens as a means of enhancing or facilitating the experience include: creating a safe space, carefully selecting music, chanting, incense, or other elements that contribute to making the entheogenic occasion ceremonial.

Psychonaut

“Psychonaut” is a term which has been embraced by both psychedelic thinkers and members of entheogenic culture to describe those who use entheogens as a means of venturing into the psyche. Psychonauts are “psychic voyagers” (Ott 1993, 17); they are those who travel the inner cosmos, seeking self-knowledge or other forms of esoteric experience. It is a term that is not meant to be definitive but rather open-ended, used to refer loosely to those who use entheogenic substances in order attain a desired experience that can be characterized in several ways, but most often in terms of transcendent, mystical, religious, or sacred. Ernst Jünger, a trained entomologist, is attributed with being the first to use this term in attempting to explain drug experiences in a way that was analogous to physical exploration (Jünger 1970). The implications this line of

thinking meant that the “trips” one takes inwardly should be considered at least as valuable as those which occur outwardly in the “external world.” It can be argued that the value of these experiences may be seen as simply a form of entertainment, such as when one takes a vacation; however, the reports of these experiences seem to have much deeper and personal implications in terms of how a person creates meaning in their life, especially with regard to things that seem to have a significant impact on how they live their lives.

Meaningfully Regenerative

“Meaningfully regenerative” is a phrase that I will often use when speaking of entheogenic experiences. Although it may be argued that everyday ordinary experiences can be meaningfully regenerative in some sense, what I refer to when I employ this term is an experience that can lead to *transformation*, i.e. “a radical restructuring of the entire psyche” (Metzner 2004, 17). Transformation in this regard simply means that a significant shift in meaning has occurred because of the experience. This meaning is partially determined by a person’s *set* (see Chapter 3), and will therefore likely reflect content that is significant to that person’s own life. Entheogenic experiences themselves are “meaningfully regenerative” in this sense since they create the conditions for new philosophical commitments to take root. The philosophical commitments I refer to are those which makeup a given person’s worldview, including their metaphysical, epistemological, ontological, and ethical dispositions, or simply, how they orient themselves to the world. For this investigation, I will be focusing on ethics, however, metaphysical and ontological insights—as we shall see—can also give way to new ethical commitments.

Philosophy, Worldview, and Religion

For the present investigation, the terms “philosophy,” “worldview,” and “religion” will be used synonymously, given that each of these terms refers to the basic understandings that a person brings with them to experience and which shapes the way they orient themselves to the world. While acknowledging that each of these terms is inherently limiting, what I refer to when I

employ these terms is the basic assumptions which lie at the core of any given individual; this includes their metaphysical, epistemological, ontological, and ethical dispositions, or the “mythos” of the culture in which they willingly operate when attempting to make sense of themselves and the world. Throughout this work, when I employ these terms or those related to them, such as philosophical or religious, I do not refer to the disciplines of philosophy or religion, nor do I refer to how these terms are used in practice. What I am referring to is simply the aforementioned assumptions that shape a person’s orientation to themselves, others, and the world.

Religious and Mystical Experiences

Regarding the phrases “religious experience” and “mystical experience,” each suggests both a phenomenological aspect (the content of the experience itself) and a processing stage thereafter, the latter of which involves a process of rendering into language, rationalization, and meaning-making. Given these circumstances, I must differentiate between what I mean by both the phenomenological and processing stages.

In first addressing the phenomenological aspect, this stage of “religious” and “mystical” experiences is not something that can be defined adequately by these terms without also sealing them off from fertile inquiry. Given the vastness of what these terms are supposed to convey, along with the inherent limitations these terms carry with them, it is ultimately unproductive to essentialize these experiences by employing either of these terms as qualifiers. Since there is no point from which one can objectively judge whether an experience qualifies as religious or mystical, it leaves us no choice but to conclude that religious and mystical experiences are simply religious or mystical if the person who had the experience claims it to be so.

Despite these difficulties, the criterion I choose to use to delimit the phenomenological aspect of the religious and mystical experiences cited throughout this work is their apparent ability to catalyze meaningfully regenerative spaces. If some new meaning is made by users

thereafter, the experiences can be said to be *positively transformative* for those individuals; “positively transformative” here refers to a shift in some aspect of their basic philosophy or worldview that they feel has been useful or significant to them in their lives. As a result of these transformative entheogenic experiences, many users seem to gain new ethical insights which can lead to regenerated ethical dispositions and commitments.

In many cases (see Chapter 1), mystical experiences have been defined by scholars and researchers through certain typologies of mysticism which have categorized some of the recurring features that seem to be characteristic of mystical experiences. In these particular instances, mystical experiences will be defined within the parameters of these studies; however, I wish to make it clear that I believe mystical experiences are one only way of describing entheogenic experiences, or one type of experience induced by entheogens, but not that entheogenic experiences are mystical experiences.

Entheogenic Experience

“Entheogenic experiences,” like religious and mystical experiences, also have phenomenological and processing phases. While many parallels have been drawn between the phenomenological and processing stages of mystical and entheogenic experiences given certain dominant characteristics shared by both (Stace 1960), each of these experiences is still inimitable given the complexity of the variables involved in any experience (see Chapter 3). Throughout this inquiry, I will use the term “entheogenic experience” to describe an experience that is both meaningfully regenerative, positively transformative, and drug-induced.

In this thesis, I will argue that entheogenic experiences create spaces in which meaning can be generated, and that the phenomenological and processing phases of entheogenic experiences provide ample evidence to support this postulation. Furthermore, these meaningfully regenerative entheogenic spaces can later be rationalized or interpreted in a number of ways, including in religious, mystical, or scientific terms. It is vitally important to keep this in mind, as

it is not possible to measure entheogenic experiences against so-called “religious” or “mystical”; rather, entheogenic experiences are meaningfully regenerative and thus can later be interpreted as religious, mystical, spiritual, or other ways.

Entheogenic Substances – The Classic Psychedelics

The following list of entheogenic substances is nowhere near exhaustive, however, this research project focuses on what have been referred to by many scholars as the *classic psychedelics*; namely, lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), psilocybin, mescaline, and dimethyltryptamine (DMT). Each of these entheogens has a history of usage in ritual and shamanic practices, and each has continued to be used up to the present day in both native and non-native contexts. Since the active compounds and synthetic derivatives that are drawn from these classic psychedelics have also been used in non-native contexts, their usage in contemporary times has created new forms of ceremony and practice. In contemporary contexts, reference to these other entheogenic-using cultures does not serve to legitimize or justify the current use of these substances, but rather only serves to contextualize these classic psychedelics in terms of how they have been used in other cultures in different ways. Currently, the classic psychedelic substances seem to be the most commonly used entheogenic substances by Americans, many of whom have no knowledge of the usage of these substances in other cultural contexts.

Lysergic-acid-diethylamide (LSD)

The entheogenic compound “lysergic acid diethylamide” better known as LSD, was first isolated and synthesized in Switzerland by the chemist Albert Hoffman in 1938. It is a semi-synthetic substance, derived from ergot alkaloids that are found in the natural environment. Ergot itself is the temporary form that the mushroom *Claviceps purpureaa*—a parasitic fungus that grows on wild grasses, wheat, and barley—assumes during the wintertime. In attempting to find pharmaceutical uses for ergot-derived alkaloids, Hoffman created LSD without the slightest inkling as to how this substance would shape history. Shortly after Hoffman’s “discovery,” by the

1950's, LSD—which was known at that time as *Delysid*—had begun to be distributed widely for medicinal use in clinical psychiatry and brain research (Ott 1993, 120).

Mescaline

“Mescaline” is the primary psychoactive substance found in the small, grayish cactus known as peyoté, or scientifically, *Lophophora williamsii*. The cactus, also referred to as a “button,” is hemispherical in shape and naturally grows in extremely arid conditions such as the southwestern United States and northern Mexico (Ott 1993, 82). It has been revered throughout the centuries by many native groups, including the Huichol, the Tarahumara, and the Native American Church (Schultes, Evans, Hofmann, and Christian, Rättsch 1998, 74). The button can be powdered and prepared into a tea, or it may be eaten fresh without any preparation. For many of the native groups who incorporate this plant into their ceremonies, the plant is perceived as a divinity, and referred to as a medicine that channels healing songs and visions to the participants who partake of the sacrament. It has been stated that “The peyote cult is not based on a written or spoken Word, but on the experience of the members during the communion (Bernard 1963, 578).

Dimethyltryptamine (DMT)

N,N-Dimethyltryptamine (DMT) is the active compound found in the Amazonian shamanic brew most commonly referred to as *ayahuasca*; however, variants of this brew are known to exist in many regions of South America by different names such as *hoasca*, *Caapi* and *yajé* (Schultes, Evans, Hofmann, and Christian Rättsch 1998, 66). While the main ingredients used to make ayahuasca differ depending on the native plant species found within a given region, the brew nevertheless always incorporates at least two main ingredients which work together to create a long-lasting entheogenic experience that is often used for ceremonial and healing purposes (McKenna 1984).

DMT, the first of these two main ingredients, is extracted from the leaves of the Chacruna bush (*Psychotria viridis*) in Amazonian ayahuasca. DMT is structurally similar to

serotonin and melatonin and is a powerful psychedelic compound that produces the visual content in an entheogenic experience. Equally as important as DMT, however, is the other main ingredient, *Banisteriopsis caapi*, which refers to the vine which provides the necessary MAO-I (monoamine oxidase inhibitor) used to activate the DMT. Since DMT is not an orally-active drug, the caapi vine works to inhibit the body from naturally breaking down DMT before it crosses the blood-brain barrier, and thus, allows for the entheogenic experience to take place.

DMT can also be prepared into a crystalline or powdered freebased form and smoked as a way of bypassing the need for a MAO-I. Other variants of DMT, such as 5-HO-DMT, have been found endogenously in many plant and animal species. These variants of DMT are nevertheless chemically similar and have been used in traditional practices in South America where *Anadenanthera colbrina* seeds have been mulled into a snuff and inhaled (Repke, Torres 2006). Rick Strassman (2001) has gone as far as linking DMT to the pineal gland, dreams, and the experiences of birth and death, as well as arguing for its potential application in both science and medicine.

Psilocybe Cubensis (Psilocybin)

Of the 180 known species of fungi which contain the psychoactive tryptamine alkaloid known as psilocybin, the family of *Psilocybe* mushrooms is the genus that is most widely recognized and consumed in contemporary American society. While these mushrooms can be found growing naturally in large patches of mammalian manure, today they are usually privately cultivated either through spore inoculation or by other means. Evidence for the historical usage of these psilocybin-containing mushrooms can be found dating back to the Aztec civilization and in the other neighboring Amerindian ceremonial practices of Mexico, Guatemala, and Colombia (Luna, Luis Eduardo 2016, vi). The earliest sources about the sacred mushrooms date back to 1598 in Mexico, one century after the conquest of the Aztec empire, and were written in Spanish by an educated Indian named Tezozómoc (Ott 1993, 276).

Robert Gordon Wasson, the famed banker-turned-ethnomycologist, is credited with playing a crucial role in the “rediscovery” of the sacred mushroom known in ancient times as *teonanácatl* and for finding remnants of the ritual use of these mushrooms in contemporary Mexican Indian societies (1980). After learning that mushrooms had played a divinatory role in religious practices in Mexico, in combination with the fact that pre-Colombian mushroom stones had been found in other South American regions, Wasson decided to venture to Mexico himself to take part in an entheogenic experience using these mushrooms. In 1957, *LIFE* magazine featured an article in which Wasson gives his account of his entheogenic experience with the Mazatec *curandera* Maria Sabina (Metzner 2004, 2). After secondhandedly acquiring mushroom samples that were originally collected by Wasson in Mexico, Albert Hoffman isolated the active principles found in these mushrooms in 1953 and named them *psilocybin* and *psilocin* (Ott 1993, 281).

Chapter 1

The Prismatic Nature of Entheogens: Discourses on the Classic Psychedelics

Understandings of morality represent an engagement in communication; we narrate what we know and we know by what we narrate. Since moral reflection is in fact the conversations that constitute it, then the presence of many different histories, memories, and experiences converging in our classrooms is a unique opportunity for religious studies. Moral inquiry and religious studies proceed in this context not by constituting the other...[but] through the recognition of difference and a revisioning of one's own story through the lens of the other openly engaged. It means experiencing one's world from the disorienting perspective of the other...and this necessarily entails risk, vulnerability, vertigo...The understanding of other religious worlds and the moral impulses of these worlds comes only through the multiplicity of stories told and stories attended to and the new possibilities that emerge in the places between heaven and earth, between lives and stories, and between people and their gods (Orsi 2005, 204).

To fully engage with the subject of entheogenic experiences and their potential ethical import, several perspectives on entheogens must first be considered before attempting to analyze the complex phenomenology of these experiences. In this chapter, I provide an overview of several discourses which have been written about entheogens and entheogenic experiences, and proceed to show how each of these discourses contributes a salient layer of meaning to the investigation at hand about the ethical import of entheogens. I begin with a brief statement on the human relationship to drugs, and continue by showing how several proponents of entheogens have argued that there are deeply-rooted Western biases against entheogens and those who use them. I then provide several historical facts about the ceremonial use of the classic psychedelics, highlighting some of the purposes for which they have been used in different cultural contexts. Moving on from their ceremonial usage, I outline several features of the early research that was conducted on the classic psychedelics, and then elaborate on the links that have been made between the phenomenology of psychedelic, mystical, and religious experiences. I continue by explaining how psychedelic substances have gained a resurgence of interest in current times in both academic and popular culture, and show how revolutionary scientific studies are beginning

to give insight into the neuroscientific underpinnings, as well as the therapeutic and behavior-changing value, of psychedelic and mystical states of consciousness. I finish this section by providing contemporary positions which have dealt with the topic of ethics and psychedelics, and explain how these works provide valuable perspectives on how the topic of ethics has been approached in psychedelic literature.

In closing this chapter, I explain why the combination of these findings lay the groundwork for my investigation on the ethical import of entheogenic experiences, and why they show that this inquiry into ethical import of entheogens presents a blossoming area of research that is just beginning to unfold. The purpose of this chapter is to supply my investigation various scholarly angles of vision through which to view the intricacy of the topic of entheogens. I contend that each of these discourses is invaluable to understand entheogens and must be taken into account in any study which hopes to analyze the phenomenology of entheogenic experiences. My hope is that by outlining these discourses—in combination with the information I have supplied in subsequent chapters—that the reader will gain sufficient perspective to understand the complexity and breadth of this topic.

A Note on Drugs

In different cultures, drugs are often used in completely different manners. This demonstrates that the consumption of drugs is culturally shaped to a very large extent. Which substances are used, when, by whom, how, how often, and in which dosage, where, with whom, and why, and also which conceptions are related to this are largely dependent upon the cultural membership of a user. Because of these influences, inebriation is experienced and lived out in very different ways, and a drug may be used for different purposes, may be assigned different functions (Blätter 1994, 123).

In attempting to lay out a general context suitable for understanding this investigation into the ethical import of entheogens, an early starting point must be drawn, given that human beings have coevolved through a prehistoric and symbiotic relationship to naturally occurring drugs. Even though this relationship persists to the present day, it appears that common sense still does not

seem to reflect this natural awareness. When I first embarked on this “entheogenic journey,” I had to cast my net as widely as possible in order to contextualize my investigation. Upon doing so, and beginning with the topic of drugs, I soon realized that just the mere sight or utterance of the word “drug” incited fear and anxiety in many of my colleagues, as well as in many of the people who had just so happened overhear my conversations.

I reasoned that this was due, no doubt, to the negative associations made with drugs, such as criminal behavior and psychosis, but I later came to realize that it was perhaps more so because they seemed to aggravate deeply ingrained cultural taboos. This line of reasoning broadened the horizons of my initial inquiries into entheogens, and made me wonder, “what does the term ‘drug’ even refer to, anyway?” Upon researching this question, I found that, “The word ‘drug’ refers to a chemical substance that is taken deliberately in order to obtain some desirable effect” (Iversen 2001, 1). Understanding that this was a rather vague definition, basically implying that a drug can potentially be anything we consume, I soon realized that this definition was actually quite apt in the sense that drug use is often inextricably tied to diet. The fact of the matter is that much of what we consume either out of dietary habit or for medicinal purposes ends up producing changes in our biochemistry. This in turn has a wide array of potential consequences not only our genetic makeup, but also on our cognitive functioning, behavior, and perception, depending on what substance is consumed, and how it interacts with an individual’s unique psychology and physiology.

This alone gives reason to take a closer look at our relationship to drugs and to also question why there seem to be culturally-sanctioned states of consciousness, as well as culturally-defined prejudices against consuming or possessing certain types of foods and natural substances. It also warrants an investigation into whether there exist certain types of conscious states induced by drugs that can be beneficial to humanity in some way, including for medicinal or ceremonial purposes. Even on a recreational level, one may ask, “Why do we want drugs?” Well, for the

same reason that we want other goods, “We want drugs to relieve our pains, cure our diseases, enhance our endurance, change our moods, put us to sleep, or simply make us feel better—just as we want bicycles and cars, trucks and tractors, ladders and chainsaws, skis and hang gliders, to make our lives more productive and more pleasant” (Szasz 1992, xxiii). And since it is well-established that drugs are interwoven into the fabric of every human society, the question then becomes, “how do we determine what is a ‘good’ drug versus a ‘bad’ one?” I would be the first to confess that this question does not admit of an easy answer, however, some scholars have suggested that the acceptance or rejection of a “ceremonial referent”—or drug—is simply a culturally-based decision that strictly depends on a membership in a community; therefore, it is not a decision based on fact, nor is it a matter of logic (Szasz 1974, 41).

The implications of this seem to be that what a given culture’s definition of a drug is, and their attitude towards it, are already inherently biased affairs in the first place, and this is largely due to unconscious cultural conditioning. When looking at this situation in the United States today, there seems to ironically be a mass hallucination of ignorance towards anything drug-related, despite the fact that certain drugs like alcohol, caffeine, and pharmaceuticals are well integrated into the very structure of society. Many thinkers have argued that there has been deliberate obfuscation of drugs from Western history altogether, however, their works are often received with scorn and ridicule since they often challenge the ruling paradigms that operate in many disciplines.

One of the discourses which deals with these cultural biases is D.C.A. Hillman’s work, *The Chemical Muse*, which challenges the historical picture of drugs by providing a compelling case for the widespread use of drugs in ancient Greco-Roman society. Hillman maintains that drug use permeated all aspects of ancient life, and that many pre-Socratic philosophers—from Homer and Ovid, to Pythagoras and Empedocles—were either practitioners of medicine, or at least knowledgeable about the study and application of drugs in medicinal, recreational, and other

contexts. Hillman argues that Greeks and Romans understood that certain drugs could act as curatives and palliatives, while others could induce experiential states beyond anything that could be obtained in ordinary perceptual experience. The power of morphine, for instance, was known in the Greco-Roman world for its ability to reduce the perception of pain while enhancing feelings of pleasure (Hillman 2008, 66). Hillman's book itself serves as testament to the prevalence of these unconscious biases when it comes to the perception of drugs in the United States, for the impetus behind writing his book came from the fact that much of its content was derived from the sections he was forced to remove from his PhD dissertation, given that his committee found it unorthodox.

While contemporary scientific investigations are beginning to slowly erode these biases by showing the medicinal potentialities that many illegal drugs have—especially the classic psychedelics and marijuana—it seems that Hillman's work still sheds light on the ill-reception that certain drugs continue to receive in the United States as well as in other nations which take after its drug policies. Several of the scholars who have written on entheogens have argued along these lines as well, and have sought to tie entheogens and the groups who have historically used them into this narrative about cultural biases of the West regarding drugs.

Perspectives on the Western Biases Against Entheogens

We have arrived at the point in our story where history merges with the political energies of the moment. The current controversies that have use and abuse of substances as their theme must share the stage with other issues of equal importance: poverty and overpopulation, environmental destruction, and unmet political expectations. These phenomena are the inevitable by-products of the dominator culture. In struggling with these social problems we must remember that the roots of our humanness lie elsewhere, in the cascade of mental abilities that were unleashed within our species many tens of millennia ago—the ability to name, classify, to compare, and to remember. These functions can all be traced back to the symbiotic relationship that we enjoyed with psilocybin mushrooms in the African partnership society of prehistory. Our breach of faith with the symbiotic relationship to the plant hallucinogens has made us susceptible to an ever more neurotic response to each other and the world around us. Several thousand years of such bereavement have left us the nearly psychotic inheritors

of a planet festering with the toxic by-products of scientific industrialism (McKenna 1992, 271).

The notion that cultural biases exist regarding certain drugs is an idea that has been echoed by some of the scholars who have been proponents of entheogenic substances as well; in their hands, however, these remarks go a step further in claiming that the demonization of ecstasy-producing drugs can also be linked to the cultural biases of the West. One thinker who has argued along these lines was Robert Gordon Wasson, who held that there are deeply-ingrained cultural biases regarding mushrooms and other entheogens. Wasson (1963), along with his wife, Valentina Pavlovna, proposed that that there existed both “mycophobic” and “mycophilic” cultures, terms he created upon discovering certain linguistic biases between his culture (American) and hers (Russian) when it came to the number of cultural references and synonyms they could find for the word “mushroom.” One of the methods that Wasson used to investigate this was by gathering all of the words for “mushroom” he and his wife could find, studying their etymologies, and discerning the meaning of the latent metaphors that existed in these words (28). Wasson found that mushrooms are widely linked to the thunderbolt, the cock, the fly, and the toad, and further investigated the positive and negative values that were associated with these mushroom vocabularies found in European mythology, legends, epics, and poetry (29). After conducting his research which involved collaborations with several linguists and other specialists, Wasson ultimately theorized that there existed a deeply-rooted rift regarding mushrooms which divided the Indo-Aryan peoples into two groups (28). For Wasson, this rift represented the historical suppression of ecstasy-producing substances and entheogenic experiences, as well as the suppression of the groups who engaged in these practices.

Christian Rätsch, author of *The Encyclopedia of Psychoactive Plants: Ethnopharmacology and its Applications*, has summarized a similar position to Wasson’s in claiming that, “...in our culture there is a deep chasm, a wound, for the people who preserved our

own traditional knowledge have disappeared as a result of forced Christianization, imperialism, the Inquisition, the persecution of witches, the Enlightenment, and positivism. And yet, in spite of this, the psychoactive life continues to pulse in the inner cultures” (2005, 13). Rátsch, like Wasson, maintains that entheogens and ecstatic experiences have historically been viewed as a threat in regions which have been under Christian and secular rule, and further holds that they continue to be demonized by the dominant ideologies that are characteristic of the West. Rátsch builds upon Wasson’s perspective in claiming that drug use in Western society has not only been prejudicially defined, but also that these prejudices stem from deeply ingrained Christian cultural taboos which have also spilled over into the secular realm. In presenting the idea that entheogen-using groups have been persecuted for over two millennia, Rátsch harkens back to a theme which recurs across the literature by those who have been proponents of entheogenic substances.

Continuing along this line of thought, the mid-twentieth century philosopher, Alan Watts, was another proponent of entheogenic substances who also supported the proposition that there exists a deeply-rooted Western repulsion to entheogens and those who consume them. Watts himself thought that this rejection of psychedelic substances and experiences was based on at least three of the following reasons: first, their use clashed with the dominant religious worldviews of the West (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) which maintained a monarchical relationship with God, whereas the psychedelic-mystic felt herself to be one with God; secondly, entheogenic experience also went against the secular worldview of the West which is mechanical and disenchanting, stripped of all meaning and purpose—ideas and views that are at sharp odds with a worldview that is organic, meaningful, and sacred; and lastly, since Western society takes pride in the self-controlled, egoistic, “man of virtue,” it rejects any idea or experience that might deconstruct the culturally-embedded notion of the ego that the society has placed such a high value on (Watts 1968). Watts ultimately argues that based on these reasons, the United States legal system is in direct opposition to any religious practices, including the use of entheogens,

which might lend credence to a unitive or organic worldview which places emphasis on interrelatedness over egotism.

The ideas put forth by Wasson, Rátsch, and Watts resonate with the words of the prominent advocate of psychedelics named Terence McKenna, who undoubtedly synthesized these ideas and took them yet a step further. In many ways, McKenna has communicated the idea that the loss of entheogenic plants and experiences has essentially cut humans off from their interrelatedness with the planet and all its inhabitants. He has also argued that, due to centuries of suppression by European civilization and Western thought, knowledge of entheogenic substances and states of consciousness, including their potential benefits, has almost entirely been ignored and forgotten in the West (McKenna 1992, 223). McKenna also promulgated the idea that psychedelics are deconditioning agents, and reasoned that this was why they were such a red-hot political issue. According to McKenna, the government's phobia of entheogenic substances is rooted in the fear of losing control, and that "dominator types"—a word he borrows from Rian Eisler's *The Chalice and the Blade*—have continued to suppress these substances due to the fact that they challenge the values of their patriarchal and hierarchically-structured societies (Sheldrake, McKenna, and Abraham 2001, 50). McKenna's position, like Watts', begins to bring the conversation about the suppression of entheogenic substances into the realm of ethics by claiming that entheogenic experiences are linked with a worldview that is based on interrelatedness and the actions which stem from this, such as altruistic behavior toward others and the environment.

In addressing the discourses presented here on the Western biases against entheogens, it seems that in some instances, entheogens have been overromanticized by these thinkers to a certain extent. In ancient India, for example, McKenna's theory about cultures who used entheogens being opposed to patriarchy or hierarchically-structured societies seem to fall short. One reason for this is because India has a history of patriarchy and has maintained a caste system

for at least three thousand years, despite their ceremonial use of entheogens. Even in the case of ancient Greece, where the famed Eleusinian Mysteries took place, there existed clear class divisions in Greek society, including a slave class. In other cultures, ancient and tribal alike, there have also been instances of patriarchy despite the presence and use of entheogens, and it seems that McKenna's theory may be missing some key elements to fortify its validity. Although McKenna did believe that the introduction of agriculture was one of the factors which lent itself to hierarchy, there still seems to be some crucial elements missing to his idea that psychedelics provide a roadmap to utopian society. Nevertheless, if what McKenna and Watts have claimed still holds at least some weight, and entheogenic experiences do give insight into a worldview that is organic and not egocentric, then there may be a sliver of truth in McKenna's claim, albeit not enough to say that societies who use entheogens are absolutely opposed to patriarchy, paternalism, and hierarchical rule.

While McKenna's overall project is much larger than these few remarks suggest, his comments help to illustrate the position that he and many other thinkers took regarding some of the implications that can be drawn from the status of entheogens, as well as the links that are often made to them and their use. Across their various works, what these thinkers all seem to converge on is the idea that psychedelic substances are consciousness-expanding, boundary-dissolving tools (McKenna's words) that allow humans to regenerate themselves by questioning the disempowering, culturally-validated assumptions they have come to adopt, and thereby ultimately replacing them with empowering values based on interrelatedness, preservation, and ecological sensitivity. While this idea has been viewed as a far-fetched hedonistic fantasy, the following discourses on entheogens—namely the ceremonial use of entheogens, the early research conducted on the classic psychedelics, the link between psychedelic, mystical, and religious experiences, and contemporary scientific research being done on the classic

psychedelics—all seem to lend some credence to this grandiose claim made by McKenna and other thinkers regarding the implications which can be drawn from the use of entheogens.

The Ceremonial Use of Entheogens

To make life meaningful and livable, people have always depended on certain beliefs and practices, which used to be called religions; they have also always depended on certain substances whose use formed an integral part of their religious practices. These facts have not changed. But our perspective on them, and the vocabulary we use to describe and try to understand them, have changed (Szasz 1974, 30).

Throughout this section, I will provide several examples of how entheogens have been used ceremonially in different regions of the world, while focusing on the use of the entheogens that are known as the classic psychedelics. After providing an overview of how these substances have been used in ceremonial settings, I will argue that since entheogens have been used and revered in ceremonial contexts—for up to several millennia in some cases—they demonstrate a long history of human engagement with these substances as well as the experiences they provoke. Further, these instances show that the experiences induced by entheogens have been held in the highest regard by those cultures that engaged in their consumption. Lastly, since these ceremonial instances of entheogen use have proven to be of central importance in many of the worldviews of those who have used them, they also have significant implications as to how current users may be forming their identities around entheogenic substances, ceremonies, and experiences as well.

Though the beginnings of the ritualistic use of drugs prove elusively difficult to pinpoint historically, it is assumed that human communities engaged in these practices since well before the advent of history. What we know for certain, however, is that entheogens have been revered by many indigenous cultures and other groups worldwide—not only as sources of gnosis, but also as powerful tools that facilitate healing and which are often incorporated into ceremonial practices. In first regarding the religious implications of entheogenic experiences, some have gone so far as to claim that entheogens may be inextricably tied to the very origins of religion.

Bernard (1963), for instance, has claimed that it is more probable to assume that metaphysical notions such as disembodied soul and an afterlife have been the result of human interactions with entheogenic plants than they are spontaneously generated ideas. On the opposite end of the spectrum, however, other scholars have suggested that although one may be easily convinced by the entheogenic-origins-of-religion argument, if one were take a closer look, from the general to the specific, the waters tend to get muddied (Miller 2015, 6).

In thus looking at the specific, as suggested by the latter scholar, the use of entheogens can be traced back to the oldest known sacred text in the world, the Rigveda. The Rigveda (the first of the four Vedas) dates to c. 1500-1200 BCE and contains canonical hymns that were originally recorded in the Sanskrit language. The content of the Rig Veda's hymns detail the genesis of Hindu cosmogony, while they also feature the propitiation of deities as a recurring theme. Among these propitiated deities, there was one unique god who went by the name "Soma," who, as Gordon Wasson has put it, "was at the same time a god, a plant, and the juice of that plant..." (Wasson 1971, 3). Many scholars, including Wasson himself, have argued that Soma is an entheogen. However, which entheogen Soma actually refers to has been the subject of ongoing debate up to recent times. Wasson, after becoming enthralled by the Soma phenomenon, proceeded to hire a team of philologists and researchers—including renowned scholar of Hinduism Wendy Doniger—to investigate which entheogenic substance Soma could have been. He published his findings in the book titled, *Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality*, which argues that Soma was the mushroom known as the fly agaric, or *Amanita Muscaria*, which is known to have had traditional usage in Siberia as a shamanic inebriant (1971).

Wasson's verdict on Soma, however, has received a mixed reception by scholars, including from other proponents of entheogens such as Terence McKenna. McKenna took issue with Wasson equating Soma to the fly agaric for several reasons, the first being that the fly agaric mushroom is extremely variant, both genetically and chemically, making it an unreliable source

of ecstatic inebriation (McKenna 1992, 108). Further, McKenna claims that the fly agaric is extremely toxic; even Wasson himself was unable to attain an ecstatic experience through using it. Lastly, according to McKenna, *Amanita muscaria* intoxication is nothing like the ecstatic experience induced by mushrooms containing psilocybin, for it creates an uncomfortable experience which McKenna thinks could never have given rise to the rapturous devotional hymns dedicated to Soma.

Despite the controversies which still and may forever exist regarding what Soma actually was, it can be safely assumed that it was undoubtedly an entheogenic substance given that it was a highly revered ecstatic inebriant, and also because the texts claim that it imparted incredible powers to the gods and aided them in accomplishing their supernatural deeds. The consumption of Soma was used in conjunction with *mantras*, or speech-acts, that were meant to invoke the gods and compel them to do the bidding of the reciter. Furthermore, for those who knew what Soma was and who took part in its ceremonial consumption, it is assumed that they used it as a form of empowerment, allowing them to “attain immortality” and commune with the deities (Miller 2015, 7). Although still a highly controversial issue, if Soma was in fact either the fly agaric or a psilocybin-containing mushroom, then it lends historical credence to the ecstasy-producing ability of these entheogenic fungi. If one does not buy into the fungi-Soma association, however, what this instance still represents is the use of an entheogen to provoke experiences which held the utmost importance to devotees and were central to these ancient religious ceremonies in India.

Moving on from ancient India, it has been argued that the ceremonial use of entheogens can be found in ancient Greece as well, particularly in the ancient mystery cult of Eleusis. At the temple dedicated to the Greek goddess Demeter, initiates of the mystery cult would consume an elixir known as *kykeon*, which is considered by many as being an entheogenic intoxicant. It has been proposed that the temple was designed to maximize the effects of the entheogenic brew, and

that the initiates were sworn to secrecy of their experiences at Eleusis at the cost of death. Given his familiarity with ergot after having isolated and synthesized LSD from it, Albert Hoffman, among others (including Gordon Wasson), theorized that the barley which grew in the Rarian plains near Eleusis contained ergot. This proposition, in combination with several other cultural references, including the madness that was normally associated with intoxication in ancient Greece, the mythological story of Demeter and Persephone, and the fact that the mysteries were “unspeakable” experiences, were all layered to present the idea that the sacramental substance which was used in the ceremony known as the Eleusinian Mysteries was an ergot-based entheogen (Wasson, Hoffman, and Ruck 1978). Ott (1993) has argued that the Eleusinian sanctuary was the last known place in Western society where entheogens were used to attain ecstatic experiences, and that for at least a millennium immediately following the destruction of the temple at the end of the 4th century CE, the Catholic church persecuted those who claimed to have ecstatic experiences or who were involved in the consumption of entheogens or other “pagan” practices (60).

In what is now Mexico, another entheogen that is chemically similar to LSD and which also has a history of usage in ceremonial contexts is *ololiuhqui*. *Ololiuhqui* refers to the seeds of from the morning glory and other species which contain ergot alkaloids. The earliest known writings about these entheogenic seeds date back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, where writers claim that these “round things” were ceremonially consumed by the native groups. It has been reported that these entheogenic seeds were used in combination with other entheogens, including mushrooms, to purge “aquatic fever” and other related maladies in Aztec society (Ott 1993, 124), and it has also been noted that these seeds have been used ceremonially in several countries across South America (Huxley 1999, xii).

In the Western Hemisphere, especially between North America and the Mesoamerican regions, several sources suggest that the ceremonial use of mescaline-containing entheogens dates

back millennia, with some findings reporting that humans have ceremonially used mescaline for over 5,000 years (Bruhn 2002). Stacy Schaefer (2017) has suggested that other evidence supports a much older date, with peyote ceremonies dating back 11,000 years in the same region. Further discoveries from this location show that the Mexicas (known today as the Aztecs) also used these mescaline-containing entheogenic plants, referred to in their native Náhuatl language as *peiotl* or *péyotl*, as an essential part of their ceremonial practices (Ott 1993, 83). Scholars have proposed that the ceremonial use of *péyotl* likely originated in Mexico, but eventually diffused outward from the southwest, ultimately reaching the pan-Indian movements in North America around 1870 (Ott 1993, 85). Despite their long history of usage as entheogenic inebriants by the Mexicas, the nomadic Mescalero Apache, and the Lipan of Mexico, the first descriptions we have about peyote in North America were written in Spanish and date back to around 1760, but peyote use has seemingly been adopted by most North American tribes since (Rätsch 2005, 327).

The reported effects of peyote range depending on both the dosage and the use for its consumption, but in general, it has been used as an antibiotic, to cure hunger and thirst, to stimulate the immune system, to enhance spiritual awareness, and to gain insight into interpersonal relationships. Across the various native groups who use peyote, it is always referred to as medicine, and numerous types of peyote plants—such as white, yellow, blue, and spotted—are recognized by natives as having different purposes and potencies. The ceremonial consumption of peyote by the Huichol Indians is always accompanied by extremely potent tobacco, and preliminary investigations have shown that the peyote does not appear to be maladaptive for pregnant women. The peyote is often used by the Huichol to communicate with the blue deer god who teaches songs, and it is also a key element in healing ceremonies (Schaefer 2017). Sandor Iron Rope, the former president of the National Council of Native American Churches and the Native American Church of North America, has noted that, for the Lakota of South Dakota, peyote is referred to as *Pejuta Woniya Wakan*, or “the sacred medicine of life.”

Sandor Iron Rope has also claimed that the Native American Church is a survival strategy, and that the peyote ceremony is vital to the Lakota and other groups in maintaining their identities (Sandor Iron Rope 2017).

Another shamanic inebriant that has also been found in the Mexican region is the mushroom known scientifically as *Psilocybe mexicana*, or in the Náhuatl language, *teonanácatl*. According to some scholars, *teonanácatl* denotes “the flesh of the gods,” or “divine mushroom” (Rätsch 2005, 669), and others have claimed that in the Náhuatl language of the Aztecs, Nahuatl, and Mexica, *teonanácatl* carried “wondrous” or “sacred” connotations (Ott 1993, 278). This entheogenic mushroom is known to have played an integral role in the ceremonial practices of Mexico prior to the arrival of the Spanish, however, these entheogens—and the native tribes who used them—eventually became so suppressed by the Inquisition that knowledge of them virtually disappeared for centuries.

It appears that the ceremonial use of these *teonanácatl*—or other psilocybin-containing mushrooms—may have been in use for over two thousand years in Mesoamerica, with some archaeological sources pointing to ancient mushroom effigies which have been found that date back this far. More recently, discoveries have shown that aside from *Psilocybe mexicana*, other species of psilocybin-containing mushrooms have been used in ceremonial and divinatory rites among the Mixe, Zapotec, Chatino, and the Mazatec native groups (Schultes, Hoffman and Rätsch 1998, 158). It was rumors of the entheogenic use of these fungi in the Mazatec groups which initially led Wasson (1960) to his “rediscovery” of *teonanácatl* in 1955 through his interactions with the *curandera* (healer) Maria Sabina—a relationship which ultimately brought psilocybin to the United States. It is claimed that these entheogenic fungi have been used for a variety of divinatory reasons, including: finding lost items, resolving familial problems, detecting reasons for sickness, predicting the death of a loved one, discovering hidden locations, and acquiring special knowledge (Rätsch 2005, 671).

In the case of ayahuasca, anthropologist Luis Eduardo Luna has noted that at least 72 indigenous groups across South America have reported using this entheogenic drink, while there are also 42 different names for it across these groups (Luna 1982a; 1982b). Ayahuasca has often been translated as the “vine of the soul,” and some of the entheogenic potions made from the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine—one of the key elements in ayahuasca—include *caapi*, *ayahuasca*, and *yajé*. Although ayahuasca goes by many names by different groups, and may contain minor alterations in its ingredients depending on the geographical region in which it is found, it is widely claimed by its practitioners to be a great medicine that grants telepathic powers and also allows shamans to communicate with other spirits or ancestors and to soul-travel through different dimensions (Schultes, Hoffman and Rátsch 1998, 127). This entheogenic tea has also been used for purposes ranging from purging disease to causing death (Rátsch 2005, 89), and its ceremonial usage can be traced to indigenous cultures in Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, and Brazil, among other places. While many consider the use of ayahuasca to be less than a millennium old, others have provided archaeological findings which date the use of ayahuasca in Ecuador to over five thousand years (Naranjo 1986).

In contemporary contexts, the use of ayahuasca has reached major cities across the United States, South America, and Europe. This contemporary diffusion is partly attributed to the expansion of the Santo Daime and União de Vegetal (UDV) churches—Christian-Spiritism-Indigenous hybrid traditions—who use it as a religious sacrament during their ceremonies. Various ayahuasca retreat centers have also began popping up across the Caribbean and South America, spurring heated debates over the profaning of what is considered by many indigenous tribes to be a sacred medicine and ceremony. This commoditization of ayahuasca can lead to what some scholars would refer to as distortion of these indigenous traditions, in effect damaging the inner dynamics of the groups by displacing their norms and habits, potentially causing them to lose their cultural roots. Some contemporary anthropologists have rejected this notion, however,

and have claimed that indigenous peoples have always adapted to shifting circumstances given that they are dynamic traditions. Beatriz Labate (2014) has taken the latter stance, and has claimed that as the world becomes increasingly globalized, indigenous groups must continue to adapt—as they always have—if they wish to persevere, and that part of this adaptation involves selectively integrating new cultural elements into their worldviews and lifestyles which can help them to carry on their traditions for generations.

One ayahuasca retreat center which has been considered to be mutually beneficial for both indigenous peoples and Westerners is the Temple of the Way of the Light in Iquitos, Peru. It is said that here, many young Shipibo *medicos* have had the opportunity to be trained in Eastern psycho-spiritual practices such as meditation and yoga, and have also learned a number of integrative techniques which have come from Western psychiatry and psychology. The Shipibo themselves are interested in other cultures as well, and those Shipibo who have attended the curricula at the Temple of the Way of the Light have become conversant with concepts in Western medicine, as well as other concepts such as mantras and chakras. Despite the well-intentioned fears which exist regarding the perversion of indigenous knowledges and cultures by taking their practices outside of the contexts from which they originated, it seems that in some cases, these circumstances can simultaneously create novel opportunities for ayahuasca practices to continue transforming and evolving (Aronovich 2017).

Today, many indigenous cultures continue to use entheogens ceremonially, and in many instances, also incorporate them throughout their daily routines. The significance of this is not so much because entheogens have so many diverse applications, but because indigenous worldviews often do not compartmentalize these activities into mutually exclusive categories. A fascinating aspect about the relationship between many indigenous groups and entheogens is that oftentimes, the substances which are integral to daily life also seem to be those which hold a vital place in their worldviews. One instance of this can be seen in the Tukano Indians of the Northwestern

Amazon who use coca, tobacco snuff, and ayahuasca—among other psychoactive stimulants—on a regular basis, while they also seem to be the loci from which the mythological origins of the world, and thus the worldview of the culture, emanate (Rätsch 2005, 9). Another instance of this can be seen in the Muinane tribe from the Colombian Amazon who maintains similar views to the Tukano regarding these natural substances in identifying themselves as being literally made from them, while also personifying these substances, not as humans, but nevertheless as “people,” in their cosmogonic narratives (Londoño 2012, 95).

The ultimate takeaways that can be drawn from these occasions where entheogens have been used ceremonially is that they supply this investigation with at least some background knowledge on the various ways in which entheogens have been used, including some of the practices and ideas that have been associated with their usage. In diverse ways, the entheogens known as the classic psychedelics have been revered by many cultures around the globe for their healing and spiritual potentialities, as well for a panoply of other reasons. In some instances, such as in the traditional usage of psilocybin mushrooms and peyote, these entheogens have been used to gain insight into interpersonal relationships, heal physiological maladies, and to resolve conflicts. In several other cases, entheogens have been used to commune with deities or to gain spiritual awareness. For some indigenous cultures, the use of entheogens has been interwoven into the very fabric of their daily lives and is of central importance in their worldviews and in the formation of their identity. What these instances show is that entheogens have been highly regarded throughout several historical instances, and that they have often been associated with concepts and practices that we would today consider to be religious, philosophical, or medicinal in nature.

Any attempt to draw implications from the ceremonial use of entheogens and apply them to current users may be viewed as a neocolonial undertaking; however, the implications drawn do not in some way justify the current use of them outside of these settings, nor do these particular

instances of their ceremonial usage in some way validate entheogens for contemporary users. What we can draw from these instances which is relevant to this study is that since the classic entheogens do have a history of usage in certain contexts that we now consider to be religious in nature, it therefore lends some weight to the claims that entheogens can produce ecstatic states, and that the experiences they induce also have philosophical—including ethical—import. One reason for this is because ecstasy and religion have long been intertwined, and oftentimes we find at the heart of many religions revelatory or visionary experiences that can be said to be ecstatic. Secondly, the ceremonial use of entheogens seems to have played a central role in the formation of identities and worldviews as can be seen throughout this section.

What these two claims hold for the present investigation is that the significance attributed to entheogenic experiences by current users cannot be entirely dismissed as arbitrary given that the use of these same substances have been so highly revered in other settings and have been used in ceremonial fashion. Also, these ceremonial instances show that current entheogen users may be forming their identities and worldviews around entheogenic substances as well. The worldview and identity of a culture contain basic philosophical assumptions about what exists and what relationships are proper given this schema, and these fundamental notions in themselves constitute a set of moral principles or understandings. The importance for this in understanding entheogen users' experiences today is that there exists historical evidence for the fact that entheogens can provoke ecstasy, while there is also evidence which shows that those groups who have consumed entheogens ceremonially have sometimes integrated their relationship to these substances into their worldviews and identities. Further, some instances have shown that entheogens have even been used to gain insight into interpersonal conflicts and relationships.

Early Research on Entheogens

The visions were not blurred or uncertain. They were sharply focused, the lines and colors being so sharp that they seemed more real to me than anything I had

ever seen with my own eyes. I felt that I was now seeing plain, whereas ordinary vision gives us an imperfect view; I was seeing the archetypes, the Platonic ideas, that underlie the imperfect images of everyday life. The thought crossed my mind: could the divine mushrooms be the secret that lay behind the ancient Mysteries? Could the miraculous mobility that I was now enjoying be the explanation for the flying witches that played so important a part in the folklore and fairy tales of northern Europe? These reflections passed through my mind at the very time that I was seeing the visions, for the effect of the mushrooms is to bring about a fission of the spirit, a split in the person, a kind of schizophrenia, with the rational side continuing to reason and to observe the sensations that the other side is enjoying. The mind is attached as by an elastic cord to the vagrant senses (Wasson 1957, 108).

In going beyond the ceremonial usage of entheogens in traditional and indigenous contexts, it is important to trace the early stages of research that were conducted on the classic psychedelics, insofar as this initial research gave way to the widespread interest and use of entheogenic substances in the United States and Europe in non-native contexts. In 1924, the German pharmacologist Louis Lewin (1850-1929) published the book, *Phantastica*, in which he provides the first-known modern study of entheogenic substances (Miller 2015, 4). The book is the first of its kind in the sense that it supplies the reader with scientific knowledge on the ritualistic use of drugs, thereby granting insights into the relationship between people and drugs, including drugs that what we would now call entheogens. Lewin is considered by some to be the father of psychopharmacology (McKenna 1992, 229), and by many others as a pioneer of the ethnobotanical movement which occurred in the early twentieth century. Prior to publishing this work, Lewin travelled to the United States in 1887 and collected samples of a mescaline-containing Mexican cactus known as *Anhalonium lewinii* and brought them back to his laboratory in Germany where he later self-experimented with them. Soon after, in 1897, the German pharmacologist Arthur Heffter became the first person to ingest pure mescaline after isolating the compound himself. The earliest phenomenological reports which have been recorded on the entheogenic experiences induced *péyotl* can be found in the accounts of American physician Silas Weir Mitchell and the psychologist Havelock Ellis (McKenna 1992, 230).

Mitchell (1896) published a description of his entheogenic experience using *péyotl* in the *British Medical Journal*, and described having what we may consider to be an aesthetic experience, where he was in awe and admiration of the stars in the Milky Way, and recalled being enthralled by vivid colors richer than he had ever seen before. It is said that Mitchell sent a sample of *péyotl* to William James; however, James reported becoming extremely sick from consuming one button. Havelock Ellis had also experimented with *péyotl* himself, and later published a pioneering work in the medical literature on *péyotl* (Ellis 1897), as well as the first entheogenic report of synesthesia (Ellis 1898). Mitchell and Ellis are both often credited with bringing *péyotl* to popular and academic attention, and after synthetic mescaline was created in 1919, European scientists became increasingly interested in studying its effects (Ott 1993, 93).

Perhaps the most famous phenomenological account of a mescaline-induced entheogenic experience was written by Aldous Huxley and published in his 1954 book titled *The Doors of Perception*. In the book, Huxley provides the details of his entheogenic experience in eloquent fashion, explaining how various things appeared to him while under the effects of mescaline, including the subtlest insights he claims to have gained during this experience. His experience while under the effects of mescaline led Huxley to promulgate a position taken by the philosopher C.D. Broad in claiming that the brain, nervous system, and sense organs are essentially *eliminative* rather than productive, in that they select out from what would otherwise be an overwhelming influx of data in order to provide us with the information that is most crucial to our survival (Huxley 2004, 22). Huxley (2004) juxtaposed his entheogenic experience with this notion, and ultimately arrived at the conclusion that the mind could potentially expand beyond what is normally perceived under ordinary, survival-driven circumstances, and that it is possible for one to experience this expanded “Mind at Large” (23) by using entheogens to attain a state of consciousness that was concerned “not with measures and locations, but with being and meaning” (20).

Huxley's book did more to promote interest in psychedelic substances in general, rather than in mescaline in particular, and Huxley himself dedicated the rest of his life to studying psychedelics, ultimately becoming a cultural icon for them. Despite the praise that mescaline has received, it is said that Huxley was among the very few to have actually taken pure mescaline, and some have figured that it is unlikely that more than one-hundred thousand people have ever ingested this entheogenic substance in this potent a form (Ott 1993, 82). Furthermore, aside from the Native American Church and other peyote traditions, in combination with the fact that buttons take approximately 15 years to mature, the ceremonial use of mescaline or mescaline-containing plants remains one of the least used classic psychedelic substances in the United States today in non-native contexts. It seems that due to these reasons, it was more difficult for me to find entheogen users who reported having experiences with peyote or mescaline than with mushrooms, LSD, or ayahuasca.

Moving on from mescaline, LSD started to become widespread in its use throughout the United States and Europe soon after its initial discovery, and it was largely produced by Sandoz Laboratories for psychiatric purposes under the name Delysid (Miller 2015, 65). Initial medicinal research on LSD showed promise in helping to treat alcoholism, autism, and depression (Hoffer and Osmond 1968; Grinspoon and Bakalar 1979, 216). However, the massive use of LSD in recreational contexts began to brew turmoil. Eventually, by the end of the 1960s, studies on LSD were virtually stamped out of existence; by 1970, the Controlled Substance Act (CSA) sealed the verdict on the status of LSD and other hallucinogens, classifying them as Schedule 1 substances that have a high potential for abuse and no known use for medicinal purposes.

The introduction of psilocybin mushrooms into the United States and Europe also occurred in the mid-twentieth century. During his investigations into the Mazatecan mushroom cult, Gordon Wasson allied himself with French mycologist Robert Heim who eventually was the first to identify and cultivate these psilocybin-containing mushrooms. Heim, who was himself in

need of help from a chemist who could synthesize the active ingredients found in the mushrooms, ultimately sent samples to Albert Hoffman, who in the 1950's, isolated and synthesized these ingredients, naming them *psilocybin* and *psilocine* (Miller 2015, 51). In 1957, Wasson published an article in *LIFE* magazine titled, "Seeking the Magic Mushroom," where he provided a glimpse into the research he had conducted on mushrooms, while also detailing the entheogenic experience he had that was facilitated by the Mazatec *curandera* Maria Sabina. This article had an unprecedented effect on bringing entheogenic substances and experiences to the limelight in the United States during this period.

During the 1960's, Harvard University went on to pioneer numerous scientific investigations on psilocybin under the guise of the Harvard Psilocybin Project. While the early stages of psilocybin research were beginning to show promise in inducing "religious experiences" and as adjuncts for psychotherapy, with the arrival of LSD to Harvard in 1962, psilocybin faded into the background (Powell 2011, 51). Despite the criminalization of both these substances in 1970, it seems that the use of psilocybin mushrooms still spread like wildfire throughout the United States, and by 1976, Terence and Dennis McKenna published *Psilocybin: Magic Mushroom Growers Guide* under the pseudonyms O.N. Oeric and O.T. Oss, the full impact of which still cannot be fully assessed. Today, psilocybin can be argued as being the most-accessible and most-used entheogen in the United States given how easy it has become for a person to acquire the materials and knowledge needed to cultivate them themselves.

In the case of ayahuasca, one of its two main ingredients, the *Banisteriopsis caapi* vine, was also isolated in Europe by Louis Lewin in the 1920s, and the other of its main ingredients, the vision-producing DMT, was isolated by the Canadian chemist Richard Helmuth Fredrick Manske (1931). The infiltration of ayahuasca into the United States is harder to trace, although it is known to be a fairly recent phenomenon. Although ayahuasca is still deemed illegal in the United States, individuals can order the raw plant materials used to make it online, and thus brew

their own tea at home. While the use of ayahuasca in the United States seems to be growing, there has not been substantial research done in this direction thus far. A smokeable, powdered, free-base form of DMT has also been sold in the United States' black market since at least the 70s, but given the complexity of the process involved in making it, combined with risks involved with purity in the black market, it is hard to gauge what users are ingesting.

By reviewing these early stages of research that have been conducted on the classic psychedelics, it allows us to see how the study and use of entheogens reached the United States and Europe. What this section also demonstrates is that the early research on these substances was proving to hold promise insofar as entheogens appeared to have positive effects on users in therapeutic settings. There were also pioneering investigations into using the classic psychedelics for provoking psychedelic-induced mystical and religious experiences and studying the effects they had on users. These early stages of research also show that some of the first phenomenological reports written on entheogenic substances have also been described in quasi-aesthetic terms. One important feature of the early research conducted on the classic psychedelics is that these entheogens were taken out of their native contexts, isolated and synthesized by researchers, and then consumed by non-natives in new settings. This eventually led to the diffusion of these entheogens throughout the Western world, creating new uses and ceremonies involving entheogens.

Not long after the effects of entheogens began to be studied, however, research was halted in its tracks as psychedelic substances became illegal not long after their effects began to be studied. Currently, it is known that the classic psychedelics continue to be used by Americans today, and the ethnographic data I have drawn for this investigation is based on reports written or told by entheogen users in the United States. Given that the use of ayahuasca, crystalized DMT, and peyote/mescaline seems to be in less abundance and use in the United States than the use of

psilocybin mushrooms and LSD, the entheogenic experience reports I have provided in Chapter 3 are meant to reflect what I feel may be a proper distribution these experiences in America.

Discourses on The Link Between Psychedelic, Mystical, and Religious Experiences

What you do, is also a doing of your environment. Your behavior is its behavior, as much as its behavior is your behavior—it's mutual. We could say it is transactional. You are not a puppet, which your environment pushes around, nor is the environment a puppet which you push around. They go together. They act together...It's all one. So, there's a push-pull, between organism and environment. We are only really aware of this as when in curious alterations of consciousness, which we call mystical experience [or] cosmic consciousness; an individual gets the feeling that everything that is happening is his own doing—or the opposite of that feeling, that he isn't doing anything, but that all his doings, his decisions and so forth, are happenings of nature. You can feel it either way. You can describe it in these two completely opposite ways, but you're talking about the same experience. You're talking about experiencing your own activity, and the activity of nature, as one single process. And you can describe it as if you were omnipotent like God, or as if it were completely deterministic and you hardly existed at all. But remember, both points of view are right (Watts 2010).

These opening words by Alan Watts capture the essence of this section—namely, the experience of oneness which seems to be a characteristic mark of mystical experience; however, this theme of oneness with everything also seems to be one of the threads which weaves psychedelic, mystical, and religious experiences together. For those who have dedicated themselves to studying the effects that non-ordinary states of consciousness have on humans, the experiences associated with psychedelics, religion, and mysticism have long been areas of fascination. To inquire as to why so many thinkers have made associations between psychedelic experiences, religion, and mysticism, however, is a multivalent affair, which I believe can be understood in at least the four following ways: (1) the association between psychedelics, religion, and mysticism provides a justification for the use of entheogens as religious sacraments; (2) it allows scientists to conduct neurological research on religious and mystical experiential states; (3) it provides the grounds for reexamining the ecstatic and mystical states that have been recorded throughout history in light of ethnobotanical knowledge; and (4) it lends credence to the transformative

power of psychedelic-induced mystical states of consciousness. Most of the scholars who have endeavored to establish the link between psychedelic and mystical experiences have often taken the last stance and have argued from phenomenological grounds, given the striking similarity between the content reported from both mystical and psychedelic experiences, and also the profound changes that individuals report to have undergone as a result of these experiences.

During the mid-twentieth century—around the same time that psychedelics began being investigated scientifically for therapeutic purposes and were in widespread use in the United States—numerous psychologists and philosophers began publishing works in the psychology of mysticism due to renewed interests in the phenomenology of altered states. Included among those who were working in this field was humanistic psychologist Arthur Deikman, who was particularly interested in studying the non-ordinary states of consciousness associated with mystical experience. Deikman believed that mysticism should be considered a science in its own right, worthy of its own body of knowledge, and that mystics throughout history had only borrowed from religious terminology either out of necessity, or out of convenience, due to the particular sociocultural and historical contexts they found themselves in. In his psychological literature, Deikman (1982) modeled the human psyche by dichotomizing consciousness into the analytical and intuitive, or the rational and mystical, and believed that the human psyche could reach deeper and more profound levels of awareness by way of experiencing complementary modes of consciousness (Wiethaus 1996, 104).

For Deikman, the complementary modes of consciousness which he referred to as intuitive, also manifest themselves in the form of mystical experience. According to Deikman, this complementary mode of consciousness—what some have referred to as nature mysticism—allows for a fusion between self and environment that is both perceptual and conceptual (Wiethaus 1996, 105). Deikman believed that acquiring knowledge of one's true self through intuitive or mystical means would necessarily lead one towards acknowledging the

interconnectedness and unity of all life. Thus, Deikman's understanding of mystical experiences was that they revealed content which could be interpreted as having epistemological, metaphysical, and ethical implications. Taken in this regard, it seems that one of the effects that the experience has on the mystic is that the mystic seems to gain some type of knowledge which brings about a change in his or her orientation towards "the other," and this experience is often self-described by the mystic as an interconnected and unitive experience.

Deikman's understanding of mystical states resonates with the work of another prominent humanistic psychologist by the name of Abraham Maslow. Like Deikman, Maslow believed that altered states of consciousness were key to personal growth, and that mystical experiences could catalyze these transformative changes. Further, Maslow thought that it was possible to link mystical experiences—also referred to by Maslow as ecstatic or blissful—to rejuvenated perspectives on one's behavior and values. During his career, Maslow (1943, 1954) developed a human hierarchy of needs which contained five elements he believed motivated human actions. The base of this hierarchy of needs was survival, followed by safety, belongingness, esteem needs, and finally, self-actualization as the highest motivating factor if all the other needs had been fulfilled. Maslow (1968) held that there was an "essential human nature," unique to each human being, and that this inner nature could be embraced and integrated through this process known as "self-actualization" (190).

Later in life, Maslow amended his hierarchy of needs model given that, after much thought, Maslow realized that there had to be some form of motivation higher than self-actualization for those who were already self-actualizing. Given these circumstances, Maslow reasoned that a sixth level of intrinsic values could be added to his hierarchy of needs which consisted of values that transcended personally-motivated interests. This self-transcendent level of motivation included virtues such as goodness, excellence, simplicity, and elegance (Maslow 1969, 4), and eventually, Maslow further developed these self-transcendent values to include

notions such as ego-transcendence and peak-experiences (Skelsey Guest 2014, 982). In describing this self-transcendent, highest level of human needs, Maslow claimed that, “Transcendence refers to the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature, and to the cosmos” (1971, 269). As one can clearly see, the need for, and motivation towards, self-transcendence leads to an ethical principle—namely, to act in such a way as to treat others—including humans, nature, and the cosmos—as ends in themselves, and not means to an end. It is important to note that Maslow was fortunate enough to briefly investigate psychedelic states, albeit late in his life, and quickly recognized them as having the ability to assist one in transcending the self by provoking “a peak-experience, with core-religious revelation, in non-peakers, thus bridging the chasm between these two separated halves of mankind” (Maslow 1964). These remarks are significant to this study insofar as entheogenic experiences seem to reliably provoke experiences of ego-transcendence, and also because Maslow himself believed that psychedelics could provoke peak experiences. Furthermore, as we shall see later in this section, the “core-religious revelations” induced by psychedelics may be confirmed by contemporary research, and these studies—including the investigation at hand—also support the suggestions made by Maslow and others regarding how psychedelic and mystical states of consciousness can lead to the formation of new beliefs, values, and ethical commitments.

Further evidence for the phenomenological dovetailing of psychedelic and mystical experiences, including the transformative power they exhibit, has come from Stanislav Grof, a world-renowned psychiatrist and researcher. With over 60 years of experience in studying non-ordinary states of consciousness, Grof’s work includes the participation in thousands of psychedelic-psychotherapy sessions involving LSD. Earlier in his career, Grof (1988) coined the terms *hylotropic* and *holotropic* to differentiate between ordinary, everyday consciousness, and

non-ordinary conscious states which can be characterized as mystical or psychedelic (39). Grof (1998) has also argued that holotropic states are transformative, healing, and “oriented or moving towards wholeness,” and can even have evolutionary and heuristic potentialities (5).

Among the various types of holotropic experiences, Grof (2009) has developed a category known as “transpersonal experiences,” which covers such a wide variety of phenomena that they prove difficult to analyze and categorize. Grof defines transpersonal experiences as “experiences involving an expansion or extension of consciousness beyond the usual ego boundaries and beyond the limitations of time and/or space,” and has mentioned that these may include situations where subjects completely lose their identity, merge identities with others—including aspects of the external world—or even completely identify with the consciousness of another entity or being, to name a few (158). Grof believes that these transpersonal experiences can be induced by way of psychedelic substances, and also maintains that they can lead to the formation of new beliefs and values. An example of this can be seen in a subcategory of transpersonal experience which Grof refers to as “oneness with life and with all creation,” as Grof maintains that, “experiences of this kind can result in a heightened sensitivity to ecological problems as well as an enhanced awareness of them (186).

Aside from Grof, many others who have investigated non-ordinary states seem to concur with this likening of mystical experiences—marked by their significance and transformative power—to ecstatic and psychedelic experiences. One of these pioneering thinkers was the philosopher Walter Terence Stace, who attempted to tie mystical and psychedelic experiences together by way of their subject-reported phenomenological similarities. In his book, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, Stace (1960) argued that if the phenomenological reports of mystical experiences induced through pharmacological means entirely resemble the reports of mystical experiences which have not been induced pharmacologically, then one experience cannot be regarded as genuinely mystical while also maintaining that the other is not (70). According to this argument,

there is a causal indifference as to how these mystical states are brought about, which seems to imply that the mystical experiences induced by psychedelics count as valid forms of mystical experience as well.

In this same work, Stace—who was himself inspired by Rudolf Otto’s (1923) work on *numinous* experience—also put forth two types of mysticism known as “introvertive” and “extrovertive” mysticism, with “The essential difference between them [being] that the extrovertive experience looks outward through the senses, while the introvertive looks inward into the mind” (1960, 61). For each of these two types of mysticism, Stace also developed a seven-fold typology of mysticism which included features such as: oneness or unity, sense of objectivity, feeling of the sacred, paradoxicality, blessedness or peace, and alleged ineffability. With this typology set forth, Stace promulgated the notion that if the phenomenology of drug-induced ecstatic experiences also exhibit these phenomenological features that are used to describe mystical experiences, then the drug-induced experiences count as mystical experiences as well, and should also carry with them the transformative potential that is normally attributed to mystical experiences.

During the days of the Harvard Psilocybin Project, a physician and minister by the name of Walter Norman Pahnke (1963) also attempted to establish a link between psychedelics and religious or mystical experiences through their phenomenology by conducting a revolutionary experiment titled *Drugs and Mysticism*, which would later come to be known better as “The Good Friday Experiment.” Although several of the studies undertaken by this team at Harvard were under the direction of Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, and Richard Alpert, this double-blind experiment was spearheaded by Walter Pahnke and took place in Boston University’s Marsh Chapel on Good Friday in 1962. The experiment involved the administration of psilocybin to several students, most of which later claimed to have had a profoundly religious experience during the ceremony (Miller 2015, 5). This experiment is considered by many to be one of the

preeminent scientific investigations in psychedelic literature, since it demonstrated that if psilocybin were taken by religiously inclined individuals who were in a religious setting, that it could catalyze a mystical experience in the individual (Doblin 1991, 23).

For the experiment, Pahnke synergized Stace's typology of mysticism with some of the elements of mysticism put forth by William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (see Chapter 2), ultimately creating a nine-fold typology of mysticism which contained the following categories and subcategories: 1) Unity (internal/external); 2) transcendence of time and space; 3) deeply felt positive mood, (joy/blessedness, peace/love); 4) sacredness; 5) objectivity and reality; 6) paradoxicality; 7) alleged ineffability; 8) transiency; 9) persisting positive changes in attitude and behavior (toward self, others, life, and the experience itself). Despite later day criticisms which have exposed certain flaws in Pahnke's project, by developing and testing this typology, Pahnke's experiment did much to lay the foundation for future researchers who have dedicated themselves to studying the relationship between psychedelics and religious or mystical experiences phenomenologically.

Some years ago, the president and founder of MAPS, Rick Doblin (1991), decided to conduct his own follow-up study of Pahnke's experiment to see if he could verify Pahnke's hypothesis in spite of the criticisms it had received. After conceding to several critiques of the original Good Friday experiment, such as that it had failed to secure double-blind parameters, and had also used imprecise questions to quantify mystical experiences, Doblin conducted a follow-up study by interviewing several of the same participants from the original experiment about their experience twenty-four to twenty-seven years later. Doblin found that all of the participants he interviewed who ingested psilocybin during the original experiment still described their experiences in overwhelmingly positive terms, while they also considered the experience as having made a unique contribution to their spiritual lives. According to Doblin, these findings ultimately vindicated Pahnke's hypothesis that subjects who ingested psilocybin and attained a

partial or full mystical experience, “would, after six months, report a substantial amount of positive, and virtually no negative, persisting changes in attitude and behavior” (23).

Doblin’s remarks have been substantiated by a study conducted by researchers at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and published in *The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* in 2012. This study concluded that psilocybin exhibits the potential to reliably induce mystical experiences in participants, and may prove to be a useful tool in studying mysticism from a scientific perspective. The way mystical experiences were characterized in this study was by using a mystical experience questionnaire (MEQ) that had been developed over time. This MEQ built upon Pahnke’s typology of mysticism—which was itself inspired by James and Stace—through questionnaire-based reporting, and has come to serve as a helpful tool in studying mysticism from both scientific and philosophical perspectives. The phenomenological reports from these studies have confirmed some of the dominant features of mystical experiences that Stace, James, and Pahnke had noted, and includes feelings of unity, noetic quality, joy, peace, ineffability, and sacredness (MacLean 2012).

More recently, a study has been conducted to analyze the effects that psilocybin has on individuals in both research and non-research settings. For the study, researchers conducted two internet-based surveys on psilocybin-induced mystical experiences, and compared them data drawn from 3 different laboratory studies, each of which involved the administration of a high dose of psilocybin to healthy volunteers and recording their subjective responses. The findings from this study suggest that laboratory protocols and procedures used in the study proved effective in maximizing positive experiences for individuals while minimizing negative experiences (Carbonaro et al. 2015, e37). In comparing the mystical experience group to the laboratory study group, researchers found that users reported the following feelings, respectively: positive/spiritual feelings of peace (88, 86%), awe (93, 90%), spiritual height (76, 77%), joy (91,

90%), “All is One” (75,70%), and “among the 5 most spiritually significant of their lives (62, 67%) (Carbonaro et al. 2015, e36).

Another revolutionary study has suggested that psilocybin-induced mystical experiences have led to increased changes in participants’ self-reported personality trait of openness. For this experiment, researchers measured the effects that psilocybin had on five personality traits, including: Extroversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness. What they found was that following a high-dose psilocybin session, participants who had full or partial mystical experiences reported being significantly more open for more than a year after the experiment. The significance of this research is that it shows positive, long term changes for the individuals who have undergone these experiences, while it also demonstrates that even “partial” mystical experiences—those which do not meet all of the elements in the MEQ put forth by researchers—can still entail these positive transformations (MacLean et al. 2011, 1460). Perhaps more importantly, however, is that this research has established for the first time ever the notion that personality change can occur after age 30, despite what longitudinal analyses of personality change suggest, and that “the classic hallucinogen psilocybin occasions personally and spiritually significant mystical experiences that predict long-term changes in behaviors, attitudes and values” (MacLean et al. 2011, 1453).

William A. Richards, researcher and co-founder of the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine program—a program which has been involved in the administration and analyses of hundreds of psychedelic sessions in scientific settings—has worked professionally with psychedelic substances for over 41 years. For more than 25 of these years, Richards has researched psychedelic substances in therapeutic contexts, and has been able to amass a voluminous amount of personal accounts of psychedelic experiences, including the transformative effects they have had on the lives of individuals. Richards (2016) has argued that the terms “entheogen” and “entheogenic” should refer to “Discovering God within,” as opposed

to “generating God within,” and that not all psychedelic-induced experiences are actually entheogenic in this sense (20). Nevertheless, Richards has embraced the terms “entheogen” and “psychedelic substances,” and has used them interchangeably in describing certain types of psychedelic experiences.

In his analyses of the phenomenology of psychedelic-induced experiences, Richards (2015) has argued that psychedelics can induce a variety of experiences, some of which include: sensory-aesthetic, psychotic, archetypal, and mystical (191). In his remarks on psychedelic-induced mystical experiences, Richards has relied on the works of James, Pahnke, and Stace for developing the following categories: Unity, Transcendence of Space and Time, Deeply-Felt Positive Mood, Sacredness, and Intuitive Knowledge (192-193). Among the non-mystical experiences he has categorized, Richards notes a special type that he believes fall somewhere between mystical and personal states. Richards refers to these experiences as “archetypal,” and believes that,

This is a fascinating area for new exploration as it is not uncommon for subjects to report encounters with symbols or deities that have not been part of their process of enculturation, perhaps providing empirical support for Jung's "collective unconscious." Themes of great myths and world religions become manifest. Encounters with the Christ, the Buddha and Bodhisattvas, Hindu deities and Greek gods, the Wise Old Man and the Great Mother, may be reported, along with imagery of precious gemstones and metals, awe-inspiring architecture, vast landscapes, prior civilizations and cosmic panoramas. Often claims are made of having beheld visions of exquisite beauty, as though one had visited a great art museum or the realm of Platonic forms. Although the ego is still extant as the observer who beholds the vision, it subsequently may become incorporated and transcended in a unitive state, for which most scholars in the psychology of religion today would reserve the word "mystical" (192).

According to Richards, archetypal and mystical experiences are the most profound types of experiences when it comes to awakening a person to the spiritual dimensions of life, and that as a result of these experiences, individuals tend to express this awareness of spirituality in everyday living (196). Richards' work contributes to the current investigation by showing that there are profound philosophical implications which may result from psychedelic experiences that are

categorized as archetypal or mystical. Further, Richards' work is also significant to this study insofar as he has recognized that there is still some "observer who beholds the vision" during the "unitive" state (192). These remarks will be referred to later in this work, and serve an important function in helping to understand how entheogen users have reported their experiences, despite having had the experience of ego-loss or ego-transcendence.

In concluding this section on the associations that have been made between psychedelic, religious, and mystical experiences, several implications arise for this investigation into the ethical import of entheogens. First, several humanistic and transpersonal psychologists have put forth the notion that non-ordinary states of consciousness, such as those attained during mystical experience, seem to have transformative and positive effects on the individuals who have them. These psychologists, such as Deikman, Maslow, and Grof, have also theorized that the transformative effects of mystical states could also bring about a change in behavior or values. Maslow and Grof also believed that psychedelic experiences seem to have many of the same features and transformative effects that mystical experiences had, and also understood them as having these effects on behavior and values. Despite referring to these experiences in their own terminologies, Maslow believed that psychedelic experiences could provoke "peak experiences," which Maslow later associated with self-transcendent values, while Grof (2009) held that "holotropic" experiences—especially those he called "transpersonal"—could also lead to a change in values by bringing about ecological awareness and sensitivity.

Contemporary scientific findings seem to confirm these results, and have also made mention of the fact that the positive transformative changes to behavior and values can happen even for those individuals who do not experience a "fully" mystical experience. The inferences which can be drawn from these discourses on the link between psychedelic, religious, and mystical experiences is that they seem to repeat several of the ideas mentioned in the sections on the ceremonial use of entheogens and their early research. These ideas include the associations

which have been made to entheogens throughout history, such as their potential to reliably induce ecstatic experiences, and well as the fact that these experiences have been described in terms that are related to religiosity, spirituality, and sacredness. These associations have led some to argue for the legitimization of entheogenic substances for religious purposes—as Pahnke himself had advocated—since studies have now confirmed that entheogens can be used to scientifically investigate mystical and religious experiences (Cole-Turner 2014).

The Psychedelic Renaissance: Pioneering Research and Renewed Interests in Entheogens

In one of my early books I suggested that the potential significance of LSD and other psychedelics for psychiatry and psychology was comparable to the value the microscope has for biology or the telescope has for astronomy. My later experience with psychedelics only confirmed this initial impression. These substances function as unspecific amplifiers that increase the cathexis (energetic charge) associated with the deep unconscious contents of the psyche and make them available for conscious processing. This unique property of psychedelics makes it possible to study psychological undercurrents that govern our experiences and behaviours to a depth that cannot be matched by any other method and tool available in modern mainstream psychiatry and psychology. In addition, it offers unique opportunities for healing of emotional and psychosomatic disorders, for positive personality transformation, and consciousness evolution (Grof 2009, xxv).

Currently, the stigma that has long been associated with psychedelics is beginning to erode, and we can now find incursions of psychedelics in common places such as social media and in pop culture. The cover article of *Rolling Stone*'s March 2017 issue, for instance, is, “The Psychedelic Miracle: How Ayahuasca and MDMA are Radicalizing Treatment for Mental Illness” (McClelland 2017). Meanwhile, the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies’ (MAPS) Instagram page recently posted a quote from comedian Shane Mauss on the relationship between comedy and psychedelics: “Comedy is about looking at life in a different way. Psychedelics just force a different perception on you” (Mauss 2017). In January 2017, *Business Insider* published a video which explained how employees in Silicon Valley are consuming microdoses (extremely low doses) of LSD to increase work productivity (Friedman et al. 2017).

While these instances are sure signs that a resurgence of interest in psychedelic substances—in both academic and popular culture—is well under way, this second wind that psychedelics have gained has undoubtedly been due to the revolutionary scientific experiments which have been conducted and published roughly within the last ten to fifteen years.

These recent studies on the classic psychedelics have had innovative results in displaying their therapeutic application, and since several positive, empirically supported implications can now be drawn from their usage, psychedelics seem to be regaining the momentum that they once had in the 1960s, but now fortified with scientific backing. This notoriety has been painstakingly achieved despite decades of suppression, and some of the key contributors to the legitimization of psychedelic substances are MAPS and other organizations including the Beckley Foundation and the Heffter Research Institute. Each of these organizations is led by various doctors and scientists—many of whom have had some exposure to psychedelics in their life—that actively advocate the study of psychedelics, particularly with regard to the therapeutic potential of these substances in contributing to an individual’s overall health and well-being.

Among this new research, several groundbreaking studies have been conducted by a collaboration between teams of researchers from the Beckley Foundation and the Imperial Research Programme from Imperial College, London. For the first time, a study was conducted by this group on the effects of LSD on the brain, in an effort to greater understand what changes occur in the brain in order for LSD to transform consciousness and induce alternate states. By using various brain imagining techniques, researchers set out to discover what neurochemical changes underlie the profound change in consciousness during LSD-induced psychedelic experiences so that greater knowledge can be gained as to what biological and psychological processes may be at work to create LSD’s therapeutic effects. The findings have shown that under the effects of LSD, certain networks in the brain—such as the Default Mode Network (DMN), which is usually associated with one’s sense of self, or ego—decrease in “integrity,” while

distinct brain networks ended up becoming more connected with one another. Researchers have reported that this increase in connectivity across different brain networks allowed for broader and more integrated global communication across the brain (Carhart-Harris et al. 2016a).

Inspired by the results from these findings, a group of mostly the same researchers conducted another experiment involving LSD which both supported and further built upon these preliminary findings. In the study, 15 participants were given LSD on two separate days, and then underwent a combination of brain imaging and self-report questionnaires. The results of this experiment showed that: 1) LSD increased functional connectivity across brain networks; 2) these increases in functional connectivity have been correlated positively with “ego-dissolution” scores; 3) aside from being enhanced, the connectivity between different brain networks also created new patterns of connectivity under the effects of LSD. The significance of these findings show that “LSD selectively enhances communication between different brain areas and networks maintaining consciousness,” while also confirming that “psychedelics increase connectivity between networks” (Tagliazucchi et al. 2016). One important aspect of this study is that it shows that psychedelic states of consciousness—based on their measurable level of entropy—fall at the opposite end of the spectrum than those conscious states which are “diminished,” such as during sleep or under the effects of anesthesia.

Another revolutionary study from this team has shown that “LSD enhances the emotional response to music, creating a deeper and stronger emotional experience” (Mendel et al. 2016). The findings from this study show that LSD allows the parahippocampal cortex (PHC) to interact with the visual system of the brain more freely, and that LSD plays a role in creating this effect by releasing the top-down control that the DMN ordinarily exerts over the PHC. Researchers found that LSD and music synergistically increase mental content that is autobiographical in nature, given that participants reported having visions of their past or complex images such as scenes. For the researchers, these findings are suggestive of a rationale for LSD-assisted

psychotherapy insofar as the effects of music during an LSD experience can help enhance mental imagery, including personal memories.

In yet another pioneering study conducted by this collaboration between the Beckley Foundation and Imperial College, researchers found evidence which shows that the psychedelic substance known as psilocybin—the active compound found in entheogenic mushrooms—can potentially be used to treat depression. The participants selected for this study reported suffering from moderate to severe depression, and they also claimed that their depression was treatment-resistant. For the experiment, 12 patients were given two separate doses of psilocybin, with each dose being administered one week apart. Researchers provided psychological support to the participants throughout all stages of the research, and evaluated the reports given by participants based on standardized outcome measures including State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI), Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), and Quick Inventory of Depressive Symptoms (QIDS). Participants provided their responses to these outcome measures two different times post-treatment, the first being one week after, and the second three months after. The highlights of this research show that all 12 participants lowered their levels of anxiety and increased their ability to experience pleasure. Further, this research shows that 67% of these participants were depression-free at one week post-treatment, and 42% remained depression-free at the three-month mark (Carhart-Harris et al. 2016b).

The impetus behind many of the aforementioned studies came in part from earlier research that was done by a team of scientists in 2012, where they gave psilocybin to 2 groups of people—30 in total—and then scanned the blood flow and blood oxygenation in these participants' brains after they ingested the psilocybin. This study found that there was a correlation between the intensity of the effects experienced while under the effects of psilocybin and a decreased blood flow in specific regions of the brain, with those who had the greatest decrease in blood flow reporting the most intense effects. Researchers were surprised to find—

contrary to what they had assumed—that regions in the brain which are considered to be central in global brain function, such as the DMN, were de-activated by the significant reduction in blood flow to these areas. This study was revolutionary because it found that when the DMN is deactivated during psychedelic states, it permits an “unconstrained style of cognition,” allowing these orchestrating “hubs” in the brain to decrease in activity within their own networks, but increase in connectivity across the brain. This study was also the first of its kind and did much to lay the groundwork for the more recent studies that this team had conducted on the effects of psilocybin on the brain and on users in therapeutic settings (Carhart-Harris et al. 2012).

Aside from these more recent studies, other research has been conducted on psilocybin which shows that participants who have had entheogenic experiences induced by psilocybin consider the experiences to have had a lasting, beneficial impact on them in terms of personal well-being due to the meaningfulness and spiritual significance of the experience (Griffiths et al. 2006). In a follow-up study conducted on these same participants 14 months later, participant testimony reports showed that the entheogenic experiences had continued to have positive effects on their lives (Griffiths et al. 2008). Further studies conducted by this team have shown in addition to the long-term benefits largely reported by participants, there are also immediate dose-related effects which, according to participants, have proven to be beneficial in their lives (Griffiths et al. 2011). The combination of these studies has shown that both immediately after, and up to 14 months later, the positive and transformative effects that participants report include: changes in life satisfaction, behavior, social effects, altruism, and persisting changes in attitude (Griffiths et al. 2011, 662).

According to both the participants and researchers involved in these studies, what seems to be happening as a result of these entheogenic experiences are radical changes in one’s quality of life—or at least one’s perspective on it—in beneficial terms. Aside from the positive transformative effects that these experiences seem to have individuals, researchers reported that,

“Considering the rarity of spontaneous mystical experiences in the general population, the finding that more than 70% of volunteers in the current study had “complete” mystical experiences suggests that most people have the capacity for such experiences under appropriate conditions and, therefore, such experiences are biologically normal” (Griffiths et al. 2011, 664). In maintaining that mystical states of consciousness are biologically normal and can be reliably induced given the proper conditions, these research findings seem to confirm what had been known by entheogen-using cultures alike; namely, that entheogens can be used to attain ecstatic experiences, and that these experiences are of central importance to those who use them. Also, by suggesting that mystical states of consciousness are normal, these researchers can be understood as harking back to the notion that in modern day, techno-global society, our culture only seems to deem these experiences as invalid based on ideological biases which are largely unconscious and illogical. As research findings like these continue to unfold, I believe that these biases will eventually dissipate, and the potential value of entheogenic substances will be reified.

Some of the effects that these novel studies seem to be having is that they are disproving many of the myths which have been illegitimately laid against the much-maligned psychedelic substances, with at least one study in particular showing that the associations which have been made between psychedelics and mental illness seems to be patently false (Johansen 2015). Further evidence has shown that there actually seems to be a positive correlation between coping, spirituality, and life purpose during and after psychedelic experiences, if the psychedelic substances are consumed with the purpose of enhancing self-knowledge (Moró, Simon, Bárd and Rácz 2011, 188). In still other areas that are just beginning to be explored, recent investigations on entheogenic substances have been shown to help treat other psychological disorders such as anxiety, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), addiction, depression, and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) (Tupper, Wood, Yensen and Johnson 2015). As recently as last year, studies have shown that the use of psilocybin can help those with life-threatening conditions

better cope with the anxiety related to their illness, and thus, improve their overall quality of life (McCorvy, Olsen, and Roth 2016). In the case of LSD, researchers have found that it seems to work as an empathy-enhancing drug that produced feelings of trust, closeness to others, and overall happiness (Schmid, Mueller, Borgwardt, Liechti, 2016).

In concluding these discourses on the resurgence of scientific interest in entheogenic substances, there are several features which must be drawn out to show how they relate to the study at hand. In one sense, these research findings demonstrate that entheogenic experiences have neurological underpinnings which have shown that psychedelic states are more globally-connected states of consciousness. Based on this research, these more globally-connected psychedelic states of consciousness seem to also involve reducing the activity of the area of the brain which can be said to be the central “self” hub, known as the DMN. Further, research has shown that during times where DMN activity drops, participants report experiencing certain features that have been associated with mystical experience, such as ego-dissolution and oneness with everything. These findings show that phenomenological reports of ego-dissolution or ego-transcendence can no longer be viewed as subjective fantasies or hallucinations, and must be viewed as legitimate experiences which now have empirical evidence to support them.

In reflecting on these scientific studies, they also seem to demonstrate that entheogenic experiences have been so meaningfully rich for participants that they have led to drastic changes in the behaviors, values, and perceptions of those who have had them. These findings, in addition to the previously mentioned studies, seem to vindicate the views of several others who have claimed that entheogens can have transformative effects, and that these effects can have an impact on a person’s values. Since this research shows that individuals are reporting enhanced social interactions along with altruistic tendencies, there seems to now be a confirmation of the ethical import of entheogens, albeit roughly implied. Given the scope and purposes for which these scientific studies were conducted, it seems that the detailed phenomenological reports

which provide the qualitative data about the experiences were not fully analyzed. This is understandable since many of these studies are focused on the therapeutic value of entheogenic experiences. However, what seems to be transformative for individuals is the meaningfulness of the experience itself, which is entirely subjective and contained in the phenomenological content of their experiences. What these circumstances provide, though, is a pristine opportunity to examine the phenomenology of entheogenic experiences, and investigate them philosophically to draw out what type of ethical implications may be accompanied by the transformative changes they sometimes provoke.

Contemporary Discourses on Entheogens and Ethics

We may say that we are...three-brained beings endowed of a reptilian [or] instinctive old brain, an effective mid-brain that we have inherited from other mammals, and an intellectual forebrain that most exemplifies us as humans, but that, through the development of civilized life, we have come to identify excessively with our astute and clever rational mind to the detriment of our compassion and our inner freedom. [...] In light of such a model then, we can say that psychedelics undermine the forebrain dominance that sustains the (moral) indictment of our natural or animal impulses and our (immoral or predatory) preference for technology over compassion. It is as if psychedelics could anesthetize our “ego,” or controlling-repressive sub-self, and allow the expression of our natural empathy and our archetypal inner-animal...(Naranjo 2017).

Although the ethical inferences that can be drawn from entheogenic experiences already seem to be an inherent theme among those who have studied their implications, few scholars seem to have actually dedicated themselves to analyzing this line of inquiry in depth. It was only until shortly after beginning to write my thesis that I came across two thinkers which address the relationship between entheogens and ethics explicitly. The first thinker, professor Thomas B. Roberts (2004) proposes that “...mystical experiences provide ego transcendence and a sense of unity with others, then motivations and values shift from those that are self-centered to those that center more on a group, society, humanity, and even the cosmos. People who have had mystical experiences see their responsibilities, actions, and inactions in a wider context” (37). The logic

behind his theory is straightforward, since Roberts himself claims that all experiences affect a person's values in some way or another, and that if one has a mystical experience that unites them with others and with the world, that this can then lead to a shift in their values towards more altruistic behavior (49), and away from self-centered actions (38). Roberts' position also relies partly on the scientific discourses that seem to confirm that entheogenic experiences can be understood as mystical experiences. These scientific discourses, in turn, gain further credence in light of the decades of scholarship coming out of humanistic psychology where the transformative power of mystical experiences, including their ability to foster a change in values, has been noted by several thinkers. Roberts also uses a number of studies to show that there may be a possible correlation between psychedelic drug use and a higher threshold of empathy, showing that psychedelic drugs may be used as tools for reshaping one's ethics (53).

Roberts' position has ethical import as well, despite the fact that some may hold values and ethics to be exclusive from one another; the former dealing with highly regarded principles, and the latter dealing with guidelines for actions. However, if we understand that ethics is concerned with action-guiding principles for behavior, then one's ethic must be based on the values one holds. In arguing from Maslowian grounds, Roberts claims that experiences of self-transcendence—including psychedelic experiences—can lead one to the higher virtues that Maslow had put forth in his amended hierarchy of needs model of human motivation. These higher virtues include actions geared towards altruistic values and away from egocentric values, which in turn begin to be guidelines for action which takes us into the domain of ethics.

The findings offered in this investigation on the ethical import of entheogens dovetail with Roberts' own theory of how entheogens can affect values; however, this work departs from Roberts' in providing the phenomenological details of these experiences, and by providing a different framework to understand their ethical import. I believe that the approach I have used for understanding these experiences is complementary that of Roberts, however, I have also offered

strikingly different data which I have analyzed in a new fashion. Further, while my findings nevertheless seem to support his ultimate conclusions, they can be seen as synergistically filling in some of the lacunae presented in his investigation by providing user-reported phenomenological accounts which echo many of Roberts' remarks.

A second theory which has been put forth regarding the relationship between psychedelics and ethics has been proposed by psychiatrist and philosopher Claudio Naranjo (2017). Naranjo has argued—like Wilhelm Reich—that humans are intrinsically good, and that right ethical action naturally stems from a healthy mind. For Naranjo, right action, or virtue, is the natural, flourishing state of being for humans; this state of being, however, becomes corrupted when coerced, as in the case of patriarchal rule. Naranjo maintains Freud's notion that civilization has had a corrupting effect on man by imposing morality on him, and that these moral impositions have been the result of millennia of patriarchy. In echoing the words of Laozi, Naranjo has claimed that, "original harmony was lost when laws were created." Like McKenna, Naranjo believes that with the introduction of agriculture, the structure of societies and households became modeled under patriarchal forms of rule. The result of this, according to Naranjo, has created the conditions for paternalism with regard to morality, and Naranjo understands this as a top-down, normative imposition of ethics unto society. For Naranjo, this institution of what constitutes good and evil represents the dominance of the rational intellect over the animal instinct, and also reveals a lack of trust in organismic wisdom (Naranjo 2017).

Naranjo's approach is largely psychological, claiming that when human civilizations became warlike for survival purposes, these circumstances—citing Freud—created a universal neurosis in man (the ego), which in turn generated an inner critic (the superego) that criminalized the inner child and instinctual drives (the id). This situation, according to Naranjo, marked a turn against our animal nature and against our central pleasure drive, resulting in a coercion of morality and a new breed of self-aggression. Naranjo firmly believes that psychedelic experiences

can purge the mind's neurotic tendency to be enthralled in thought; a tendency which is the culprit that leads humans to mistaking the ego and its counterparts—the super ego and the id—for real things. Psychedelics, for Naranjo, return the mind to “feeling” and away from analytical thinking, and that this pureness of understanding is what is key to goodness. Naranjo's position seems largely Buddhist in nature—a position which will be revisited in Chapter 4—in claiming that the belief in the unreality of the ego is what leads to virtuous action. In relating Naranjo's ethical proposition to the findings cited here, I believe that he, too, like Roberts, provides a central component to understanding the ethical import of entheogens—namely, that the proper basis for practical action stems from a negation of self. In other words, once the mind is purged of the limiting conception of self it has come to embrace, a new possibility arises based on this understanding, leading to actions that are reflective of this newfound, expanded sense of self.

Throughout this chapter, the prismatic nature of entheogens has been made apparent through the spectrum of discourses provided. The conclusions that I draw from these discourses are that entheogens, those who use them, and the experiences they attain by way of consuming them, cannot be properly understood without considering these diverse perspectives. The discourses on the ceremonial use of the classic psychedelics has shown that some cultures throughout history, and up to the present day, have used and revered entheogens, often praising them for their ability to provoke ecstatic experiences. In these cultures, entheogens have also played a central role in identity formation and have often been reflected in the worldview of the culture. The early research on psychedelic substances brought these entheogens out of their native contexts, isolated and synthesized their active ingredients, and studied the effects of these entheogens on non-native users in non-traditional contexts. This early research ultimately led to the widespread use of entheogens in non-native contexts in the United States and Europe, creating new forms of ceremonial usage of these entheogens.

Around this time, studies on mystical and ecstatic experiences were emerging from psychology, where several thinkers were proposing the notion that these experiences had transformative effects on those who had them in terms of positive changes in behaviors and values. Due to these reasons, several thinkers began to create a link between psychedelic experiences—marked by their ecstatic and transformative effects—and mystical or religious experiences given the similarities between their phenomenology and effects. Contemporary scientific researchers have taken this psychedelic-mystical link to entirely new levels, and it seems undisputable at this point not to consider these entheogenic substances as having therapeutic, mystical, and religious implications.

In short, these discourses show that entheogens have been used in medicinal, ceremonial, and recreational contexts throughout time, and that current scientific studies are confirming the correlation between entheogens and mysticism, as well as the potential value they hold for therapeutic purposes. Also, these discourses supply an interdisciplinary perspective on the fact that entheogens can lead to a transformation of users' values and behaviors, and these cases show that entheogenic experiences have ethical import. With this information set forth, it is incumbent upon any investigation—including this one—to take these various discourses into account before attempting to analyze the phenomenology of modern day users' entheogenic experiences. While current entheogen users may not be aware of any of this material themselves, for us as critical thinkers, we must integrate these discourses into our understanding of entheogenic experiences to have a fuller picture of why users may be reporting certain themes or ideas from their experiences.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Considerations

Moving on from the various discourses on entheogens, the remainder of this project will be dedicated to investigating into the phenomenology of the entheogenic experience reports I have gathered and analyzing them for their ethical import. In this vein, I use this chapter to consider the work of several scholars whose theories I either use, or modify, to argue that entheogenic experiences have ethical implications. The first theoretical framework I adopt is drawn from Mircea Eliade (2005), whose comments on “traditional man’s” ability to cyclically regenerate himself—and thereby become free from historical constructs and fixed identities—I use and apply to current entheogen users. The second theoretical lens I draw upon is from Viktor E. Frankl’s (2006) work, where Frankl contends that there is a space between external stimuli and our response to them in which humans can create new meaning. I argue that entheogen users enter such a meaning-making space during their entheogenic experiences. By using both Frank and Eliade’s theories, I argue that entheogenic experiences create meaning-making spaces in which profound new insights with philosophical importance can be made or regenerated.

The next thinker whose work I use is Ralph Metzner (2010), who has argued that throughout all ages, certain recurring metaphors have emerged across the various descriptions of ecstatic experiences. Metzner offers 12 metaphors of transformation in his work—while acknowledging that there are likely many more—and maintains that these metaphors are symbolic of psycho-spiritual transformation. For Metzner, these metaphors signal that a restructuring of the psyche has occurred for the individual who has undergone an ecstatic experience (17). I combine Metzner’s remarks with the two previous theoretical understandings—namely, that for users, entheogenic experiences create meaning-making spaces which are meaningfully regenerative—to show that in entheogenic experience reports, users often use these metaphors of transformation in describing their experiences. These transformative metaphors may

be applied to any aspect of entheogenic experiences, including the phenomenology of the experience as well as the processing stages thereafter.

Building on the aforementioned ideas attributed to Eliade, Frankl, and Metzner, I use several theoretical understandings developed by William James, including his typology of mysticism, his remarks on conversion, as well one aspect of his theory of religion which deals with live options. Despite using James' remarks on mystical and conversion experiences and applying them to the entheogenic reports shown here, the theory developed by James (1896) which holds the most importance for this investigation is an aspect drawn from his theory of religion known as a live option. In combining James' notion of live options with the theories from the previous thinkers, I argue that the transformations which users report experiencing either during, or as a result of, entheogenic experiences create new live options for these individuals. Based on this idea, it can be said that new live options arise when users describe some aspect of their experience in which they gained a new metaphysical, ontological, or—most importantly for this study—ethical understanding. The elements contained in James' remarks on conversion and mystical experiences will only serve to add layers of qualitative meaning to these newfound insights—such as noetic quality or positive mood—and to add depth to these experiences and the live options they provoke. In most of the entheogenic experience reports provided in this investigation, one of the central live options that is frequently reported is the fundamental notion of interconnectedness between all things, and this basic idea implies certain ethical dispositions and commitments.

In sum, by using the combination of these theories, I argue in Chapter 4 that: (1) Entheogenic experiences can create making-making spaces for users within which (2) meaning can be regenerated and (3) positive transformations can occur; (4) these new meanings can potentially create new live options for a person, (5) including options which have ethical import.

Mircea Eliade – Self-Identity and the Regeneration of Meaning

Thus, for traditional man, modern man affords the type neither of a free being nor of a creator of history. On the contrary, the man of the archaic civilizations can be proud of his mode of existence, which allows him to be free and to create. He is free to be no longer what he was, free to annul his own history through periodic abolition of time and collective regeneration. This freedom in respect to his own history—which, for the modern, is not only irreversible but constitutes human existence—cannot be claimed by the man who wills to be historical (Eliade 2005, 157).

Mircea Eliade (2005) presents the idea that traditional peoples had the ability to regenerate themselves cyclically, and that this allowed them not only to live in the present moment, but to also live in a perpetual state of becoming. In remarking on these regenerative cycles, Eliade believed that traditional societies felt themselves as being inextricable from the whole of creation, including its natural lunar, seasonal, and biorhythmic patterns. Time, for traditional man, was not fixed as it is for modern man—it was constantly regenerated, giving rise to ever more novel possibilities at every moment. As Eliade states, “Like the mystic, the religious man in general, primitive man lives in a continual present.” (Eliade 2005, 86). These combined notions gave rise to what Eliade ultimately titled his book, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, which referred to this process of continual regeneration with which archaic peoples were in tune.

Notwithstanding these remarks, Eliade held that even in light of these instances of cyclic-renewal, traditional peoples still remained locked into their cultural identities and potentialities. Insofar as this is the case, I wish to modify Eliade’s notion of cyclic-regeneration when applying it to entheogen users and entheogenic experiences since newfound insights or intuitive understandings which reach beyond cultural limitations are often reported by users. Further, individuals often report experiencing or feeling as if they had undergone some transformation in which they were reborn or regenerated in some positive way. To my mind, this means that entheogenic experiences are meaningfully regenerative, just in the way that biorhythmic rituals

were for traditional peoples; however, entheogenic experiences do not seem to confine those who experience them into culturally-validated identities.

A second way in which I use Eliade's remarks on traditional man's cyclic regeneration is by applying them to the entheogenic reports found in this study, given that psychonauts tend to report gaining insight into worldviews where the unreality of linear time becomes evident. Entheogen users often report experiencing that reality only exists in the present moment, while they also seem to describe reality in organic or process-oriented terms. These ideas are fundamentally at odds with worldviews which are substance-based, and hence ego-affirming, with fixed essences and potentialities. Although Eliade himself believed that drugs were decadent practices in indigenous contexts, this inquiry shows that entheogenic experiences may not only contribute to the formation of a person's worldview, as seen in the aforementioned cases of the Tukano Indians and other indigenous groups, but may also lead to the formation of a new worldview that has regenerated ethical commitments. In light of the fact that current entheogen users seem to gain similar insights to those that traditional societies gained by way of their cyclic-regeneration practices—namely, the illusoriness of history, linear time, and the unreality of a world which contains beings with fixed identities—it can be said that entheogenic experiences are meaningfully regenerative and can lead to the formation of new ethical dispositions.

Viktor E. Frankl – Entheogens and Meaning-Making Spaces

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom (Frankl 2006).

In *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor E. Frankl (2006) gives a detailed account of the experiences he endured during his imprisonment in a Nazi concentration camp. Frankl recalls that it was these experiences which led him to develop the idea that meaning-making is the primal motivating force for human beings. For Frankl, humans are not driven by blind lust, nor by the pursuit of

power, but by the quest for meaning. Frankl came to these conclusions after witnessing countless innocent victims lose their lives in the concentration camps, and Frankl found that those who died first were, more often than not, also those who had lost all hope and ability to make meaning of their circumstance.

Despite the overall meaninglessness of the suffering caused by the Nazi regime, some survivors, such as Frankl, managed to keep hope; a point Frankl believes is what made the hopeful's suffering worth enduring, and thus gave them reason to go on living. He writes, "life holds a potential meaning under any conditions, even the most miserable ones" (2006, xiv). Ultimately, Frankl contended that one should not strive after the meaning of life in the abstract sense, but instead on the meaning of a person's life at any given moment, for each situation presents one with a mass of potentialities and one must incessantly choose—thus, one is condemned to freedom.

Frankl's remarks also resonate with Eliade's insofar as both claim that there is the possibility for humans to meaningfully regenerate themselves. Eliade seemed to believe that this was because of archaic man's intimate relationship with nature, however, Frankl seems to think that this regeneration of meaning can happen at any moment, for, "Man is *not* fully conditioned and determined but rather determines himself whether he gives in to conditions or stands up to them. In other words, man is ultimately self determining. Man does not simply exist but always decides what his existence will be, what he will become in the next moment" (Frankl 2006, 131). Frankl advocates the idea that humans are driven to create meaning, which I believe is central to what brings people to use entheogens in the United States today. Frankl also highlights the fact that there is a space between what happens to us, and our reaction to it, and that it is in this space that we are able to create new meaning. Throughout the various discourses which have been written on entheogens (see Chapter 1), it has already been well established that entheogenic experiences are significantly meaningful—and as we shall see, meaningfully regenerative—

according to the entheogen users who have had them, and I argue that this is because entheogenic experiences create spaces in which new meaning can be made. While Frankl was undoubtedly referring to everyday life experiences, I believe that the recent scientific studies on entheogens, in combination with the ethnographic reports detailed in this investigation, provide adequate support for the argument that entheogenic experiences present people with spaces in which they can meaningfully regenerate themselves. By building this foundation from which to understand entheogenic experiences, I can then argue that these experiences may result in a positive transformation for those who partake in them and can ultimately catalyze a fundamental change in their ethical commitments.

Ralph Metzner – Metaphoric Language and Symbols of Transformation

Consciousness—defined as the context, or field, in which thoughts, feelings, perceptions, sensations, images, impulses, intentions, and the like exist and occur—is transformed when any of the following occur: changes in thinking, worldview, beliefs, feelings, motives, impulses, and values, as well as altered perceptions, such as heightened seeing (clairvoyance) and sensing (clairsentience) (Metzner 2010, 18).

In *The Unfolding Self: Varieties of Transformative Experience*, Ralph Metzner explores twelve metaphoric notions that he believes seem to recur in all descriptions of psychospiritual transformation; transformation here referring to an experience which radically restructures the content of one's psyche (17). While Metzner acknowledges that there are hundreds of methods that can be used to bring this transformation about, and that these experiences may be described in myriad ways, he still maintains that these transformative episodes are often interpreted and described in similar metaphoric structures. According to Metzner, these metaphors of transformation—what others have called primordial images or archetypes—are drawn from a natural universal language that humans have always and will always recognize. Metzner holds that even the metaphors he employs in his book may themselves potentially catalyze inner transformations in his readers as they begin to interpret these metaphors through their own life

experiences. Some of the metaphoric language used to describe these transformative experiences are: awakening, purification, removing the veil, returning to the source, reconciliation with the inner enemy, death and rebirth, and from fragmentation to wholeness.

The metaphors provided by Metzner prove invaluable to this study insofar as these metaphoric structures also frequently appear in reports of entheogenic experiences—a point Metzner stresses himself (xii). Both the phenomenological and processing stages of entheogenic experiences are often described by entheogen users in ways that seem to fit many of the metaphoric structures Metzner has developed, especially since entheogen users often seem to find themselves unable to fully express either the content or the meaningfulness of the experience in regular language. More than anything, what these metaphors do is allow both those who have had entheogenic experiences, and those like myself who investigate them, the language to speak about these experiences and describe their phenomenological content in a manner that does not reduce them to the truth-value of mere propositional statements. By using metaphors, Metzner, and virtually everyone else who has written on mystical, religious, and entheogenic experiences, has stated in one way or another that language is insufficient for describing these experiences; hence, the frequent employment of metaphor to evoke an idea in the reader's imagination. In Chapter 4, I apply several of Metzner's metaphors of transformation to the phenomenological reports given in Chapter 3, and argue that the radical restructuring of the psyche which is represented by these metaphors serves as a confirmation that some new or regenerated metaphysical, ontological, or ethical insight has resulted for the user by way of the experience.

William James – Mysticism, Conversion, and “New Live Options”

Looking back on my own experiences, they all converge towards a kind of insight to which I cannot help ascribing some metaphysical significance...It as if the opposites of the world, whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles, were melted into unity. Not only do they, as contrasted species, belong to one and the same genus, but of one of the species, the nobler and better one, is itself the genus, and soaks up and absorbs its opposite into

itself... Those who have ears to hear, let them hear; to me, the living sense of its reality only comes in the artificial mystical state of mind (James 2004, 336).

William James' philosophy of religion has been described as both a pragmatic realism and as a radical empiricism in the sense that, for James, experience seems to hold ultimate authority. In matters concerning philosophy, religion, and science, James believed that these must yield to experience first, and that a good theory is just one that is useful in solving relevant problems. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, James (2004) argued that modified states of consciousness must be taken into account in any picture of reality our theories put forth if we are ever to come close to getting a full understanding of the universe. However, the problem is that that we still do not know how to regard and integrate modified states of consciousness into our paradigms since they seem to elude all possibility of accurate description (336). Nevertheless, James argued, we have no *a priori* reason to exclude any experiences from our inquiries just because we do not entirely understand them.

Throughout his scholarship on religious experience, James (2004) has developed a typology of mysticism, some of the salient features of conversion experience, and has also established a pragmatic motive for religious belief based on the notion of a genuine option. I apply James' remarks on mystical and conversion experiences to entheogenic experiences insofar as many of the entheogenic reports shown in this investigation have similar characteristics to those experiences outlined by James. While I use several of these features of mystical and conversion experiences to help analyze entheogenic experience, these similarities only add qualitative layers of meaning to the experience and do not seem to be what solely makes an entheogenic experience have ethical import. By using James' (1896) remarks on genuine and live options, I argue that the transformations which seem to occur during entheogenic experiences create new options for an individual which may potentially include new ethical commitments.

In extending James' (2004) remarks to entheogenic experiences, I contend that we must also take these types of experiences into account in our models and understandings of the universe, given that we have no *a priori* reason as to why we should not. Gaining further knowledge about entheogens and the experiences they produce are also important in terms of how individuals make meaning in their lives, and how they experience the world. I believe that if experience is what holds ultimate authority—as James contends—then entheogenic experiences are vitally important to study in terms of how entheogen users understand and integrate them into their lives, identities, and worldviews.

Mysticism

As mystical experiences are as much direct experiences of reality as many of our sensational experiences of reality are, and as the beliefs that the mystic holds on the basis of these experiences are therefore as “rational” as ours are, the mystic is at least allowed to be convinced by these experiences, and to hold the beliefs that he or she has formed on the basis of them true (Rydenfelt, Pihlström, et al. 2013, 64-65).

In his treatment of mysticism, James puts forth the idea that an experience can sufficiently qualify as mystical if it contains at least the four following characteristics: Ineffability, Noetic Quality, Transiency, and Passivity (329). *Ineffability* refers to the negative quality of the experience; negative here meaning that it seems to escape any conceivable, or positive, attribution that can be made to it. *Noetic quality* refers to the fact that mystical states seem to impart knowledge to those who have them; James claims that, “They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time” (329). *Transiency* means that the mystical state cannot be sustained indefinitely, and that upon returning to ordinary awareness, memories of the experience are vague and rare. When these memories do recur, however, they afford the person the opportunity to continuously attribute greater meaning to them, and thus further develop their significance throughout their

lives. James held that despite being largely forgotten, traces of their content always remain, and that the profound quality of them modify the inner life of the person between their recurrences. The last of these criteria put forth by James, *passivity*, refers to the sense in which the mystic might feel as if they were being controlled by an outside force, or a superior power, as if her “will were in abeyance” (330).

All four aspects of James’ typology of mysticism seem aptly suited to describing several features of entheogenic experiences as well. The first, *ineffability*, is often one of the most common elements of entheogenic experiences as users incessantly claim that their experience is indescribable. With regard to *noetic quality*, many psychedelic thinkers and psychonauts alike have claimed that this is arguably the most poignant feature of entheogenic experiences. This is because there is a sense of being imparted profound wisdom during this experience, leading some thinkers to refer to them in their traditional contexts as “plant teachers” (Tupper 2002). James’ notion of *transiency* can be applied to entheogenic experiences as well, since they too are transient and seem to present the same issues regarding the recollection of the experience. Moreover, James’ notion that these recollections present the opportunity for further integration by a person once evoked in one’s memory seems to parallel with entheogenic experiences as well. These remarks also lend credence to the “meaningfully regenerative” attribution I have made to entheogenic experiences, and also seem to resonate with both Metzner and Eliade’s remarks on transformation and regeneration.

In light of *passivity*, those who undergo entheogenic experiences often feel themselves being taken or swept under the control of a higher power that is guiding the experience, and in many cases, this experience is described as a divine entity, an animal, plant, or spirit guide, one’s ancestors, or even God. What these various elements present for this investigation on the ethical import of entheogens is that they add qualitative layers of meaning to the entheogenic experience reports found used in this study. Since what is central to my argument from James is the notion of

a live option, these aspects of mysticism put forth by James—noetic quality, ineffability, passivity, and transiency—only serve to further solidify the notion that a new ethical understanding has taken place, which may be experienced by the user as being imparted from another being, or by having their consciousness merged with that of another being or group of entities.

Conversion

In this lecture we have to finish the subject of Conversion, considering at first those striking instantaneous instances of which Saint Paul's is the most eminent, and in which, often amid tremendous emotional excitement or perturbation of the senses, a complete division is established in the twinkling of an eye between the old life and the new (James 2004, 194).

In his enumeration of the affective experience he refers to as “conversion”—which is but one type of religious experience—James claims that it should be called a “state of assurance,” and that its first central characteristic is “...the loss of all worry, the sense that all is ultimately well with one, the peace, the harmony, the *willingness to be*...A passion of willingness, of acquiescence, of admiration, is the glowing centre of this state of mind” (219). The second feature of conversion is the sense of gaining insight into life's mysteries, or perceiving truths that had been unbeknownst to one before. The third aspect of this state of assurance is that one's perception of the world seems to be reinvigorated or reenchanted as one perceives all things with a beatific newness. Finally, happiness and ecstasy are what James refers to as the final and most characteristic of all aspects of a “conversion crisis” (225).

In relating a “conversion crisis” or “state of assurance” to entheogenic experiences, it seems that many of these elements overlap with James' typology of mysticism which we have already visited, however, the conversion crisis provides more detail into these phenomenological categories. Also, James' description of assurance states shows that they are both *meaningfully regenerative* and *positively transformative*—two attributes which I argue are characteristic of

entheogenic experiences as well. James' remarks on conversion lend themselves to helping understand the processing or rationalization after-stages of entheogenic experiences since the content of the experience itself seems to reliably regenerate a person with a "willingness to be," a glowing memory of admiration, and a renewed perception of the world. In commenting on James' remarks on conversion experiences, Metzner (2010) has claimed that the conversion process is useful in describing "not only a person's change from one religion to another but also the process of attaining a sense of the religious dimension of life, a sense of the sacred" (26). In Metzner's hands, conversions may signal that the experience was transformative for the individual, and thus serve as another way to describe the shift in meaning that has occurred that can potentially have ethical implications.

New Live Options

...In all important transactions of life we have to take a leap in the dark...If we decide to leave the riddles unanswered, that is a choice. If we waver in our answer, that, too, is a choice; but whatever choice we make, we make it at our peril. If a man chooses to turn his back altogether on God and the future, no one can prevent him. No one can show beyond reasonable doubt that *he* is mistaken. Each must act as he thinks best, and if he is wrong so much the worse for him. We stand on a mountain pass in the midst of whirling snow and blinding mist, through which we get glimpses now and then of paths which may be deceptive. If we stand still we shall be frozen to death. If we take the wrong road we shall be dashed to pieces. We do not certainly know whether there is any right one. What must we do? "Be strong and of a good courage."...Act for the best, hope for the best, and take what comes...If death ends all we cannot meet death better. (Stephen 1874, 347).

In his famous essay, "The Will to Believe," William James (1896) provides a gloss on his pragmatic theory of religion by presenting the idea of a *genuine option*. A genuine option, for James, refers to a situation in which there are two competing hypotheses that are live, momentous, and forced—as opposed to dead, trivial, and avoidable. A *live* option is one in which the possibility is real for a person; it refers to something a person can practically use according to their lifestyle. James illustrates this with a passage,

Let us give the name of *hypothesis* to anything that may be proposed to our belief; and just as the electricians speak of live and dead wires, let us speak of any hypothesis as either *live* or *dead*. A live hypothesis is one which appeals as a real possibility to him to whom it is proposed. If I ask you to believe in the Mahdi, the notion makes no electric connection with your nature, it refuses to scintillate with any credibility at all. As an hypothesis it is completely dead. To an Arab, however (even if he be not one of the Madhi's followers), the hypothesis is among the mind's possibilities; it is alive. This shows that deadness and liveness in an hypothesis are not intrinsic properties, but relations to the individual thinker. They are measured by his willingness to act. The maximum of liveness in an hypothesis means willingness to act irrevocably. Practically, that means belief; but there is some believing tendency wherever there is a willingness to act at all (328-329).

A live option, therefore, is relative to each thinker, and refers to a belief that they already hold or might hold, from which they will have a willingness to act out in their lives, given the practical usefulness of maintaining this belief. An option is *momentous* if it presents one with a significant and unique opportunity in which one's decision—either to take or leave the opportunity—will be irreversible. A *forced* option means that deciding either for or against the hypothesis is unavoidable, and therefore, is a situation in which one does not have the possibility of not choosing, for even that constitutes a choice with its own predestined repercussions. Ultimately, James believed that there was both a momentous and practical difference in the life informed by “religious” beliefs versus the one that was not, and that the decision to maintain religious beliefs was a forced wager since deciding between these two options was unavoidable. In such a situation, James believed that rationality cannot make the decision one way or the other based on logic or evidence, so, one ought to follow what they feel to be true, even at the expense of potentially falling into error.

In combining these elements back into the notion of a genuine option and applying them to entheogenic experiences, it seems that entheogenic experiences qualify as genuine options, and they can also potentially create new genuine options for those who experience them. Since entheogen users describe gaining new insights during their experiences that we can understand as having philosophical import, this shows that entheogenic experiences can provoke new genuine

options for a person. In the first sense, entheogenic experiences qualify as genuine options since they are live options, given that they might give a person reason to act in a new way that they find practically useful in their lives. This new live option itself may have been gained by an entheogen user through an entheogenic experience, or because it provided them with a new insight which gave them more of a willingness to act out in their lives. In this case, both the live option and the genuine option at large seem to be novel discoveries which can be traced back to a person's rationalization of their entheogenic experiences.

Entheogenic experiences also qualify as genuine options because they are also momentous and forced options. Since the meaningfulness that one attributes to an entheogenic experience itself, or the recurring traces of it, can potentially be entirely neglected and forgotten, they present a person with only short windows of opportunity to consciously integrate them by attributing meaning to the experience before it becomes buried in the abyss of the unconscious. The way one chooses to interpret the content of their entheogenic experience is a fleeting decision itself since it might be forgotten, so entheogenic experiences at large present those who experience them with a momentous decision between options that is irreversible. Finally, entheogenic experiences seem to qualify as genuine options because they are also forced options in the same way that religious belief is for James. Like in the case of religion, belief in God is a forced wager since choosing to believe, choosing not to believe, or choosing not to decide are all decisions with different practical outcomes; in the same way, choosing to believe in the truths imparted to one during an entheogenic experience are forced, since the choice to affirm, deny, or ignore the insights gleaned during the experience will each have an impact on the way each individual's life plays out and may potentially also have ethical import.

In applying the notion of genuine options to entheogenic experiences, I believe that entheogenic experiences show that they can provoke new live options, and also that they are themselves momentous and forced in the sense that James' meant these terms. In terms of which

of these aspects has ethical import, I wish to use James' notion of a live option over a genuine option insofar as live options seem to create new philosophical insights—including ontological, metaphysical, and ethical—which had previously been “dead” for a user, or which are entirely new for them altogether. While I believe that entheogenic experiences also qualify as genuine options for the aforementioned reasons, they also seem to create new live options first, which can later be understood as genuine options.

Chapter 3

The Phenomenology of Entheogenic Experiences

The mystic cannot wholly do without symbol and image, inadequate to his vision though they must always be: for his experience must be expressed if it is to be communicated, and its actuality is inexpressible except in some hint or parallel which will stimulate the dormant intuition of the reader (Underhill 2002, 79).

In transitioning from the theoretical considerations supplied in the previous chapter to the phenomenology of entheogenic experiences with ethical import, it must be made clear from the outset that this is not an attempt to provide an exhaustive account of entheogenic experiences in any manner, for this endeavor would inevitably normalize these experiences and distort their seemingly infinite potential for creating phenomenological content beyond accurate description. In what follows, I will first provide some comments on several “elements of influence” that can impact the content of an entheogenic experience so that the reader can understand the level of complexity involved in any given experience. In this chapter, I will first detail some of the elements of influence which inevitably impact the phenomenological content of entheogenic experiences, and then move on to present the 30 individual entheogenic experience reports which have been collected due to the fact that they have ethical implications.

Elements of Influence

Of the various elements which can influence an entheogenic experience, the first I refer to here are known as set, setting, and substance. In shortly previewing these elements, the set refers to a person’s psychological makeup, the setting refers to the place and context in which the entheogen is taken, and the substance refers to what entheogen is actually consumed, including its potency and properties. Aside from these elements of influence, there are other factors which can influence an entheogenic experience, including purpose, expectation, preparation and intention. For the phenomenological reports provided in this section, I am the first to admit that I was

unable to gather all of the elements of influence that went into these entheogenic experiences given the nature of my research methods.

A second point that I would like mention is that the phenomenological reports cited here have also been self-selected in terms of whether they seem to have potential ethical implications. What I mean by this is that aside from my in-person interviews, the experiential reports I have gathered from online testimonies have been carefully selected based on whether the experiences themselves, or the rationalization of them thereafter, had potential import in terms of changing a person's ethical disposition. While it can be argued that this self-selective process of only including entheogenic experiences with ethical import undermines the logic of my entire project, I believe that countless other entheogenic experience reports can render the same results. Although acknowledging that I was unable to provide all of the elements which have influenced the outcome of my findings, I still believe that my research presents convincing material in support of the ethical import of entheogens which can also be replicated in future studies.

Set, Setting, and Substance

During their research years at Harvard, Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner and Richard Alpert pioneered one of the best frameworks that is still used to influence and understand entheogenic experiences today, namely, the theory of *set*, *setting*, and *substance*, and the idea that there should always be a "sitter" or "guide" to accompany an unexperienced psychonaut that is undergoing an entheogenic experience for the first time (Ott 1993, 138). Leary and his team claimed that entheogenic experiences are multivalent affairs that involve a complex admixture of these elements of influence. Investigating these elements, then, is something integral to understanding how an entheogenic experience might play out for a person. The *set* refers to a person's overall psychological makeup; it is constituted of the distinguishing personality traits that make a particular person who they are, including their most fundamental assumptions about reality, as

well as their innermost feelings, fears, and desires. The set is the sum of character traits that makes a person who they are or who they perceive themselves to be. The psychological makeup of an individual is thought to be an indispensable element in interpreting the phenomena that appear in any given individual's entheogenic experience.

Setting refers to the actual location, the physical and energetic space within which the entheogenic experience is taking place. As I have already noted, the term entheogen inherently denotes spiritual connotations, and this may be reflected in the setting—including the practices which may be incorporated—where the entheogenic substance is consumed. Elements within the setting may alter an entheogenic experience drastically, including how many participants are involved and to what extent a person feels comfortable around these individuals. External factors can also cause variances in entheogenic experiences, such as what type of music is being played, if any at all, as well as sensory perceptions such as the level of lighting or scents such as incense.

Other setting influences that may also alter the experience in one way or another may include the time of day, the weather, and exposure to plants and animals. Several of the reports cited here show that these entheogens were not consumed in a reverential manner or in a sacred space, which some might claim would mean that they must be using “psychedelics” in a “recreational” sense. I contend, however, that even in such cases, the users themselves have built up their own “tradition” of a sort, in which they are performing their own ceremonial chemistry. Moreover, even when these substances seem to be taken in a “recreational” sense, they often still appear to grant knowledge and insights that are considered revelatory or divine in nature by those who experience them.

Finally, *substance* refers to the actual psychoactive compounds that are consumed during this practice. Entheogenic substances themselves are not only seasonally and geographically variant, but the potency of the active chemicals found in entheogens can also vary between species and even within different parts of the substance if it is plant or fungi-based. This, in

combination with the fact that each human being has a unique physiological makeup, show that the chemical exchange which occurs during an entheogenic experience may have varying effects on individuals depending on the uniqueness of a person's physiology.

Expectation, Preparation, Intention, and Purpose

It is well-known that the expectations, intentions, purposes, and amount of preparation that a person brings to any life experience will inevitably affect their subsequent experience in some manner; in the case of entheogenic experiences, this still holds true, and beyond the elements of influence known as set, setting, and substance, entheogenic experiences are also influenced by expectation, preparation, intention, and purpose. The expectations a person has before having an entheogenic experience are a vital component to understanding the phenomenology of the experience, and thus may mean the difference between a person who has a meaningfully regenerative experience and one who does not.

Preparation may consist of maintaining a special diet for a period of time or fasting before the consumption of the entheogenic substance, or it may also involve other preparatory rites such as meditation, pilgrimage, or prayer. The intentionality of a person who will undergo an entheogenic experience also plays a key role in how their entheogenic experience might unfold, and many thinkers such as Dennis McKenna have promulgated the idea that one should always have an intention before having an entheogenic experience—simply meaning that one should have some clear reason for provoking the experience. The purpose one has for engaging in this ceremonial chemistry is also crucial to know, since it too can affect the phenomenological content of an experience. The purpose for which one induces an entheogenic experience can also affect how a particular experience plays out, and one's purpose is linked to one's intent and expectation.

While the terms preparation, expectation, intention, and purpose clearly have some overlap amongst one another and with the other elements of influence, I believe that these brief

elucidations are still useful in that they provide insight into the subtlety of difference between their meanings. Also, since the majority of these elements of influence have not been gathered for the entheogenic experiences shown here, it should be noted that they have undoubtedly contributed shades of difference to these experiences which I was unable to capture entirely. Nevertheless, I feel that by explaining these elements, the reader can get a fuller picture as to what is involved during an entheogenic experience and the number of factors which can influence any given experience.

Phenomenological Data

A written word is more than a symbol: it is an expression of an idea. To penetrate to its inner meaning is to look into the mind of the man who wrote it. Later generations may give different meanings to that symbol, extending its range of reference far beyond the original intention, but if we can trace the original significance then it should be possible to follow the trail by which it developed. In doing so, it is sometimes possible even to outline the progress of man's mental, technical or religious development (Allegro 1970, 8).

In what follows, I have compiled the ethnographic data which I have gathered throughout this investigation. This includes entheogenic experience reports drawn from both online forums and in-person interviews. All of the reports shown here have been edited by me with the intent to focus on the aspects of the entheogenic experiences which have ethical import. I acknowledge that several invaluable aspects of the experiences are being negated in this process, however, I believe that these experiences are so complex that at this stage, we can only deal with a few variables at once. For this reason, I have chosen to solely investigate two aspects of the entheogenic experience reports provided here which I believe have ethical import; namely, the experience of *interconnectedness*, and experiences which explicitly state some newfound ethical insight.

In the ensuing reports, I have chosen not to catalogue these entheogenic experiences given that I understand all 30 of these reports as comprising their own distinct category of

entheogenic experiences that have ethical import. While acknowledging that there are many other theoretical considerations which can interpret these experience reports for their “mystical,” “religious,” or other prominent elements, I have decided to focus only on whether these experiences have ethical importance primarily. Based on my findings, I emphasize two main aspects of the phenomenological reports which seem to lend themselves the most to the realm of ethics and values. In the following reports, I have placed an *emphasis* on the aspects of the experiences where users describe an experience of interconnectedness with others—including nature or all of existence—either implicitly or explicitly, or on reports which contain overt ethical references made by the individuals themselves. The first 20 entheogenic experience reports (R1-20) have been drawn from the online databases referred to in the Introduction, while the final 10 reports (R21-30) have been drawn from in-person interviews which I have conducted. After supplying these entheogenic reports in this chapter, I move on to Chapter 4 to deliver my analyses of these experiences and argue for their ethical import, including an investigation into several of the other elements which add qualitative layers of meaning to the ethical insights gained by entheogen users.

Experience Reports

Report 1 (R1)

The following report was drawn from the Erowid vaults and was written by a male named Will. This experience happened in 2006, and the piece, “Empathy and Insight,” was published on January 5, 2007. Will reported that he consumed 2.6g of dried psilocybin mushrooms and smoked cannabis.

This was literally liberating for me. I was able to conceive of others as having their own issues that, by and large, did NOT include me. *It was my new sense of empathy, shroom-imparted, that allowed me to make this connection...I was filled with a profound desire to make meaningful connections with other people. I can only describe it as love [...]* The point was extremely introspective for me. I was found myself wrestling with a host of identity-related issues. Who am I?

What is really important in life? I can only describe it as this: I examined the things that I think, my beliefs and values, and broke everything down to its most basic level. I'd take a topic, and, like a child, just keep asking why until there's nothing left [...] *I want to briefly elaborate on the empathy. For me this was the most profound effect. I found that I was very attuned to everyone around me.* I was having a conversation with our sober chaperone, and he said something that I questioned. Even though I did not intend it that way, he interpreted my questioning as an attack on him. I could see it in his face, and his body language, I just knew. I stopped him. I said "hey man, I'm not questioning you. I'm just trying to understand your beliefs. Go ahead, talk, I want to listen." I could see and feel him relax, and this made me happy. We had a great conversation [...] My shroom trip was overwhelmingly a positive one. I found a new love for my fellow man, and was just smacked silly with insight (Will 2007).

Report 2 (R2)

The following report titled "My Journey to Insanity: An Experience with Mushrooms" was drawn from the Erowid vaults and was written by a male with the username SlipKnot420. The experience occurred in 2001, and the date the report was published was March 28, 2005. SlipKnot420 consumed 7 grams of dried psilocybin mushrooms and smoked cannabis during this entheogenic experience.

Suddenly I realized the severity of what was happening. I had always known that I was going to die, that my life on this earth would have to come to an end eventually. But now it was ACTUALLY happening. I felt filled with fear at what was going to happen. It was all ending. Soon my body, the body that had been mine for so many years, would just be lifeless laying in this basement. My life, my memories, my self, would all be gone. I thought about my parents. They would be so upset about it. But by this point it was too late, there was nothing I could do. I couldn't hold on any longer. And I felt myself die. It was scary. My heart wasn't beating in my body anymore, I wasn't breathing, everything was going wrong in my brain.

And then it was over. The frantic panic dissolved into serene calm. Suddenly it wasn't scary anymore. *I became one with the trees, the grass, the world. I felt my soul stretch towards infinity. Feeling myself becoming part of the millions of galaxies existing throughout the universe.* I was seeing visions of the stars and heavens glowing brilliantly. Swirls of universes, the amazing heavens, it was more amazing than any picture of outer space that you could ever see. And I was part of it all again. It had always been like this. This was all so familiar. Something that you forget when you are alive, but once it's over you become a part of everything again and remember. And it was amazing [...] Suddenly a million memories started flooding back to me. But they weren't memories from my life. They were memories of the ultimate truth. The answer to every question.

This is definitely the hardest part of the trip to explain. It was like an incredible never ending déjà vu. The feeling kept getting stronger and stronger as I was soaring through this new spiritual dimension, I didn't have a body to hold me down. Nor did I have a self to hold me together. When you are on the earth existence, its like you have blinders on, making you forget about the truth. But once you leave the earth world, the spiritual understanding comes back to you.

Thinking back to earth life, and remembering how I was always trying to understand what life really was. But I couldn't understand it because I had those blinders on. But now I was back to the place where my soul had initially came from. *My soul was continuously moving faster and faster through this new world, uniting with it. Realizing that it had never been separate from this world. The seperateness was just an illusion.* This was my true home. As I thought back to that earth existence, I realized that eventually I would have to go back there. Once again, I'd have to live another life confused about existence with my blinders on. But it didn't matter, because no matter how long it seemed that I would be in that world, it was really only a tiny amount of time compared to how long I'd stay in the ultimate truth once I died again. And then I would come back to my soul's true "home" and reunite with the ultimate. And then I would have to go back to the earth world again. I would be eternally switching back and forth between these two places. I then realized that I always had been switching back and forth between these two worlds since the creation of the universe. I had lived a million lives and would live a million more (SlipKnot420 2005).

Report 3 (R3)

The following report, titled "Enter the Lifeforce: Ascent to Enlightenment," was drawn from the Erowid vaults and was written by a male with the username Xorkoth. The experience occurred in 2002, when Xorkoth was 18 years of age, and the date the report was published was October 7, 2005. Xorkoth consumed 1.75 grams of dried psilocybin mushrooms and smoked cannabis during this entheogenic experience.

The rush and confusion, in one shockingly abrupt moment, fall away, leaving me in a state which I am about to try to explain, but will most certainly fail horribly in doing. Rainbow colors washed the small dorm room in a myriad of cool tones which constantly flowed across the walls like water [...] The music seemed to be coming from everything at once - *everything was alive and breathing, and had an essence, a life-force, to it that I could feel and see, as real to me as anything had ever been.* I realized that the Truth of the universe, which before had been assaulting my brain with a ferocity that made it difficult to make any sense of it, was now a part of my consciousness, in a way that I'd never experienced before (in fact, it's never happened since, either). *My ego was not crushed or shattered; rather, it was reduced to tiny proportions and pushed aside as a triviality. My entire physical life, eighteen years of experience, became the smallest blip in my*

brain. It was still there, and I still knew myself, but I knew then how much more there is to existence than what we are able to sense.

The most sublime feeling came over me then. *Here was the universe, singing to me its sweet, timeless song, and I embraced it, twining my consciousness around it.* Everything was so... beautiful. I can no longer remember very much of what I did at that point. Physical communication became impossible, and we as a group, when we were able at all, could only communicate in disjointed grunts ('What... uh.. huh?') Instead, however, I began to explore this new state. It was so, SO much more real to me than my life has ever been. I knew, absolutely KNEW, that I had been to this state before, and would return again. It was so ancient, so timeless, that I was humbled to a degree that I have never known before. It occurred to me from somewhere that in this state I was seeing, feeling, and living the absolute Truth of everything. I can't stress enough how incredibly real this was, and still is to me years later. It was so beautiful, so spiritual, that I began to weep with pure joy, because I knew that *my life was forever changed, that by experiencing this, the universe was giving me a rare chance to see it for how it is, rather than the way we humans try to form it to our own liking.* I felt so... blessed, that I was chosen to experience this [...] I let my consciousness expand outward, and what I found was amazing. *I was brushing the life-force of everything I came in contact with.* I flew out the window and across the country, the ocean, in seconds. *I began to brush my thoughts against those of every living thing I saw, and I knew them intimately, no less than I knew my own life.*

As I traveled, I no longer saw the dorm room I was sitting in. I had joined the Life-force, and I was enmeshed within the [entirety] of its being. *My own life was this tiny speck in a sea of collective consciousness* - technically, I knew it was mine, but I honestly didn't care or find it particularly special. This nirvana-like bliss and absolute Truth went on for an indeterminable amount of time. It felt so eternal, and I knew that the reason it seemed so familiar is because it was. It was primordial, and I realized that I had been there before this life, before every other life my particular soul had ever occupied, and that I would be there again, after this one. I watched nature and everything alive in extreme fast-forward, seeing the endless cycle of death and rebirth played out over and over. I saw all of existence covered in a massive flood of green energy, consisting of minute, shining particles. It swept over the land, a spark becoming a new blade of grass, a new caterpillar, a new person. Likewise, bits of life-force emerged from each being at its moment of death, rejoining the endless cloud of life. I lost myself in the ebb and flow of the universe and I was home. I could go on for hours and hours, and have before, about the wonders of my awakening, but truly, words don't exist for what I was experiencing, so hopefully my meager attempt at explanation will do [...] The rest of the trip was much less psychedelic, and in general I just sort of returned to normal after a few more hours. However, I was left with a warm afterglow, and I still felt the bliss for weeks.

More significantly, my life was changed forever as I came to realize the truth of the universe. Although I tripped many more times since then, this first trip has done 95% of the work in transforming my brain and personal philosophies. In the four or so years since that day, I have come from being an unguided atheist,

having already abandoned Christianity for its hypocrisies, to having a definite and very powerful idea of what 'God' really is. It is all of us, and everything else living, ties together in an infinite web that I like to call the Liferforce. I no longer fear death, as I know what it will bring. I will be happy to leave my body behind and join the collective consciousness of Life itself, when the time comes (Xorkoth 2005).

Report 4 (R4)

The following report titled “The Universe is a Fractal,” was drawn from the Erowid vaults and was written by a male with the username Howard. The experience occurred in 2003, and the report was published was June 4, 2009. Howard consumed 3.5 grams of dried psilocybin mushrooms during this entheogenic experience.

Everything I experienced at this time felt deeply significant like it's meaning was deeper than time and space itself and went beyond anything I had ever experienced before, and *it felt like everything I was experiencing then was connected in some way to everything else in the universe in some profound way that I was incapable of understanding*. I had very intense deja-vu, feeling like I had experienced all this before, wondering why I was experiencing it again, and feeling like I would continue to experience it again and again forever, although I conceived that other experiences would come intermittently to these [...] During this time I would shift in and out of reality sometimes feeling as if I was stretching into eternity, like my existence was being pulled across the whole length of the universe and time; I suppose it was a *feeling of transcendence and ego loss*. I would feel as if I suddenly fell through reality and these moments would feel like they lasted forever while I was experiencing them, but just as suddenly I would fall back into reality, with a sharp start like someone waking from a nightmare. The whole time my confusion was paramount and my emotions were very extreme. I believe at times my emotions went beyond any distinction between good or bad. I was crying almost the whole time, snot running down my face [...] During the stretching into eternity feelings I would have a sensation like my concept of reality was zooming in and out, from the microscopic to the universal. At some points it would feel like I was looking at the entirety of existence, and it appeared to be a huge swirling fractal. It was more like a 3 dimensional fractal, but thinking back on it now the closest thing I can equate it to is the 2d fractal images that are popular with psychedelic users. All the 'pixels' (or points) of this fractal were moments in time and they were all swirled together in some huge mess which did not make sense in the linear concept of time, but I had a sense that it all fit in some way that was beyond my comprehension and was deeper and more meaningful than linear time or spatial relationships.

Throughout this whole experience I had an overwhelming feeling that what I was experiencing was more real than anything I had ever experienced before, and to

this day I am convinced that outside my narrow concept of reality, this is what exists and awaits me (when I die for instance). *In fact I had a vague sensation that within the webwork of this fractal were all the lives I had ever lived as well as all the lives I would ever live.* It also seemed like everything that existed was represented within this incomprehensible swirling fractal. I distinctly remember thinking “This is the big picture, this is what everything actually is like.” I talk about it like it looks like something but at this point my sensations were beyond the five senses, there was no distinction between look hear smell taste or feel, all experience was experienced in something like a hypersense, wherein I was acutely aware of every detail, every facet of everything without being limited by seeing it the way we normally sense things (which is always an incomplete picture no matter how accurate). *As I was saying before, I would zoom in and out of this fractal, at times experiencing the individual lives and experiences of the universe as if I was living that life, and had no concept of anything outside of that life, and other times zooming back out to the big picture and experiencing all of it again [...]* As strange, horrifying and incomprehensible [as] it all was, I still feel like I got a whole lot out of it, and I feel as though it was the most complete understanding I have had of reality up to this point. I feel as though many of my spiritual beliefs were confirmed by this experience and I feel as though some deeper understandings of reality were formed, which I do not completely understand or know how to verbalize. At the same time I feel like my respect for and fear of psychedelics and reality were greatly deepened by this experience. I always looked at drugs as being potentially dangerous and not something to play with or to be taken lightly (although I do not always act accordingly) but this experience definitely drives that point home more than any other drug experience I have had (Howard 2009).

Report 5 (R5)

The following report titled “The I of the Storm,” was drawn from the Erowid vaults and was written by a male named Keith Fonda. The experience occurred in 2011, when Keith was 20 years old, and the report was published was October 15, 2011. Keith consumed 15 grams of fresh psilocybin mushrooms and smoked cannabis during this entheogenic experience.

Now that I had mastered the ability to remain comfortable in this environment, my mind began to wander. I felt this incredible wave of calm wash over me, unlike any other feeling of peace I have ever had before. I felt privileged to experience it and wondered how different a place the world would be if others could experience this pure tranquillity. This is where the entire trip seemed to manifest itself in a vision. I saw a giant storm, the shape of a hurricane. The dark, turbulent and electric clouds were representative of people all over the world interacting with each other in a destructive and chaotic manner. No one was working together, but perpetuating this wretched atmospheric system by constantly battling one another in every interaction that took place. *My focus was then drawn to the eye of the storm. Here I saw myself, seated in meditation.* The

eye itself appeared to be a lens which magnified the image of me and of those I interacted with. This centre point emitted the aura of calm that I was experiencing. As I (the eye of the storm) drifted through the tumultuous atmosphere, *I realised I had the ability to project this calm onto the people immediately around me.* If I were able to project this in the right way, their portion of the hurricane would begin to settle into a peaceful state.

This was a profound metaphor. It was my mind showing me that I have full control over my actions, and that *every decision I make will somehow affect people around me, even if neither party realises it. If I can learn to exist in this calm state, and encourage others to join me, the entire hurricane could potentially dissipate. All the chaos in the world would be gone. All the destructive interactions would stop, and the world would be at peace.* This vision is cemented in my mind as a tool for spiritual guidance in my life; only by accepting peace will the world begin to revel in it [...] We both noticed how little worrying about the future helped. Existing in this state where all that mattered was putting more wood on the fire at the right time seemed like we had tapped into some previously unknown primal state [...] *The effects of this trip for me were profound. From this experience I feel I have a greater appreciation for everything natural and peaceful that was beyond anything I could have possibly anticipated.* The important thing here was not the drugs, however. Without meditation I believe this experience would have been relatively tame. It is only through challenging oneself (dealing with the cold) and contemplating in a pure state of receptivity that the most important lessons were learned. The level of openness my mind reached in this trip was not something I had experienced before. It just goes to show that you can have years worth of trip-time, but you may never learn a single thing until you are objective with your experiences, and learn not to run from them (Fonda 2011).

Report 6 (R6)

The following report titled “An Afternoon in the Garden of Eden,” was drawn from the Erowid vaults and was written by a male with the username TreeFox. The experience occurred in 2010, when TreeFox was 21 years old, and the report was published was December 6, 2013. TreeFox consumed 2.5 grams of dried psilocybin mushrooms during this entheogenic experience.

After having glimpsed into the living, breathing soul of the small clearing I felt that it was only right that I submit to it and become an integral part of its existence. I walked towards the center and found a nice patch to sit down on. I don't know how long I staying in that spot, I'm pretty sure it was about two hours, but it felt like so much longer and so much shorter all at the same time. Over whatever time period that was I slowly pushed my legs into the tangle of vines, enmeshing my body with the body of the forest. I lay back and pushed my arms through the vines, covered my face with the leaves. *All of the sudden the clearing and I were one.* We experienced the passing of time together. *I felt like a toddler*

again, intrigued by every little thing to such a degree that I didn't know was possible. My brain was like a sponge, taking in everything. I wasn't tuning out the minute details like I normally would. Everything was perceived with equal importance. Nothing was spectacular; everything just mattered, because it existed.

One of the most revealing parts of my trip came as I lay there, enveloped in the tangle of honeysuckle. I had been feeling small insects crawling over my body the entire time, but this one felt different. I turned my attention to my arm, and saw a spider walking across my arm. *Ordinarily I hate spiders; for whatever reason I have never liked them and will always do whatever is necessary to get them away from me. But in this moment, I just watched the spider. I couldn't justify disrupting him.* I had been doing a lot of thinking, lying there in that clearing, and had come to the realization that right now, this very instant in time and in space, is just the intersection of an infinite number of cycles. *This particular moment in my life cycle was met by the spider at this moment in his life cycle, and we were surrounded by thousands of individual living things that were just carrying out their life cycles. And to interrupt even a single one of those cycles, regardless of how physically small the being was, was to disrupt the natural order of things.* So I let that spider continue on his way, across my arm, and into the dirt. I don't know where he came from, or where he was going, but *it was not my place to alter his path* (TreeFox 2013).

Report 7 (R7)

The following report titled “The Plant with the Answer,” was drawn from the Erowid vaults and was written by a male with the username Joel. The experience occurred in 2002, and the report was published was September 29, 2003. Joel consumed 13 buttons of peyote during this entheogenic experience.

In this vision, I was standing still in a field looking straight ahead at a buffalo. It was probably 50 yards away from me. It moved forward slowly. Probably an inch every minute or so. The buffalo didn't move in position though when it came forward. It just sort of slid towards me. Now [...] The buffalo is literally touching my skin, though i feel nothing, nor do I fall back. It slowly just moves through my body. Gliding right past me (well, through me). A few minutes later, It is totally behind me, and all that I can see is the field and where it meets the horizon. Now to end this vision, nothing could have done it better then what happens next. At the start of the horizon A white light arises. Then it suddenly grows to cover up my whole screen (meaning everything I can see/ everything in front of me) And just like that, I'm out of my visionary state, back in the mountains sitting just like I was before this happened. Except, it was totally bright. That vision I had which seemed to have taken place in about 2 hours had lasted about 10. I looked around at everything I had admired the night before. I say this in the simplest form, though no words can describe how I really felt... *I*

honestly felt ONE with everything around me, everything I saw. And I have felt this way towards everything since this experience. [...] 6 months later I had traveled with friends up to Oklahoma next to lawton, where the Wichita Mountains lie. My friend and I were walking around. Everything was well and peaceful. Next thing we knew, a buffalo had gone wild and started running around at dangerous speeds in a psychotic manner. My friend ran off in fear for his life. But I on the other hand, was reminded of my vision on peyote. The buffalo started running towards me. In a matter of 10 seconds I had re-lived the 10 hour long experience that had occurred. And something in my mind had told me not to move. When I snapped back into reality, the buffalo was standing right in front of me holding completely still. It had gone from carelessly running around to standing completely still in a matter of seconds. My friends was astonished. As was I. That is when I discovered what my vision meant. And up to this date, that is the best experience I have ever encountered. Definitely what i would call a spiritual experience.

I highly recommend the spiritual, medicinal, or religious use of Peyote to anyone seeking enlightenment (Joel 2003).

Report 8 (R8)

The following report titled “A Rookie’s Bumbling Notes,” was drawn from the Erowid vaults and was written by a male with the username Oswald Rabbit. The experience occurred in 2013, and the report was published was January 9, 2017, when Oswald Rabbit was 37 years old. Oswald Rabbit consumed roughly 1.5 shots of an ayahuasca brew during this entheogenic experience.

The kaleidoscope of my childhood has suddenly re-appeared before my eyes. But this time, it's on some serious steroids. And it's much, much faster. Colors, shapes, and animals, all of which move at an autobahn-like pace, whizz by me in a flurry I've seen not even in my wildest dreams.

She likes it. To share such pretty things. That's right. I said SHE. I definitely felt the plant as a strong FEMALE presence. Call it mother earth, the great divine, Shakti, call it whatever you want. Others consistently report the same. It's a she. With a BIG personality [...] Without asking to be, I'm launched into the people in my world. I see my family, I see my friends. I see that the actions we take in life stem from either fear or love. Those two emotions form the core of where we operate and make decisions from. Many actions we take are because we are seeking love, but are often looking for it in the wrong place(s). I've understood this intellectually for most of my life, but now I feel it. A feeling which centers itself in my core. It's a presence I cannot ignore. [...] What does matter is the resulting health benefits. I have clearer skin, happier digestion, deeper sleep, my chronic (inexplicable) wrist problems have all but disappeared, and my gums and teeth are healthier. I feel more grounded and calm, and my desire for sugar in the afternoons is all but gone. More importantly, I feel I've become a more

compassionate, more understanding, more loving person. Everything that has come out of this experience is good. It's good. It's good medicine.

This plant, vine, energy, spirit, whatever you want to call... is many things. She is a teacher. She is a healer. She is an opener of doors. *She has a powerful way of reminding us that we are indeed connected to the earth and each other.* After having worked in the health care system for the past dozen years, I would heartily agree with my friends who dub Ayahuasca a 'medicine'.

She is indeed, in the truest sense of the word.

Of the myriad of feelings I believe she has for us, one in particular stands out for me. She loves us dearly, and wants us to thrive. *She wants us to be healthy, happy and connected with the planet that sustains our life force.* She perceives our species as if we're somewhat stumbling along, moving along a path that we can't quite seem to make our peace with. We're continually trying to get our feet under us. At this point in our evolution, it's somewhat of a struggle. If more of us would listen to what she has to say, maybe with time, we could begin to collectively walk with a little more grace. Hell, with time, we might even begin to run (Rabbit 2017).

Report 9 (R9)

The following report titled “Life Changing Encounter with The Other,” was drawn from the Erowid vaults and was written by a male with the username mindexplorer. The experience occurred in 2010, and the report was published was March 16, 2012 when mindexplorer was 20 years old. Mindexplorer consumed an unknown amount of an ayahuasca brew during this entheogenic experience.

At some point the dogs stopped fighting, and I became calm again. I laid down, and looked through the roof at one of the stars. At this point, I could understand the dogs. *Communication with animals is definitely possible.* That sounds really weird, but *I could literally understand and empathize, on a deep emotional level, the information that the dogs were conveying in their howls.* This sparked profound realizations. *I realized that on a fundamental level, all conscious entities were the same. The only differences between our consciousness, and the consciousness of dogs, were merely different wavelengths within a greater medium.*

Upon this realization, my vision became engulfed with a white light. The light was so bright and beautiful that I began to uncontrollably cry. I knew that I was experiencing the same white light people describe upon death. It was the source of all consciousness. It was omnipresent, eternal, and about as close to a description of God as you can get. *This must be God. I understood how all life, and the universe, was connected by fractals in this hyperdimensional membrane.*

I felt like my soul had connected to an ocean made of light, and tears flowed down my cheeks as I saw the entire universe, galaxies and all.

I could feel the ayahuasca coursing throughout my veins. I noticed that I couldn't feel my hands; my body slowly became numb. I accepted God, in all of his glory, and prayed that I would be safe. There were no entities to guide me this time.

Very soon I had no body. I just was. Complete and utter transcendence. But I could still see, which puzzled me, because I had no eyes. I actually began to float out of my body, and into the room. I could see my life-less body, laying down, with my hands across my chest. I could see the shaman, and my two friends, (Y) was crouched in the fetal position. But there was also this violet light, and it seemed to be coming out of my body; the room was filled with this light. I wasn't scared because I knew that out-of-body experiences are common on ayahuasca, but I never thought it would feel this real. The realization that I had become some sort of hyperdimensional entity freaked me out. What if I never returned to my body? Was I dead? Immediately, I returned back to my body after thinking those thoughts. I was both filled with relief, that I was alive, and regret, that I hadn't gone further into the spirit realm. However, my body was still fairly numb, and raising my hands gave me the sensation of flying through some ethereal realm (mindexplorer 2012).

Report 10 (R10)

The following report titled "Death of Illusions and Fear," was drawn from the Erowid vaults and was written by a female with the username Peyotita. The experience occurred in 2008 when Peyotita was 37 years old and the report was published on April 13, 2017. Peyotita consumed 2 cups of an ayahuasca brew during this entheogenic experience.

I'm so tired, laying down and feeling like I have a gun pointed to my head. I will be shot any second and I have no choice, I know that this is the last second of my life and I have no chance for living. I'm too tired to fight so I'm just laying curled up on the ground and accepting my inescapable death. I'm killed. I see the births tearing apart my body, in one second I died, I gave up everything, my life, fighting. I hear a voice: „finally you gave up, finally you gave up the fight”. So I'm dead. But somehow I exist. I don't know what it is that is me, I don't know what exists, but I am and I'm sure that it wasn't that „me” who came to the ceremony. *I have this strange, unusual feeling, that I always have been and always will be and there is no end of „me”. The way I feel myself now it is different „me”, that I thought was „me”. There is something so certain in this state of being, a feeling of total calmness, peace and security. I know that there's nothing that can threaten me, there's nothing that can kill me because I am forever, always have been and always will be.* The snakes were searching for everything that is not me, that is not real, for something they can get and destroy, something that makes me sick, unhappy, suffer and lost. Letting them kill my

illusionary self made me free from fear and tension in my body – readiness to fight for something I thought was me and as predicted, can be destroyed [...] And the moment I make the decision for living, I hear a beautiful song. Sonia, our curandero’s girlfriend, is singing. That song is like a flower growing in me, very gentle, very beautiful, like stars shining in the darkness of my just-found soul. Lifting me up, calling me to live, waking up for real life. But still I don’t know who I am. Who it is who is being born. When the music stops I see only darkness, no visions, no clues where to go. All I know that what is an essence of me is a sound, a vibration. *I go outside to experience the nature in this new state of being. And all around me also seems to be vibration. Not only the grass and stones are vibrating but also I can see the sound that frogs make as a vibration. The whole world looks like a net of different kinds of waves that interact with each other.* I sit down on the little hill and just look around amazed by what I see. But another disturbing thought comes to my mind: “I didn’t want to admit it to myself, but what I expected from this ceremony was meeting God, some kind of light creature, so I feel little disappointed. Maybe I don’t deserve it...?”

But the Spirit of the plant surprises me. The lake, the grass, the dog, and all this scene with myself in it, appears to me like a form of God, not the form I expected to see- bright figure separated from me, but the form which is all creation – an omnipresent vibration. God is all around me and also inside me of being alive, LIFE. God showed himself totally in a different way than I expected.

Well... now, from the perspective of year and a half... Anxiety is gone, I don’t have any more depressive states, I have a deep feeling of who I really am. There were a few more ceremonies I participated in, but this one was the *most transforming if it comes to fear and anxiety that sometimes had paralyzed me, making my life very difficult* (Peyotita 2017).

Report 11 (R11)

The following report titled “Look Deeper,” was drawn from the Erowid vaults and was written by a male with the username Frog. The experience occurred in 2015 when Frog was 46 years old and the report was published was July 6, 2016. Frog consumed 1 gel tab of LSD during this entheogenic experience.

Then I heard a voice inside my mind. “Look deeper”. I looked around, and looked up to the tree and to the new branches growing up on the higher branches. With my more sensitive vision to colors, I could clearly see how the tree became limbs, which became branches, became smaller branches, and became leaves. And from the older leaves, which were turning a darker green and brown, were younger leaves growing a bright green, at the end of the smaller branches. “Wow”, I said audibly [...] That tree had a grain that went sideways in rings, like fat rolls, around the tree, instead of the vertical grains of all the other trees. Every tree was different [...] “*You’re wrong*”, *I heard a voice say inside my head. “I’m*

not lonely, and I'm not far from home. And I'm definitely not different from the others."

'Of course you are,' I thought. 'You're different, and I can tell by looking at you.'

"I told you to look deeper", the tree said in my mind. *'We are all here, roots in the SAME soil, inspiring and expiring the same atmosphere, and with the same sun shining on us. We are all drawing the same energy and nutrients. Look deeper.'*

That made me gasp. *The metaphor for all of us on Earth, all limited by what we do with the same resources - the air, the sun, the wind, the water, the minerals in the land", was super obvious to me. And I felt stupid for thinking how different everything was. I was part of the trees, and of the Earth also. We all start with the same resources* (Frog 2016).

Report 12 (R12)

The following report titled "Ego-Death and Profound Insights," was drawn from the Erowid vaults and was written by a male with the username BigChief. The experience occurred in 2007 and the report was published on April 17, 2008. BigChief consumed 2 hits of blotter tab LSD during this entheogenic experience.

We stopped again to rest and immediately, I was back in the confusion of my own mind – stronger, but not yet in control. P said, "We need some music, why don't you play your harmonica. I remembered that I had my harmonica in my pocket and I put it to my lips, hoping I would remember how to play it. I found myself unable to play coherent melodies, but I discovered that it was intensely pleasing and calming to me to simply inhale and exhale through it, producing the two fundamental chords.

On a harmonica, inhaling produces the V chord, and exhaling produces the I chord. V to I is the most basic cadence in all of music, tension and resolution. Some musicologists have theorized that moving from I to V represents leaving home, while the V to I resolution represents the return home. I was not actively conscious of this theory at the time, but I simply knew that this was the case. Exhale/inhale, V/I, tension/release, away/home. The duality implicit in the harmonica was like a revelation. Suddenly I knew the cognitive ground that I could use to understand my shattered reality. *Everything exists in two states – dissolution and resolution, away and home* [...] This simple phrase became a mantra for me. At once, the madness of my experience collected itself into archetypal manifestations of this fundamental truth. I began to babble to P about my discoveries – the duality of all things, the cyclical progression from dissolution to resolution and back again, the psychological meaning of "home." I

was obsessed with the notion of home. *I insisted that all of life is just finding home in the present moment, discovering the resolution of all tensions, psychologically returning to the first state of oneness, before moving back into chaos and repeating the process.* At some point during this time, I had the bizarre sensation that P and I were shooting thoughts back and forth between our minds non-verbally, but these thoughts consisted only of sounds. I really can't explain this, but that's what it felt like.

After walking for a long time, we arrived at the lake. The size and brilliance of it completely overwhelmed me. As we wound around the shore line, I admired the plants around me, which had taken on a painterly quality – instead of continuous lines, they looked like bold strokes of color moving independent of one another. Finally, we found a shady spot near the waters edge and sat to eat. *At that moment, I felt completely at one with the universe and my companions. I reached the conclusion that all life is really a manifestation of the same universal life-form. Realizing that this life would continue forever without me, I had no fear of death, though I felt fortunate to have been given a portion of this life to do with as I please.* As I sat in perfect bliss, marveling at the implications of my insights, I realized that I was home (BigChief 2008).

Report 13 (R13)

The following report titled “Becoming Another: Ego-Loss & Self Realization,” was drawn from the Erowid vaults and was written by a female with the username Hello_Cosmos. The experience occurred in 2007 and the report was published on March 24, 2009. Hello_Cosmos consumed 2 hits of blotter tab LSD and smoked cannabis several times during this entheogenic experience.

At another point, I begin to experience ego loss, and feel myself as other people in my life. I feel myself becoming B, seeing the world the way he does, and appreciating the magnitude of the love he has for me. I feel the events of his childhood, his estrangement from his parents, and how all of these things have colored his life. At this time he reports experiencing the same thing towards me, and we spend a good length of time gazing at one another and somehow communicating non-verbally, bonding on a very intimate level.

Later I find myself extending this sense of becoming another towards my younger sister, to whom I am not very close; I see the struggles she has dealt with in her life, and feel a bit of sadness for her current circumstances. Then I feel myself become my mother, with whom I have had a difficult relationship through the past several years. I begin to intimately understand why she had acted the way she did, why she brought certain individuals into her life, and felt sympathy for her in the first time in years. I saw her struggling over the miscarriage she had prior to my sister's birth, and how the longing and grief she felt from this event carried over into other parts of her life. In that moment, I loved her as a child who makes foolish mistakes, but who only seeks love and recognition. This

progresses into a strong feeling of empathy for all of humankind, all conscious beings, and I strongly sense the idea of a universal spirit. I relate this to the complex patterns still overlaying my vision, and see them morph into “tribal art” which resembles Southwest Native American tapestries, than Chinese, than Indian. I realize that this mind state I’m experiencing has been found by all the mystics and shamans and priests of all of Earth’s cultures, and that these same visuals influenced the art of each respective culture in a similar way. All of these realizations comfort me in my decision to major in cultural anthropology, something which I had been stressing over lately (Hello_Cosmos 2009).

Report 14 (R14)

The following report titled “Well that might be enough...(6.5g Trip Report),” was drawn from the Trip Report forums on Shroomery and was written by a male with the username DuhltsMe. The experience occurred in 2007 and the report was published on November 06, 2016. DuhltsMe consumed 6.5 grams of dried Golden Teacher psilocybin mushrooms during this entheogenic experience. DuhltsMe describes himself as being raised in a Christian background, but having gone through a “spiritual depression” after never finding what he sought in over 15 years of religious devotion. He claims that he was interested in lucid dreaming during his teenage years and that he meditated for several years before this experience.

I was astounded. How had I forgotten who I was? It was all so obvious, *I AM IT. And by that I mean, all of it. Everything I was looking at was me and in me and I in it.* I couldn’t believe that this fact had slipped by me. I had the feeling that this was something I was always in the habit of forgetting but that ultimately it didn’t matter because *I would always return to myself eventually* [...] As I accessed my knowledge base I was under the impression that all of the religions were about me. I had made those as ways of getting back to myself, if ever I wanted to (though the ridiculousness of that statement was no less ridiculous in that state). All of those poor folks signed up to those programs were just doing the same, trying to get back to Me. I had been searching for years, not just in spiritual pursuits but in all desire, to return to myself, to *recall what I had forgotten*. What I had not betted on was that this great mystery was far too obvious to be arrived at by deep philosophical thought or by physical striving [...] Movement from the *centre of Me, which is what seeking is, was the obstacle. If I and my Father are One*, then to realise this I need not go looking anymore [...] If you are reading this, *I love you* - and not in some stupid wishy washy kind of way, *I mean it. We are okay, You and I. Death is not a problem. Avoid causing harm to others if you can (because there are no others)*, your suffering will soon be seen for what it is (DuhltsMe 2016).

Report 15 (R15)

The following report titled “Nature’s Miracle,” was drawn from the Trip Report forums on Shroomery and was written by a male with the username RiskBreaker. The experience occurred in 2007 and the report was published on October 22, 2016. RiskBreaker consumed 6.5 grams of dried Golden Teacher psilocybin mushrooms during this entheogenic experience.

I turned my gaze inwards until my breath slowed to a whisper. I was ready to let go but there was nowhere to turn; I looked out of the window again and pushed my life through it and into the space outside. The leaves shook and grew, then shrunk as it all passed back to me. *Energy can't die.* I thought. *There is no death, just different forms.* Suddenly a bird appeared on the window ledge and tapped at its reflection. Taken by madness it would not stop, it was in such a stupor over the illusion in the glass that its entire being was consumed in attacking itself. I looked beyond where it was striking and noticed for the first time - a plug-in mosquito repellent. It couldn't be. I unplugged it and the bird disappeared [...] I returned to the meditation room and saw at once - another repellent. Sucking power, spewing poison. I felt shame. I removed it and let the air clear through the windows. *It occurred to me that my ego had created pure madness - it had made me wary of my true self to the point that I was attacking it and poisoning the very space in which all things are connected.* In this state, I simply could not understand the logic of such folly. I returned outside to the garden, kneeling then prostrating myself before the statue, *connecting with the earth.* I felt drops of water on my back and looked up to a darkened sky. Could this really be happening?

As I stood in disbelief at the synchronicity of it all I felt a welling inside me. *The garden was breathing with me,* taking in the fresh air and waiting in suspense at the very edge of life and death. I looked inwards and let go, I felt the welling *ebb and flow in my body* - spots of rain hit and then retreated - it was as if something was holding the floodgates back [...] Returning outside I took time to appreciate the torrent - I stepped out into it and let it wash over me. I knelt down in *gratitude to life and nature.* Returning to the meditation room I stepped outside into the tiny alcove with the totem. *Where before there was death, there was now an abundance of life.* The rain was strong but again the *ebb and flow ran through me,* pushing and pulling as the sheets came down, on and off. It felt again like a door inside was yet to open. I took off my clothes, closed my eyes, and grasped the totem in my hands, bringing my face up to its own, *connecting fully with the moment.* The rain unleashed with such raw force, *I was covered in life and stood there completely embraced in being. I felt true love: unattached yet wholly present.* It still felt, as I looked inwards, that there was one more step to completely cross over the threshold, but it felt like now was not the time and that I wasn't ready. I stepped back inside, closed the doors and walked through the garden of eden in absolute bliss (RiskBreaker 2016).

Report 16 (R16)

The following report titled "First Trip Report: Living and Loving!," was drawn from the Trip Report forums on Shroomery and was written by a female named Sandra. The experience occurred in 2007 and the report was published on June 06, 2004. Sandra consumed 2.5 grams of dried psilocybin mushrooms with chocolate during this entheogenic experience.

The mother vibe in the shower was amazing, intense. I felt so close to my mother, like an equal human, like a human in this soup of experience with nothing but love to radiate, and I wanted her there to tell her all about it, to feel it with me. I wanted my mom, and Meg, and her mom, and *I felt all the mothering energy in the whole universe. I felt the earth, and I felt everything.* It was sex, love, life, being, consciousness, total orgasmic bliss. It was like we were in the birth canal, going backward in life, from innocent little children to this intense birthing experience, where everything was white and pink and our bodies were full of red veins that I could see, and the water was the same as us and our spit was the same as us and I became Chunder and Chunder became me and I became everything and there were no words. *I was God, everything was God. I felt like everything, I felt like the mother of everything.* Chunder and I were letting our spit go everywhere, feeling it, playing in it, rubbing our faces against the wall in the shower, going on and on about how we were everything, how we understood. I said "I want EVERYONE to feel this. I want George W. Bush here right now!" And we laughed about it, because it was silly, ridiculous, and tripping is silly, life is silly. It was silly, but I meant it. George W. Bush was the only thing, the only symbol I could even remember from the real world that I relate with government and complicated things and problems that I knew the answers to. It was the only thing I knew to say that might begin to express my feelings to Chunder. He understood, and we both wished for George Bush to be there. *We wished for the world to be there, all of existence. And it was. And we were it [...]* Wherever I looked, I saw endless patterns of spinning cogs and gears. Within each spinning cog, there was a whole new pattern of colors and cogs, and within each one of those more patterns, straight into infinity. I looked into the carpet, and *I truly grasped infinity. Forever. Emptiness.*

It was Kerouac's great vision of emptiness right there in front of me. I couldn't just see objects as themselves; I saw the infinite rainbow pattern connectivity that went on forever, in everything. I even felt it in myself when I concentrated on my insides. While that was going on, my mind was also inspecting my ego. I was sitting on the floor, but I imagined myself sitting on the couch. I thought about myself talking to Chunder, and watching television, and holding up the insecurities and barriers I hold up all the time. I thought about the things I think about, and how stupid it is for me to do the things I do, and how I should just get rid of all my material things and somehow use what I had learned during the trip, during the ecstatic touching of God, to live the way I should be living (Sandra 2004).

Report 17 (R17)

The following report titled “Peyote Healing,” was drawn from the Erowid vaults and was written by a male with the username Peyote Healer. The experience occurred in 2003 and the report was published on July 13, 2003. Peyote Healer consumed roughly 24-34 buttons of peyote in different forms, including raw, dried, ground, and in tea during this entheogenic experience.

Suddenly I start to go into some deep dream states, it's as if I'm having lucid dreams, they last very short seconds maybe just a second but a lot happens. *I start seeing other people's thoughts expressed to me in the form of dreams, I see intricate details of people, things that they only know.* I start hearing people talk to me in the dreams. I start flying to the universe and I see bright bright colors now, the designs move slowly and not fast constantly changing like mushrooms do to me. I see colored lights pass over me as if I'm flying in the universe filled with bright stars. I suddenly find myself in a world where everything is crystal, and I see holy beings that look like Hopi Kachinas and a mixture of Northwestern totem poles a long with a japanese feel. *I start to receive info about my life and how to become a better person, I learn ways on how to be in life, humble, loving. How to pray better, how to heal, how to find a better job, right decisions.* I moved around into different worlds and different thoughts [...] *I feel like a new person, I feel good alive and get this, days later I got what I asked the peyote to help me get. The peyote told me it would be 4 days, and I got exactly four days later...what a good blessing (Healer 2003).*

Report 18 (R18)

The following report titled “Into the Mind of God,” was drawn from the Erowid vaults and was written by a male with the username Voyager. The experience occurred in 2012 when Voyager was 25 years of age, and the report was published on June 27, 2016. Voyager vaporized 230mg of crystalized DMT during this entheogenic experience.

During this period, *I experienced several profound philosophical realizations.* I could see that the *emptiness* from which I had fallen was the *fundamental state of perfection in the cosmos.* All efforts to make one's own life as well as others' lives 'better,' culminate in this state. It is the attractor and the end of time, pulling the individual and the whole of life toward its perfection. I felt that the purpose of experiencing life is to cultivate the qualities and skill *necessary to find the clear light and to stay in it, without falling back into routine, ego-dominated reality. This applies to the individual, as well as the collective of all living beings. I saw that the cultivation of good mental qualities are essential to the process.*

Intelligence, concentration, and ultimately wisdom are all necessary to make and then maintain contact with the clear light. In addition, *compassionate behavior or right action on the individual and the collective scale, is also essential to the attainment and preservation of divine bliss.*

[These] realizations felt like sacred gifts bestowed upon me by the experience. In my routine ego personality, I consider myself to 'know' these things already. I attempt to study and understand the teachings of the Buddha and practice meditation, although the turbulence of life often distracts me from these efforts, and too often I find myself wrapped in the business of seeking out sense pleasures. *Experiencing the falling from the clear light and re-learning the significance and purpose of spiritual endeavors like the cultivation of good mental qualities and the performing of right actions on some very deep and real level of my psyche are invaluable. This kind of intensely felt experience serves to keep me in touch with what is most important in life and what is the closest expression of my true unimpeded nature [...]* Soon I felt the enchanting light slipping away, leaving in its place a deep sense of renewed purity. I had been reborn. Then I wept. I wept and wept with joy and gratitude. I was back [...]. *The purpose of life is to make life better for oneself and all other beings. This gradual incremental process of making life better a tiny bit at a time culminates in the divine bliss felt just after the break up of the body and psyche. This state of unbecome perfection is the attractor at the end of cosmic time.* To recognize it and to maintain it requires the systematic development of *good mental qualities like concentration and awareness.* It also requires the performance of *compassionate actions in the physical world. These efforts, made diligently enough shall deliver the individual and the collective of all life in the cosmos into the divine state of perfection. Into the mind of God* (Voyager 2016).

Report 19 (R19)

The following report titled “The Puppeteer in the Swirling Prismatic Void,” drawn from the Erowid vaults and was written by a male with the username Flamineo. The experience occurred in 2009, when Flamineo was 26 years old, and the report was published on August 19, 2010. Flamineo smoked four hits of DMT, consumed 2 hits of LSD, and smoked cannabis during this entheogenic experience.

At a certain point in the trip, I realized that I wasn't an individual anymore. There was something else, that told me that it was all things, all people, all identities. It told me that it could wear our perceptions like masks. It asked me “how could I ever think of myself as being separate from all that manifold complexity?” I saw huge, spiraling, churning rows of heads, human, animal, stone—and the thing was chasing itself all through them, churning them up, stirring up perceptions into people. This thing showed me, made me feel that my

whole identity was nothing more than an empty mask to it, unless it chose to inhabit that mask with beautiful complexity.

It then made me feel that inside my mind itself was so much complexity, that the complexity of those perceptions mirrored, made room for, etched in limned and sanctified all the animal heads, the dancing whirling world, the prismatic voids, threatening to shatter human minds, to show them what they're worth, that their most intimate contents are nothing more than playthings to something much vaster. It then left me, churning into other waves of images and patterns that the DMT had left me with. I kept asking "What are you?" but it didn't answer—it seemed as if it almost laughed at the impudence of the question.

[Later that night, I also felt that inside my head was an infinite number of beings, that the complexity of my perceptions and the colonial nature of my own consciousness united me with other beings as well as separating me from them. It was always a mistake to view that complexity as a barrier rather than a bridge.]

Also this thing was asking me why I denied the spiritual structure of material reality. It then showed me an extra dimension of reality, which was made of interlacing patterns uniting all beings. This spiritual reality was supported by pillars of light, complex patterns of stone and animal heads, and the entity pressed my head into one of these pillars and asked me why I didn't believe, and *my mind was flooded with interlacing imagery. I understood then that I was united with all things. These patterns, these interlacing patterns [the ones generated by the DMT], they froth up the boundaries between entities and tangle them together.*

The heads were all stretched out in a row which curved as if it were the crest of a wave or the slope of a hill. They seemed almost like graves or monuments. The entity that I encountered wasn't itself visible; I could only glimpse it in the ripples it left as it moved through twisting, churning webs of light. *I understood that the complexity of the perceptions in me was what united me with all things; I was merely one stream in an endlessly intertwining river of perceptual streams. I kept repeating to myself "I am many things." Knowing that even in myself the perceptions of a multitude of different entities were churning together in a little whirlpool of a human mind seemed to unite me with the endless complexity of the universe.*

The spiritual reality I witnessed was made of fractal patterns of animals and plants that twisted together and interlaced between all objects, both organic and inorganic. It was a huge, warping, prismatic fabric that wove the universe together. Certain parts of this fabric thickened into towering pillars shot through with intensely glowing bluish light. It was one of these pillars that the entity held my head against, and the zig-zagging animal patterns that danced across it tangled together and crept into my thoughts, destroying the boundaries between my own identity and the rest of the universe.

After this point in the trip, I felt more spiritually energized than ever before in my life. It was only later in the morning that I began to worry I'd seen things that no human being had seen and broken my head for good (always a sign of a great

trip). I decided to see if I could sleep it off and surprisingly had very little trouble getting to bed. When I woke up seven hours later, I was a little foggy and disoriented and I had a bit of a headache, but otherwise I was fine. Within 24 hours of the experience, I no longer noticed any aftereffects. All in all, this was certainly the most intense experience of my life and perhaps the most beautiful as well (Flamineo 2010).

Report 20 (R20)

The following report titled “Riding Her Voice,” was drawn from the Erowid vaults and was written by a male with the username Elevation. The experience occurred in 2007 and the report was published on October 9, 2007. Elevation consumed 3 hits of LSD blotter tabs, smoked cannabis, and smoked DMT during this entheogenic experience.

I began listening to the symphony of the sea again. I was being lulled into a trance. I did not realize it at the time, but it was her. She had led me there, egged me on, and she was singing to me now. Her voice was transcendent. Once in her trance, *I found myself to be in a multi-dimensional sonic space*. The rhythm and structure of her song created these pulsating, swirling rhythmic harmonies that were of a complexity so incredible, so beautiful. I have never heard anything like this before in my life. And I've been to the beach before, I've heard the sound of the surf crashing against the sea and sand. But never like this [...] *I channeled her and she channeled me, and the spirit of the water had led me there, against the rocks, where I could hear her sing*. The rocks she had led me to were shaped perfectly to resonate the swirling, spinning divine rhythmic harmonies of the waves deep in the sea. I could ride her voice for miles. It was one of the most powerful experiences of my life. Everything was clear now, *I was lucid in this spirit realm*, and I was in harmony with her, dancing with her. The presence I had felt encircling me was now a part of me. I spent a long time out there, hypnotized and enraptured by her breathtaking roars and elaborate cadence. *It resonated within my soul. She was a part of me now*, and I was in ecstasy [...] I went back to the same spot I was in the next night, but this time in the normal, material world, where both the haze and the stars were less visible, the rocks were no longer stacked up, and I could only barely hear that whirring energy resonance. But it was still there.

The most astonishing thing to me about this whole experience is the fact that I actually *got a response from a seemingly unresponsive universe*. I was out there looking for spirits, or some kind of “other,” I don't even really know. My normal day-to-day life feels different now. Even though I was in such an altered state, as this surely ranks among the strongest trips I have ever had, and even though I am a little unsure about the linear progression of events, *I have no doubt about what I heard in that eternal moment. She sang to me* (Elevation 2007).

Report 21 (R21)

The following report was drawn from an in-person interview I conducted with 26-year-old male named Noah on his experience with psilocybin mushrooms. I got to know Noah during my graduate studies at Florida International University. He was a very charismatic and highly energetic individual, and was also a Political Science major who has since gone on to pursue his PhD. Noah was born in Miami and was a first-generation college graduate given that his parents emigrated to the United States from Cuba. He was raised Catholic and was baptized, and claimed that he always maintained a conversant relationship with God throughout his life. The experience cited here contains the recollections of an entheogenic experience that Noah had at the age of 24, where he consumed 5g of dried psilocybin mushrooms in a friend's apartment with ambient music playing.

I felt like I was going to die. I was in my friend's apartment and I just collapsed and cried. Reality broke down, and there was a *complete ego-death. I was all of the universe at once—everything at once.* I saw ideology understanding itself, and I saw these mirrors which reflected glimpses of the world. I actually understood what it means to be gay; I mean, *I could actually understand what it was to be a gay person, what they must feel like.* I realized, “*Who am I to judge?*”

I received insights into the fact that there are no binaries, and that this was a limiting way to perceive the world. *I realized that reality was just sets of contradictions, paradoxes, and that reality is a multiplicity.* I was shown that there was no first principle, there was no different between Being and Non-Being, since they both are the same and mutually necessary. *I entered a space between the real and the symbolic,* where I actually saw the Jungian archetype unfold in front of my eyes. I thought to myself, “these are the basic fundamental building blocks of personality, reality—all performing at different moments.”

I noticed that I could talk to my own unconscious in this state, and *realized that I shouldn't be so hard on myself.* In looking back at my experience, I believe that my life is the embodiment of what tripping means. *I believe that it showed me a way of being, and that people are not a means to an end, but ends in themselves—like Kant said. Before this experience I saw people as objects, and now I feel that I can understand them better in their totality. The experience made me more careful, more conscious, improved my interactions with others and modified my language. It also made me more sensitive* (Noah 2016).

Report 22 (R22)

The following report was drawn from an in-person interview I conducted with 31-year-old male named Caleb. Like Noah, Caleb too was a first-generation college graduate of Cuban descent that was pursuing a master's degree at Florida International University. Caleb was raised Catholic until his teens and underwent baptism, communion, and confirmation at his local Catholic church. Caleb claimed that his experiences with the Church never took root aside from always having the feeling that a higher power was at work, and that there was something to religious experience that could not be entirely accounted for by rational inquiries. The experiences cited here are the recollections gathered from an entheogenic experience that Caleb had in which he consumed 7g of dried Golden Teacher psilocybin mushrooms and smoked cannabis. The setting was in his room at night, surrounded by books, art, and natural and spiritual motifs with meditation music playing throughout the experience.

Although it is absolutely impossible to recollect or even describe the panoply of phenomena which occurred during this experience, I will try my best to do so. After consuming the 7g of mushrooms, I sat in meditative style, awaiting any visions which might begin to occur. I began feeling nauseous after about 30 minutes, and decided to smoke a few bong hits of cannabis. About 5 minutes after I smoked, I was propelled into a warp-speed portal in which lights and movement appeared to pass me; or I passed through them, it was like a tunnel. It kept going faster and faster, and eventually began to turn into patterns, and eventually into coherent images. They were all of the images I had ever seen and associated with foreign places—Egyptian pyramids, Mayan Temples, Buddhist motifs, Mountains, everything was moving and in a constant state of flux. Art, kingdoms, artifacts, religious iconography, it was all flooding past my field of vision at lightspeed, all different and unfolding. It was beyond overwhelming, I could not maintain the images since they were unfolding nonstop at a rate beyond comprehension. Even though I couldn't gather all of what was being shown to me, I felt like I was downloading or learning absolutely TONS of information. It seemed like I was gaining thousands of years of knowledge and insight, but none of this came in a rational form.

I remember a distinctly feminine feeling to the entire experience, as if I was being guided by a gentle, motherlike being that I could not see. She made the entire experience absolutely pleasant, and I cried several times because of how beautiful the experience was. If anyone would have walked in on me during this experience they would have thought I had gone out of my mind because I was squirming around and putting myself in the oddest positions. I was actually

enjoying myself beyond anything I could imagine though, in a state of extreme bliss. There was actually a strange feeling of a little trickster entity as well that I could never quite perceive. It seemed like a male, and that he wanted to play a game. *I realized that the game was that I had to focus. But I also noticed that if I tried to force the experience, a voice would tell me that forcing my willpower and ego was not the way. I had to submit. I had to become passive; feminine, for lack of a better word. This was the way of the mushroom—the way of nature. I could not impose my will or the experience would not unfold in the manner I wanted it to. I had to be receptive to what it wanted to give me, which was a profound lesson.* The game with the little creature never was completed, at least to my knowledge, but I learned that the game was to stay focused, but not egocentrically-focused, as if I wanted to impose my will. It was to pay close attention but also be receptive, a seemingly paradoxical situation that was hard to maintain, especially with the flood of other imagery and the influx of knowledge I was receiving. I have to say that *I got this profound feeling that this was a rule that applied to all of life, like if it was “the way” to follow, so to speak, the “Tao.”*

I decided to take another bong hit, and saw myself now in the outside world blowing smoke as if it were stardust. Suddenly, I was back to tripping super hard again, and *I saw myself as one with God, with the Universe, with all of creation. I felt like I was only this one person because my perception had chosen to focus on this one aspect for the time being—a realization I had somewhat gleamed during meditation, only this time, it had an authenticity with exceeded the meditative state. I remember flying through the universe to a library which was infinitely large and elaborate, and there I found all of the philosophers I loved, all welcoming me, telling me that they were me. That they were in my head, and that I was them. Inside of me was everything that exists, and that I had infinite creative potential* (Caleb 2017).

Report 23 (R23)

The following report was drawn from an in-person interview I conducted with 23-year-old female named Rosa. Rosa was an international student from Venezuela who was pursuing a master’s degree at Florida International University. Despite having been raised Catholic, Rosa did not consider herself to be religious in any sense of the word. The experience cited here contains recollections from an entheogenic experience that Rosa had in which she consumed 2.5g of a psilocybin-infused tea. The setting was in her boyfriend’s apartment, with soft meditative music playing throughout the experience.

The first thing that I remember happening was that there was a candle on the table, and its flame went outside of the candle, onto the table, and then onto the

floor. That is when I decided to follow it and sit down on a yoga mat. I felt really uncomfortable, and bothered in my own body. It felt as if I wanted to get rid of my arms, but not in a harmful sense, they were just uncomfortable. I started to feel really nauseous and then threw up all over myself and the living room. As soon as I vomited, I felt a million times better and actually felt wonderful. This is when everything started happening. I saw geometrical patterns and red and blue colors which turned into snakes that were two-dimensional. *They were benevolent snakes though, and since then I have changed my perspective on snakes.* Anyway, I was seeing everything against a black background, and I saw two toucans that were back-to-back, and I felt a deep, significant connection to them. They eventually started moving, and I kept hearing animals and jungle sounds. The whole experience was very primitive and jungle themed.

At this point, my boyfriend was frantically cleaning up all of the vomit and took me into the shower. The shower was wonderful, I didn't want to leave. The water was falling in slow motion and was multi-colored. Eventually, I got dressed and went to the bed, where I continued to have strong visions. Here, *I thought of my father and our relationship with had been troubled, and I felt extremely sad, but okay. It was as if I was coming to terms with our situation, and I could understand him more.* I also remember seeing Jesus. He was outside, at night, under a really bright star. My boyfriend and I were both there with him, and he was just standing there. It was on a mountaintop or something, where we could still see the city but also see the countryside.

When I thought of my boyfriend, I felt a love I had never felt before. It was very strong. His tattoo was moving when I would look at it, and he appeared to have a green aura, green-and-yellow. It was the color of his soul, I told him, I could see his soul. I remember traveling through space at another time, and I also remember looking at a painting in the room that my boyfriend's brother had drawn. The painting was crying, and I couldn't stop seeing it cry—I told my boyfriend, "Why is he crying?" I felt like it was his brother speaking through the painting—contemplative yet suffering. Right after this, I saw my boyfriend's dog who had died a week before. I saw her sitting happily, and there was golden dust that was falling down and covering her. At some point there was a wolf starting at my boyfriend and I, we had a deep connection.

I reflected on my decision to become a vegetarian, and I promised myself that I would never eat an animal again. "We should not ever kill animals for our own interests," I thought, and I knew from then on that I would never eat meat again. I feel like the experience came in phases; first it was uncontrollable—something I liked. It was a flood of pleasant imagery and amazing beauty. As time went on, however, I was more able to guide the experience and it was something I did not like. I remember at one point feeling like I could feel what this child in the news who had been sexually violated and murdered felt. *I could actually feel how scared she was and what she must have felt like.* I knew that this was all there if I would look to the right, but I choose not to look.

I understood why children draw mushrooms like houses—this became a very clear truth, but I can't explain it properly right now, I don't know. After the whole experience, I feel super happy that I had it. *It changed my life in many*

ways, I feel like a different person. It feels like I was born again. The experience reaffirmed many things in my life; my relationship to animals, for example, has been reinforced. I feel like I can understand my father more, and that I have more empathy. I learned that everyone has their own truth. I'm also more aware of the environment and my natural surroundings.

Report 24 (R24)

The following report was drawn from an in-person interview I conducted with a 40-year-old American male named Erik. I had first met Erik at a talk titled “Psychedelic Culture” where Alex and Allison Grey were speaking about visionary art, ethnobotany, and traditional cultures. I met Erik again when I was conducting my research and he told me about a vision quest that he went on in which he fasted for three days at the top of a cliff, and then consumed several buttons of peyote under the instruction of a spirit guide.

I was sitting there, at the top of the cliff, meditating. The fasting had already induced several revelatory visions, but the peyote brought me the ultimate truth. I remember that one of these insights was that I was able to gain insight into my relationship with my father which had been a wreck, and most importantly, I encountered my bear spirit. During this experience, I was empowered by my spirit animal and instantly given meaning, purpose, insight, and a memory of my ancestral lineage. I truly felt my connection with nature and all animals in a way I never had before, even though I had already loved animals my entire life. After this experience, I learned that I had Native American blood and have since embraced this as a central part of my identity.

The web of life was also something that became forged in my mind during this experience. There's something about plant medicine that opens us up to these insights. This was something I had experienced several times before, and I had an intuitive sense of this my whole life, but during this particular experience with peyote, it became an undeniable truth. (Erik 2016).

Report 25 (R25)

The following report was drawn from an in-person interview I conducted with a 29-year old Hispanic-American male named Alex. I met Alex through one of the interviewees mentioned earlier, and he talked to me about his experience after taking 5g of dried B+ psilocybin

mushrooms and smoking cannabis, which is recorded here. Alex wasn't exactly an atheist, but nevertheless was a pretty hard-minded scientific type.

I was home alone, sitting in my living room in a meditation-like fashion, awaiting what was to come with an anxious, excited-yet-terrified feeling. I decided to smoke some weed, and soon after, started to see indigenous patterns, little Aztec-like Indians, somewhat cartoon-like, but moving and alive. The colors green, red, and yellow were most prominent around these figures, and they were against a black background. They kept charging, unfolding, over and over again in different ways in different forms, but in a similar-looking style. I felt as if they were interacting with me, and this went on for some time. Eventually, the images involved into other now-forgotten scenarios and landscapes which are hard to recall.

I do remember that I found myself going through the infinite depths of my being, understanding finally what a labyrinth was meant so symbolize. It was a metaphor for the self, and how one can never reach the true self, for it is only what one chooses to focus on which determines the point of reference for the self. I kept receiving profound wisdom like this throughout the experience, finally understanding the deepest truths I had ever known. I remember venturing to a place that did not necessarily have any visual representations that I can recall, but just a deep, undeniable sense that it was the place where magic was. Magic was real; absolutely, one-hundred percent real, without a doubt. It existed, and it was a real place. This was also the place where gnomes and fairies are, it is a real place, and it is inside of us. Although I know that it sounds crazy, these are the only words I have that can describe what I experienced, and it has changed my entire life since then. I actually was able to experience magic and fairyland. Gnomes, fairies, Star Wars, the Force, it was all real. At another point in the trip, *I learned that there was a fundamental principle in life, and that was that life must be respected. For me, this basically meant that I shouldn't use anyone, I should be honest, humble, and all the other virtues like charity, kindness, and compassion.* At some point in the trip, I remembered feeling as if I was being reborn, but I didn't ever feel a death ever. Like I was still there, but not focused on the regular me. Although I can't really recall all of the details, it wasn't scary or anything. I just remember thinking of the phoenix and the symbol of transformation.

There were many times where the mushroom, or what seemed to be the mushroom, would let me know that it was not just my own mind making up these phenomena. It would interact with me, make me laugh, on many, many occasions. I remember distinctly laughing at a particular face it made of a black woman dressed with some elaborate golden costume, it was as if she was a princess shielded in a gold-plated armor of some kind. She winked at me at some point, which to me blatantly showed that I was not making this up. It was as if every thought I would think would immediately be answered by this imagery, and told to me, not in rational form, but in a form I could nevertheless understand. The problem was that this was happening all too fast, nonstop, and it felt like an overwhelming amount of knowledge going into my brain. Like, my

brain felt super tired. One of the last things *I remember is being God*. I don't really remember why, or how, but *I just remember being God. I remember having a conversation with God in which I realized that I was God experiencing itself*.

I feel like I stretched my mind to the point of insanity several times. Some of the insights I gained looking back were that I saw that I was fully determined, yet also fully free. I learned that the scared is real, and that we have an infinite creative potential inside of us. Some ideas I wrote down immediately after were: "*Don't violate rule of life*," "*Everything is perfect*," "*No place for ego*," "*The sacred is real*" and "*inner treasures are greater than anything else in the whole of existence*" (Alex 2017).

Report 26 (R26)

The following report was drawn from an in-person interview I conducted with a 41-year old American female named Laurie. I met Laurie at my university and had several conversations with her about her use of, and experience with entheogens, however, it wasn't until a special dinner event until I had heard the actual phenomenological details of her ayahuasca experience. Laurie was definitely spiritual, and friendly towards all religions. She felt that there was truth in everything, and that the universe was inherently spiritual. She was open to all types of experiences, including "paranormal" phenomena and anything else people claim to experience. During this experience, Laurie consumed several cups of an ayahuasca brew during a ceremony.

It was beyond powerful; at one point I felt myself purging out this dark energy. It was a complete cleansing. I went to a really dark place, and was scared. I eventually became consumed by the darkness and let it take me whole. I was gone from my entire awareness, but some level of consciousness still remained. It was really scary, but eventually the songs made me see the light. I threw up viciously, several times. Each time I threw up, more light was able to make its way into me. I'm not sure what it was that I was purging, but all I know is that it was definitely some negative energy.

Eventually after throwing up profusely several times, I reached a state of calm and bliss. My nausea had gone away, and I was now in a cloud-space, where I could interact with divine angel-like beings. I was in contact with pure light and pure love. *The shaman's song carried me to the mother of our planet—ayahuasca was the female embodiment of the planet. This was a message of care, and to act in according to what we observe in all of nature's harmonious relationships. She was Mother Earth speaking to me, carrying with her the message of the planet. She told me to share this knowledge with the world, which*

is what solidified my decision with academics and determined the vision of my lifepath (Laurie 2016).

Report 27 (R27)

The following report was drawn from an in-person interview I conducted with 38-year-old Middle-Eastern male named Nahil who was a medical student. Nahil was raised Muslim and still had a deeply rooted belief in the faith, however, was much more open to other experiences and ideas from other traditions. I met Nahil at the Psychedelic Science 2017 conference which was held in Oakland, California in April, 2017. The report given here was what Nahil told about his experience drinking several cups of ayahuasca in a friendly setting.

One of the first things I remember is that it was ineffable. I remembered though, that I felt like I had to resist, I felt “don’t submit.” I realized it was a process of submission though, and I had to let go. It opened me up. It gave me a vision I can’t explain. At one point, I saw myself in a prison, with silhouettes all over; I felt fear, true darkness. I gave in. It encased all of me. I remembered then that hope lies in only in darkness, that is where hope is most concentrated. Then I saw a ball of light—it was very concentrated and powerful. I felt myself surge to a different level, a completely different reality.

I learned that there is always a risk versus what needs to be done and what I have to do. I think of this Buddhist phrase which says, “Life does it for you, you don’t work towards life,” something like that. It seems like the brain is like a filter. It filters out all of these other aspects of reality. *I feel like the veil has been lifted. I learned to focus on what’s right in front of me, how I pursue a partner, and that I’ve been limiting myself in a very real sense.* It was more about me in this experience, *it showed me myself inside out. I think that it made me a better person and has had an irreversible effect on my life and how I pursue women.* I used to be very fixed on a particular type of perfect woman, but I learned that that was limiting me, and that I could experience so much more, and I have. *I am able to appreciate new types of women, and I feel like I can better understand other people I was judgmental about in general.*

I never saw the ayahuasca snakes that everyone talks about, but there definitely was some female presence there. I saw some patterns, but not too many. It was more of a dark experience before I finally came to the light. I am in medical school right now. I am at odds with the status quo there. I plan on doing my residency and working on psychedelics. It’s hard to break away from society—hard to be ingrained into society. Everyone has a role to play. *I want to help change the perception of psychedelics, they are tools for healing ourselves and the world (Nahil 2017).*

Report 28 (R28)

The following report was drawn from an in-person interview I conducted with a 20-year old African-American female named Tara. I met Tara at my university and we briefly spoke about her experience smoking DMT with some of her friends. Tara believed that organized religion was evil, but that religious experiences were real and legitimate. She believed in “spirit,” but did not subscribe to any particular metaphysical or religious worldview.

Immediately after taking a few hits my reality was entirely replaced. It’s as if a machine-like world was superimposed onto this one. There were all sorts of entities, beings, creatures, things which I had never seen. I was absolutely blown away, in complete shock, speechless. They all seemed to be working on something. They were busy, and didn’t even seem to mind me at all. I still don’t know what that was, or where I went to. It was like I entered a portal into another dimension. Eventually, they turned to me, and jumped into my body. I think they reprogrammed me somehow, they rewired my wiring. I can’t exactly pinpoint how exactly I am different, but I just know that I am. I absolutely know that there are an infinite amount of dimensions that we know nothing about, and that these beings, although creepy, were friendly somehow. *They are helping me, and helping other humans who smoke DMT somehow.* I don’t know. It’s like they want us to push the boundaries of what is possible in some way. *Be better people. Stop fighting.* I did get pushed through this tunnel though that kept feeling like I was going a million miles an hour. I was eventually caught by a *female spirit-thing, who embraced me, told me many things* I can’t recall. I know that *one was that I need to follow my intuition and my feelings over everything.* (Tara 2016).

Report 29 (R29)

The following report was drawn from an in-person interview I conducted with an 18-year-old female named Cheryl. I met her back in 2016, and she was a new student to FIU. Cheryl was a Theater Arts major, and was obsessed with The Grateful Dead, psychedelic rock, and what seemed to be all psychedelic culture. The visionary artist Alex Grey was one of her favorites, and her dorm room was covered in all sorts of spiritual and artistic decorations. She told me that she was raised on a farm where she said she frequently consumed the psilocybin mushrooms that grew from the donkey feces around the farm grounds. In the following report, Cheryl told me of a time she ate an unknown amount of fresh psilocybin mushrooms.

I was outside, watching the sunset go down, and everything was normal for about an hour. Eventually, I started feeling queasy and decided to lay down in the pasture. I'm not sure how long I was lying there when I suddenly saw beams of light—like spaceships—flying past the sky as I laid on my back looking up. At this point, I wanted to look around outside, but I was beginning to get crazy visions that I couldn't ignore. In my mind's eye, I saw so many things that I can't even explain. *I saw myself going into myself, into my deepest core, and coming out of that into the universe. I felt an expanded sense of myself, like I was me, but also everything else in existence.* I saw vivid colors, bright purples, golds, iridescent greens and blues, all enveloping me, wrapping me in like a cocoon. But it was like a cocoon of love, rainbow-colored. It dissolved into my skin, and I feel like I have always carried this with me inside of me since that experience. *It definitely changed me in some way,* I don't know why. It's like my genetic makeup was changed.

Later on, I was still doing some super deep introspection. I learned that I can do anything, be anything; I can go anywhere. I am the ultimate limiting factor in my life, and any choice I make can be made a reality. There was some point when I felt the forests of the world burning—they were in anguish. That people were manipulating the world in all of the wrong ways, and that this was all due to a lack of consciousness. A lack of awareness. I remembered the book *The Celestine Prophecies*, and I felt like I could see and feel the energy of the trees. This wasn't trees around me, but visions of all the rainforests and forests in the world.

I had visions of animals and Native peoples, healers and sages performing magical rites. I knew that I was connected to them, and that we were all connected through a seamless web. I wished that everyone in the world could experience this wisdom, because if they did, we would have peace on earth. I knew this had to be true, it was an undeniable feeling, pure objectivity (Cheryl 2016).

Report 30 (R30)

The following report was drawn from an in-person interview I conducted with a 60-year-old American male named Henry. I met Henry at my university and we immediately clicked when I told him about my research. I ran into him often throughout the past two years, and we would always meet up and talk about entheogens. One time, we had lunch in the school dining area, and he told me about an unforgettable experience he had at the Burning Man Festival in the United States when he consumed an unknown amount—but at least several blotter tabs—of LSD. Henry was raised in a strict, Christian style household. His parents were extremely conservative, and

despite Henry conforming most of his life, he eventually “broke out of his shell” when he first experienced LSD. From his first experience with entheogens onward, Henry believed that plants were the only real connection to God.

Absolutely phenomenal. Pure ecstasy, bliss, joy. Absoute love. There was this machine that someone had built which projected an incredible light that shot up into the air. There was also a water shower which started flowing at one point from where the light was centered, and it felt like it was radiating vibrant life energy. *We were all showered and renewed by this pure rain. I felt timeless, eternal. I was glistening in the light of God.* I had been struggling with an illness for some years in my life and how I coped with it, and this experience showed me that I was eternal. I didn’t need to worry about anything. My God! *It was complete nirvana, I melded into the very fabric of existence and knew that this was the most complete glimpse of reality that there was. There was the brightest white light that went through the very core of my being, purifying all of my cells.*

That experience changed me forever. It changed my thought processes, my motivation to work; it gave me a renewed sense of purpose and direction in life. I also felt the best sense of community when I was out there. It was a true brother and sisterhood, a unity, based on pure, uninhibited, unencumbered, pristine, genuine love. I think everyone needs to try psychedelic substances—our politicians, our boards of Education. It is absolutely ridiculous how this has played out in politics. *We need to learn to love again. LSD, for me, reenchantd my world. If people opened themselves up to these types of experiences, they would tap into a level of unbounded love for each other that they never knew existed.* (Henry 2017).

In concluding this section on entheogenic experiences which have ethical import, what should be evident to the reader is that entheogenic experiences can be described in vastly different terms, but still, seem to have similarities including instances which explicitly have ethical implications. In the following chapter (Chapter 4), I provide my analyses of these experience reports by using the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2. I argue that these entheogenic experience reports show that users have gained new or regenerated live options—including ethical options—as a result of their experience.

Chapter 4

The Ethical Import of Entheogens

There is no difference in principle between sharpening perception with an external instrument, such as a microscope, and sharpening it with an internal instrument, such as one of these three drugs. If they are an affront to the dignity of the mind, the microscope is an affront to the dignity of the eye and the telephone to the dignity of the ear. Strictly speaking, these drugs do not impart wisdom at all, any more than the microscope alone gives us knowledge. They provide the raw materials of wisdom, and are useful to the extent that the individual can integrate what they reveal into the whole pattern of his behavior and the whole system of his knowledge. As an escape, an isolated and dissociated ecstasy, they may have the same sort of value as a rest cure or a good entertainment. But this is just like using a giant computer to play tick-tack-toe, and the hours of heightened perception are wasted unless occupied with sustained reflection or meditation upon whatever themes may be suggested (Watts 2013, 19).

In the following chapter, I apply the theoretical considerations given in Chapter 2 to the entheogenic experiences presented in this investigation to argue that entheogenic experiences have ethical import. In short, I argue that these entheogenic experiences create meaning-making spaces in which meaning can be regenerated, including fundamental philosophical assumptions, which in many cases have further ethical implications. After establishing my argument based on the entheogenic experience reports provided in this study, I move on to synthesize several of the points drawn from the discourses on entheogens (see Chapter 1) to further supply my argument with reason and evidence. After concluding my argument, I then provide some speculations as to what types of ethical dispositions these newfound insights gained during entheogenic experiences ultimately seem to commit entheogen users.

Before elaborating on each aspect of my argument, it must be noted that the elements presented are not linear and do not occur in a predictable sequential manner; they are simply different ways of analyzing or describing the experiences. Some of the elements in these experiences, such as transformation and regeneration, may be used to describe both what occurred during the experience—the phenomenology—and also the meaning attributed to the

experience afterward. While it remains true that there is a process—sometimes ongoing—of integration that occurs after entheogenic experiences, it is wrong to assume that this is the only time that the attribution of meaning—and other phenomena such as transformation or regeneration—occurs.

At this point, it appears unhelpful to structure these elements in any formalized or linear fashion, at least until more research has been done. Regarding to the so-called “negative experiences,” and despite having omitted a panoply of other types of entheogenic experiences from this investigation, it has been argued by Goldsmith (2011, 113) and others that even those who encounter difficult experiences have later reported that these were often the most significantly meaningful experiences of their lives once they were properly integrated. In the reports used for this investigation, entheogen users described the phenomenological content of their experiences retrospectively, and I have mined several gems from these experiences and placed them into the following theoretical framework. With that being stated, the following argument goes as follows: (1) Entheogenic experiences can create meaning-making spaces within which (2) meaning can be regenerated and (3) positive transformations can occur; (4) these new meanings can potentially create new life options for a person, (5) including options which have ethical import.

1. Entheogenic experiences can create *meaning-making spaces*.

As has clearly been evidenced by the phenomenological reports provided in Chapter 3, all of the cases reported (R1-30) seem to show that those who have undergone entheogenic experiences have gained either insight, perspective, or some new meaning about a theme that has momentous implications in their life. In some cases, this meaning may be insight into their own personal relationships with family members (R23) or how they choose partners (R27); in other cases, new meanings were made about how they orient themselves to nature (R15) or even how they understand death (R14). In several instances, it can be said that new philosophical insights

were gained, including metaphysical insights about the structure of the universe (R19), ontological insights by encountering other beings (R29), and even direct ethical insights about what constitutes right behavior (R18). All of the instances shown here clearly illustrate that after ingesting an entheogenic substance, an experience followed in which new meanings were made.

The “meaning-making space” I refer to is not a physical space, but an abstract, conscious space, in which immediate judgments seem to be temporarily suspended and new insights can be entertained. As one of my interviewees described it, “I entered a space between the real and the symbolic” (R21). Viktor Frankl (2002) has theorized that humans have the ability to continuously redefine what their existence means in every moment, and that this awareness can bring meaning to what would otherwise be fixed beliefs. What the entheogenic experiences presented in this study show is that they seem to bring participants into this meaning-making space and give them insight into the awareness that Frankl has claimed; namely, the ability to redefine themselves and their circumstances in a new context. In several of the reports shown here, some users have described gaining information about life regarding how to be a better person (R17), how to be more compassionate and understanding (R8), or report experiencing a realm between lives (R2). These experiences mark cases in which individuals reexamine their lives, and this idea leads to the following point about how these spaces can be meaningfully regenerative.

2. Entheogenic experiences can be *meaningfully regenerative*.

In many cases, entheogenic experiences seem to be so meaningfully rich that they are described—both implicitly and explicitly—in terms of *regeneration* and *rebirth* in several reports in this study. While these findings seem to overlap with my subsequent assertion about transformation, it is worth analyzing this concept of “meaningfully regenerative” on its own. The reports provided in this study show that those who have undergone entheogenic experiences sometimes claim that they underwent a rebirth during the experience, or feel reborn as a result of it (R10, 18, 25). Based on these reports, these instances of rebirth mark a regeneration of self-

identity which results in a change in either their outlook on themselves, on others, or even on the world. These regenerative experiences have been described here in different ways, such as leaving participants “more spiritually energized than ever before” (R19), or allowing them to receive “a response from a seemingly unresponsive universe” (R20). This regeneration described as rebirth often reflects changes in self-identity, and participants refer to having their genetic makeup being changed (R29), having their entire organism purified (R30), or simply feeling “like a new person” (R17).

Using Mircea Eliade’s (2006) perspective as a guide here, I wish to bring in his theory—which I modified in Chapter 2—which held that traditional peoples were not the victims of history since they could regenerate their identities cyclically; there were no fixed identities for them that were not continuously re-rooted in all newfound circumstances. In light of the accounts I have found, I believe that a similar regeneration is occurring during entheogenic experiences, and that the identity of those who undergo entheogenic experiences becomes transformed as a result. In modifying Eliade’s theory (see Chapter 2), I argue that during entheogenic experiences, the creation of new identities and the realization of new potentialities are not constrained by cultural identities or expectations, as Eliade held. Instead, entheogenic experiences provide entheogen users with the ability to acquire new identities or worldviews which can either arise during or after their entheogenic experiences.

In some entheogenic experience reports, users describe going through a deep self-analysis that where they travel “through the infinite depths” (R25) of their being. In other cases, the entheogenic experiences brought their self-imposed limitations to light, and encouraged participants to “focus on what’s right in front of” them (R27). In (R19), Flamineo explicitly states being shown that his “whole identity was nothing more than an empty mask,” and at one point, reports that the boundaries between his “own identity and the rest of the universe” were destroyed. Other cases have shown that some users have broken free of their self-imposed

limitations, such as Cheryl (R29), who reported “I learned that I can do anything, be anything; I can go anywhere.” I take all of these cases to show that entheogenic experiences are regenerative in the sense that Eliade believed that traditional practices were regenerative, but I argue further that during entheogenic experiences, individuals can break free from culturally-validated identities and worldviews.

Tied to the idea of a regeneration of identity, I propose that entheogenic experiences are also meaningfully regenerative in the sense that users frequently claim that it has brought an awareness to them regarding the unreality of linear time. In several entheogenic reports, there is a strong notion of eternity (R4) and the present moment (R12), and these notions seem to bring entheogen users into a space in which they can redefine themselves. If they are not constrained by history—including their own life events—individuals are allowed the freedom of experiencing themselves anew, and I believe that this space in which time dissipates is also linked with the notion of ego-loss. This idea has somewhat been alluded to already by Eliade in his remarks on traditional societies, however, during his lifetime, he failed to take entheogenic experiences into serious consideration. What I believe is novel about these findings is that they seem to provide evidence in favor of the notion that entheogens were intimately tied to the cyclical ceremonies which Eliade believed regenerated traditional societies. What this study in particular shows is that the use of entheogens also seems to bring about the meaningfully regenerative experiences Eliade has described, and these experiences have also been expressed in terms of transformation.

3. Entheogenic experiences can be *positively transformative*.

In making this assertion, I am taking *transformative* to mean that some shift in meaning has occurred in one’s worldview as a result of an entheogenic experience—often signaled by a transformative metaphor—and that this shift is perceived as being *positive*, or having significant value for those who report this transformation. The metaphors proposed by Ralph Metzner (2004) are a crucial part of interpreting the transformative instances which occur during entheogenic

experiences, and in nearly all of the reports cited here, these metaphors have been employed by those who are describing their experiences, sometimes several times. In the entheogenic experiences found in this study, I have only applied a few of Metzner's transformative metaphors, even though all twelve of the metaphors he has proposed can be found in all of these reports (R1-30).

One metaphor which Metzner believes signals transformation is the theme of "darkness to light," and this can be seen in reported in several of the cases shown in this study, such as (R27) where Nahil describes an experience of going from absolute darkness to encountering a ball of light. In other instances, such as (R26), Laurie describes being "consumed by darkness" and then eventually making her way to "pure light." In further cases, users report having "fallen" from the light, and making their way back to the "clear light" (R18). Metzner (2010) interprets these instances as "enlightening" insofar as they "bring light in" and involve a process of acquiring knowledge about something (159). Since all of the entheogenic experience reports shown here seem to show that users have been imparted some type of knowledge that they realized either during or after their experience, I argue that these encounters with light-oriented themes add further evidence to the notion that some new type of philosophical commitment was acquired by these individuals.

Another metaphor for transformation put forth by Metzner is "integrating the wild animal" (177), which can be seen in experiences where animal imagery or encounters with animals occur. Metzner claims that these instances containing animals can be understood as aspects of self-actualization, signaling an "inner directedness" or "valuing" (185). Encounters with animals recur in a large number of the reports cited here, such as in the case of Erik (R24) who was "empowered" by his spirit animal, or Rosa (R26), who encountered benevolent snakes and toucans, the latter of which she felt intimate connection and identification with (R26). In both of these instances, these users also reported feeling their connection to animals stronger than ever

before. In other cases, such as in (R9), Mindexplorer recalls realizing during his ayahuasca experience that communication with animals is definitely possible, claiming that “I could literally understand and empathize, on a deep emotional level, the information that the dogs were conveying in their howls.” Others, such as Peyotita (R10), have reported experiences with animals during their ayahuasca experience as well, with Peyotita stating that, “The snakes were searching for everything that is not me, that is not real, for something they can get and destroy, something that makes me sick, unhappy, suffer and lost.”

The theme of rebirth is also a transformative metaphor that recurs in entheogenic experiences, and in the case of Caleb (R25), he distinctly recalls experiencing phoenix imagery and having the sense of being transformed through a death and rebirth. In other cases, such as Sandra’s (R16), this rebirth has been described in terms of a “birthing experience,” and in still other entheogenic experiences, the external world has been described as mirroring this death and rebirth process (R15). For Metzner, transformations described as rebirths signal a radical transformation of the psyche where a new “I”, or identity is born. Metzner believes that these are often the result of a perceived or temporary ego-death during the experience, in which the “central organizing principle of selfhood” becomes transformed (136). Evidence for this can be seen in (R10) where Peyotita experienced a death and rebirth, and later described her experience as being the “most transforming” experience of her life in terms of helping to overcome anxiety and depression, and also in Xorkoth’s (R3) report where he states that “my life was forever changed” after undergoing an experience similar to a rebirth.

“Returning to the source” is yet another metaphor of transformation that recurs in entheogenic experiences, and Metzner claims that these experiences are often described in nostalgic terms such as having the feeling of having “been here” before, or being home or on a homebound journey (249). A sense of being “home” can be seen described in Peyotita’s (R10) experience, where she reports having had a nostalgic feeling during her “unmanifested” state, and

also in SlipKnot420 (R2)'s report where he returned "back to the place where my soul had initially came [sic] from." BigChief (R12) describes being "obsessed" with the concept of home at one point during his entheogenic experience, ultimately coming to the realization that "life is just finding home in the present moment." DuhltsMe (R14) describes another instance that marks a return, commenting that he realized that he "would always return to myself eventually," and Xorkoth (R3) claims that, "I knew, absolutely KNEW, that I had been to this state before, and would return again."

Conversion experiences, as proposed by James (2004), are also transformative experience which signal that a transformation has occurred in which a sense of the religious life, or a newfound willingness to be is achieved by a person. In extending these notions, Metzner (2004) claimed that during conversion experiences a sense of the sacred is imparted (26). Instances involving these types of conversion can also be seen in the entheogenic reports shown in this work, such as in the case of Voyager who recalled feeling that the profound realizations he was being imparted were "sacred gifts" (R18), and also in Alex's (R25) realization that "the sacred is real." In several instances, experiences with God are reported (R7), and in others, a female spirit seems to be an integral part of the experience (R8). For James, conversion experiences had momentous implications on the way a person lived their life, since James believed there was a significant difference between religious and non-religious lives. For the purposes of this inquiry, however, instances of conversion only stand to confirm that a profound transformation has occurred in which new philosophical insights have been gained. I submit that in all cases of entheogenic experiences that also qualify as conversions, a new live option has been created for that person which opens this person to further philosophical commitments.

4. Entheogenic experiences can create new *live options*.

The idea of a *live option* has been adopted from James (1896) to signify a belief, relative to each thinker, from which they might be motivated to act given the usefulness of maintaining

this belief in their lives. I understand live options here as being basic philosophical assumptions including one's religion, philosophy, or worldview, and their inherent notions of metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, and ethics. In the entheogenic experiences shown in this work, some participants explicitly mention that they "experienced profound philosophical realizations" (R18), while others infer metaphysical assertions by claiming to witness the structure of "spiritual reality" (R19), or having an undeniable experience in which they understood that "magic was real" (R25). In all such cases, new, valuable insights seem to be gained—with philosophical implications—that the participants found helpful or useful in their lives, and thus, motivated them to act in such a way that was in line with this new live option.

What these new live options seem to grant is a new vision of the possible, or a fundamental shift in one's orientation towards oneself, other people, animals, the environment, or the world. Encounters with benevolent beings or even God can generate a transformation in a person which would then create a new philosophical option which was previously "dead" to them, especially the belief in God, benevolent beings, or both. Referring back to Elevation's (R20) case, he claims that his everyday life feels different after having had the experience of receiving a response from what he had previously thought was a dead, "unresponsive" universe. In (R19), Flamineo encountered a being which asked him why he "denied the spiritual structure of material reality," and then recalls being shown "an extra dimension of reality, which was made of interlacing patterns uniting all beings." Flamineo's case—like many others in this work—seems to impart several live options at once; the first, a metaphysical insight into the structure of reality is at its most fundamental level, and the second, an inherently ethical option in being shown his otherwise hidden interconnectedness with other beings.

In several cases, participants report being given direct insights into the nature of reality, such as when Noah (R21) "realized that reality was just sets of contradictions, paradoxes, and that reality is a multiplicity," or when Caleb (R22) was shown that everything in existence was

contained inside of him. Caleb's case also serves as a prime exemplar of an entheogenic experience in which several new live options became available, since he also saw himself "as one with God, with the Universe, with all of creation" at one point. These new insights can also "enliven" or "awaken" options which may have been previously denied by a person and thus concretized, or they may be entirely new options which a person had no conceptual connection to prior to the entheogenic experience. In the case of Tara (R28), for example, entirely new live options were entertained given that Tara's entire reality was replaced and she had no frame of reference she could draw upon to interpret what was happening during this experience. In Peyotita's (R10) report, "God showed himself totally in a different way than I expected." Taken together, the experiences of Noah, Caleb, Tara, among others, show that newfound live options had been generated during their entheogenic experiences which had momentous implications on how they understood reality, or themselves in relation to it.

In a few of the cases shown in this work, participants found that the insights gained during their entheogenic experience actually confirmed their prior beliefs, such as (R4), when Howard stated that "it was the most complete understanding that I have had of reality up to this point. I feel as though many of my spiritual beliefs were confirmed by this experience and I feel as though some deeper understandings of reality were formed." While it may be argued cases such as Howard's do not seem to generate a "new" live option for him since they, in part, confirmed his prior beliefs, I contend that a new option was nevertheless generated for Howard since it was gained by way of experience, rather than by theory, and that this experiential quality of a live option gives it a new level of authenticity and veracity for the individual. Like with the case of transformation, several philosophical insights, or new live options, can be extracted from the reports in this study (R1-30), however, what has been presented here should suffice for argument's sake. It should also be noted that regardless of whether or not these novel philosophical insights, or options, are actually later acted upon and integrated into daily lives of

these participants afterwards, the entheogenic experiences in this study have nevertheless shown that they have still generated new live options which can later be denied or embraced by participants.

5. Entheogenic experiences have *ethical import*.

In the prior remarks made about meaning-making, transformation, and live options, several of the cases presented here can also be seen as instances where either explicit ethical direction was imparted to the participants, or ethical implications could be inferred from the new insights they gained. Across most of these experiences, there appeared to be a unifying theme—which also constitutes a new live option—that has profound ethical import; namely, the experience interconnectedness. Ingressions of this unifying interconnection can be seen in case (R16), where Sandra “saw the infinite rainbow pattern of connectivity that went on forever, in everything,” in case (R19), where Flamineo “understood that [he] was united with all things,” and in (R21), where Noah recalls being “all the universe at once—everything at once.” These reports of being unified with all-that-is are common in the entheogenic reports shown here, and they also represent one of the main elements in entheogenic experiences that has ethical implications.

The assumption here is that an experience of interconnectedness at least opens the door to new ways of acting in the world given that a person has had the experience of being “the other.” In (R11), Frog described having a profound realization imparted to him through a conversation he had with the trees around him in which the ideas of shared resources and interconnectedness became plainly obvious to him. In (R13), Hello_Cosmos reports experiencing herself as her boyfriend, and seeing the world in the way he does in all its complexity, and then envisions herself as her younger sister, and then her mother. Eventually, Hello_Cosmos claims that this experience continued and eventually extended to all of humanity, giving her a strong sense of “the idea of a universal spirit.” In describing this experience, Hello_Cosmos reports that it was experienced as complex, interlaced patterns which resembled “Southwest Native American

tapestries.” What we can see is that individuals are experiencing themselves as other individuals in some of these cases, and the interconnectedness of their relationships can either be symbolized by visual content in the entheogenic experience, or may just be plainly realized through an external experience.

In most instances, however, a dissolution of subject-object distinctions are reported by entheogen users in describing their interconnected experiences. In (R7), Joel claimed that, “I honestly felt ONE with everything around me, everything I saw. And I have felt this way towards everything since this experience.” In (R21), Noah described this resolution of opposites during his entheogenic experience he “realized that reality was just a set of contradictions, paradoxes.” In most instances, this experience of interconnectedness seems to concomitantly arise with a diminishment or loss of ego, as can be seen in cases such as (R22), where Caleb recalls realizing that his identity was one with God, the universe, and all of creation, or in (R29) where Cheryl “felt an expanded sense of myself, like I was me, but also everything else in existence.”

In many reports, entheogen users describe having an experience of interconnectedness along with their sense of self being either eliminated or diminished. In (R2), SlipKnot420 first experienced himself die, and then experienced becoming one with the trees, the world, the universe, and with everything in existence. In (R3), Xorkoth claimed that his ego “was not crushed or shattered; rather it was reduced to tiny proportions and pushed aside as a triviality.” Soon after this experience, Xorkoth reported “twining” his consciousness around the universe. What seems to be happening in these scenarios is that there is first a negative assertion made which seems to be that the ego does not exist (or at least is not at the forefront of thought), which is an idea—or an experience—that is tied to the notion that there is no separateness. These negative metaphysical assertions at the same time give rise the positive ethical inference of interconnectedness which presumably, brings an expanded threshold of awareness to a person’s actions from that point forward. Based on this experience of interconnection, the illusion of

separateness seems to fall apart (R2), and in light of this new awareness, one understands that all of their actions are retributively returned to them. In realizing this, one would logically strive to reduce harm to others and pursue the so-called “higher” values which are not egocentrically-based.

In some of the more explicit cases, the ethical import derived from the experiences has been told outright by the participants themselves in claiming that, “I believe that it showed me a way of being, and that people are not a means to an end, but ends in themselves—like Kant said. Before this experience I saw people as objects, and now I feel that I can understand them better in their totality” (R21). Others, such as mindexplorer (R9) have reported that they gained a newfound sense of understanding as a result of these experiences in being able to “empathize, on a deep emotional level” with animals and other conscious beings. Oswald Rabbit (R8) reported feeling more grounded, calm, and “More importantly, I feel I’ve become a more compassionate, more understanding, more loving person.” Rosa (R23) recalls having more empathy for others as a result of her entheogenic experience, and Henry (R30) has claimed that entheogenic experiences can allow people to “tap into a level of unbounded love for each other that they never knew existed.” Will (R1) recalls having a “profound desire to make meaningful connections with other people” and gaining a “new found love” for others, while Xorkoth (R3) experienced becoming one with the “life-force of everything” and intimately coming to know all living beings “no less intimately” than his own life.

Direct ethical principles have also been claimed as being learned by way of entheogenic experiences, such as in the case of (R18) where Voyager learned that “the purpose of life is to make life better for oneself and all other beings,” and in (R16) where TreeFox realized that “everything just mattered, because it existed” and that the act of interrupting the lifecycle of any being would “disrupt the natural order of things.” In (R25), Alex recalls learning a fundamental principle of life which was that “life must be respected,” and Keith (R6) recalled learning that he

had “full control” over his actions, and that “every decision” he made would somehow affect the people around him. Others, such as DuhltsMe (R14), have claimed, “Avoid causing harm to others if you can (because there are no *others*), and RiskBreaker (R15) came to the realization that his ego had poisoned the “very space in which all things are connected.”

In concluding the overall argument, it should be noted that all of the experiences in this study (R1-30) are so meaningfully-rich that they invite multiple, overlapping layers of each of these five theoretical considerations to be read into them. In fact, after having broken each of these concepts down for arguments sake, each of these experiences (R1-30) should be reread in their entirety once again so that all of these overlapping layers of meaning can be understood in one fell swoop. Although I have deliberately limited the amount of these interpretations here, the elements I refer to as meaningfully regenerative, transformative, live options, and ethical import can be also be found in several of the cases I did not specifically discuss. With what has been analyzed, however, sufficient reason and evidence seems to support the proposition that entheogenic experiences can potentially have ethical implications.

Since entheogenic experiences can create spaces in which new meaning is made, and these spaces allow for new identities and philosophies to arise, entheogenic experiences seem to allow new ethical dispositions to be entertained and take root as well. In the reports summarized here, participants discussed situations which can be seen as nothing less than transformative, and these transformations mark that some new meaning has been made in terms of their worldviews. In 17 of the 30 reports provided in Chapter 3, either an implicit or explicit experience of interconnectedness has arisen for individuals during their entheogenic experiences, and I argue that these have created new live ethical options based on the fundamental metaphysical notion of interconnectedness. In the other 13 reports which did not either implicitly or explicitly state an experience of interconnectedness, direct ethical insights or imperatives were experienced by entheogen users which dealt with becoming more compassionate and altruistic. In all instances

(R1-30), fundamental philosophical insights were gained by users which dealt with either the way in which they perceive themselves, others, the world, or the divine. Most importantly, however, in terms of ethics, what these experiences overwhelmingly bring to light is the concept of interconnectedness—whether it is described poetically as a “seamless web” (R29), or simply as shared “resources” (R11)—which implies acting in a way that takes others into consideration.

Entheogens and an Ethics of Interconnectedness

Badiner: Are you anticipating the emergence of a Buddhist psychedelic culture?

[Terence] McKenna: No, it's a Buddhist, psychedelic, green, feminist culture! I've always felt that Buddhism, ecological thinking, psychedelic thinking, and feminism are the four parts of a solution. These things are somewhat fragmented from each other, but they are the obvious pieces of the puzzle. An honoring of the feminine, an honoring of the planet, a stress on dematerialism and compassion, and the tools to revivify and make coherent those three.

Badiner: The tools being psychedelic substances?

McKenna: Yes...(Badiner 2005, 170).

In these opening remarks, Terence McKenna aptly captures the essence of what will be contained in the following section—namely, the ideologies which may stem from thinking about oneself and one's actions in a wider context of interconnectedness. The themes of Buddhism, entheogenic experiences, feminism, and deep ecology all inherently promote the notion of interconnectedness by way of a diminution or reconceptualization of the self. In Buddhism, one strives to realize the unreality of the ego; during entheogenic experiences, the ego may appear to undergo a symbolic death and rebirth followed by an experience of interconnectedness; in feminism, the message is the empowerment and honoring of the feminine, which rests upon an expanded understanding of others; and in deep ecology, the ethos is to re-envision ourselves in the context of the ecosphere and to make our decisions based on this awareness.

All of these lines of thought require an expanded sense of self to realize, as well as an awareness of one's interconnectedness with other beings. I believe that this is the ultimate

message which is being conveyed across all the literature that has already been written about entheogens, and when taken in combination with this study, that interconnectedness is the fundamental philosophical “live option” that is gleaned during entheogenic experiences. Taking this line of inquiry one step further, it seems that those philosophies which resonate with a fundamental principle of interconnectedness will be what entheogen users will most likely gravitate towards.

Referring back to McKenna, it should be mentioned that he was, and still is, by far the most notable spokesperson for psychedelics. During his lifetime, McKenna studied nearly every aspect of the implications of psychedelics, including the role they have played in evolution, particularly in the expansion of consciousness and language (1992), their philosophical potentialities (1991), their pharmacological and healing properties, the history of their ceremonial usage, and their legal status, to name a few. In relating psychedelics to ethics, McKenna (1992) has promulgated the notion of what he once called a “...sense of Gaian Holism—that is, a sense of the unity and balance of nature and of our own position within that dynamic, evolving balance. It is a plant-based view. This return to a perspective on self and ego that places them within the larger context of planetary life and evolution is the essence of the Archaic Revival” (93). Taking all of this together, it seems that McKenna’s position on the ethical import of psychedelics rests upon two of the main principles which have also emerged in this study—namely, the notion of the unreality, diminishment, or expansion of the ego, and the experience of interconnectedness of being—both of which have also been elucidated upon by Roberts (2004) and Naranjo (2017) as well. McKenna’s (2011) position on the term “psychedelic” was that it meant “getting your mind out in front of you by whatever means necessary so that you can relate to it as a thing in the world and then work upon it.” This refers to the capacity that entheogenic substances have in allowing one to examine oneself and one’s relationships from a non-egocentric vantage point. This idea is consistent with the findings presented here, and it seems that during his lifetime, McKenna too

had already began exploring what other philosophical systems seemed to resonate with the principle of interconnectedness and an expanded understanding of the self.

While it would prove a self-defeating undertaking to propose any ethical principles that are sufficiently capable of representing all of those who have had entheogenic experiences—even in the small case study presented here—I believe that it is still possible to speculate on what type of ethical dispositions might arise based on the results of my findings in combination with what others have already put forth. It should also be mentioned that these reports taken as a whole and cannot predict what an entheogenically-inspired ethical life will look like either, and at this point, only speculations can be drawn with regard to what systems of thought seem to have resonances with the ethical insights gained during entheogenic experiences and the fundamental principle of interconnectedness. In what follows, I have put forth several theoretical frameworks which can be seen as having this resonance of interconnectedness with entheogenic experiences and thus, may prove to be potential worldviews which entheogen users may gravitate towards.

Interconnectedness in Buddhist Thought

Ultimately, Buddhism and psychedelics share a concern with the same problem: the attainment of liberation for the mind. While psychedelics lurk in the personal histories of most first-generation Buddhist teachers in Europe and America, today we find many teachers advising against pursuing a path they once traveled. Few Buddhists make the claim that psychedelic use is a path itself—some maintain that it is a legitimate gateway, and others feel Buddhism and psychedelics don't mix at all. But just as Buddhism itself must be held to the test of personal experience and to the wholesomeness or unwholesomeness of the results, so also must the question of how, or if, psychedelics can be part of Dharma practice (Badiner 2005, 2).

The resonance between entheogens and Buddhism has already been noted by several prominent thinkers, and most recently, it has been well-documented in the books of Allan Badiner (2005) and Douglas Osto (2006). While Badiner offers an overview of the Psychedelic-Buddhist landscape and highlights several significant themes, Oslo tends to elaborate more on the correlation between American Buddhism, Buddhist vows and practice, and the use of entheogens,

exploring whether they can be seen as complementary or irreconcilable. What I wish to draw the reader's attention to, however, is Badiner's contention that Buddhism and entheogenic experiences share a concern in the same issue: the notion of liberation. This notion will be expanded upon here, for liberation in the Buddhist sense means liberation from attachments, including concepts, such as the concept of an independently existing self. Ignorance—including the ignorance of this principle—represents evil in Buddhism, and leads to a dissociation of self from others and the environment (73). Realizing this principle is liberating in the sense that it leads to a newfound, expanded sense of self-identity.

To comprehend what ethical principles thus arise from this liberated understanding, several points must first be made with what has hitherto been put forth. In attempting to draw out the ethical principles that may arise from this fundamental notion of interconnectedness, the work of D.T. Suzuki (1974) will be used as reference throughout this section. First, regarding the concept of liberation, Suzuki claims that,

...therefore, says Buddhism, "as the first work in your religious discipline, destroy this chimerical, illusory notion of self; get convinced of the truth that there is no such creature dwelling in the coziest corner of our minds; free yourselves from the yoke of ego-soul which exists not; and you will see how vexatious and spirit-harrowing it was to be confined within the self-made, self-imposed prison. You will see again how free and unhampered your life is in the ego-less atmosphere where we all forget the limitations of individualism and participate in the feeling of universal brotherhood" (44).

Here, we can clearly see that the first work in Buddhism is to liberate oneself from the false identification with the ego. This identification with the ego denies the fact that "this self and other selves are one in each other" (45), and ultimately constricts one's perception of oneself—one's self-identity—in a limited way. Liberation from the ego, however, concomitantly seems to give rise to an undifferentiated experience of everything, something Alan Watts (2015) has called "thusness." Thusness was Watts' rendering of the Sanskrit term *tathātā*, which is normally translated as "suchness," and it refers to the experience one has from the perspective of liberation

or enlightenment. During this experience, one does not perceive themselves as existing as an independent ego, nor does one project a linguistic construct onto what they are experiencing, but instead, one just *is*.

Watts has also remarked on the Buddhist principle of interconnectedness in claiming that self-and-other are one and the same, and in fact, imply each other for their own existence—they mutually arise. My favorite rendering of this idea is Watts' phrase, "We need rocks," since it portrays the notion of embedded interconnectedness in brute fashion. In accordance with this line of thought, one realizes that creature and environment, self and other, existence and nonexistence spring from the same source and interdependently coexist—they are simultaneously the one and the many. Watts claimed that although we can temporarily entertain this concept of interconnectedness theoretically, we do not *feel* our interconnectedness with other things, and so, our common sense and our actions do not reflect this understanding. However, during mystical and entheogenic experiences alike, reports of thusness are common, and seem to allow people to attain the interconnected experience of being one with all that is. Essentially, entheogenic experiences seem to, at least on occasion, grant an experience of thusness, including a temporary liberation of the ego.

In what has been put forth thus far, the liberation from the self-limiting concept of the ego leads to a newfound awareness of oneself, and this expanded sense of self set the stage for a certain ethics, since this new understanding of oneself incites one to include the welfare of others in their decisions and actions. This, however, does not always seem to be the case in Buddhism, at least not explicitly, as Suzuki writes,

Therefore, the Buddhists declare: Regulate your thoughts and deeds according to the feeling of oneness, and you will find a most wondrous spiritual truth driven home to your hearts. You are not necessarily thinking of the welfare and interest of others, much less your own; but, singularly enough, what you aspire and practise is naturally conducive to the promotion of the general happiness, of others as well as of yourselves (46).

The welfare of others, therefore, is not necessarily a goal, but something of a byproduct which occurs as a result of acting in accordance with an awareness of thusness, according to Suzuki, and this is an idea which resonates with the notion of intrinsic virtue that had been put forth by Naranjo. Recall that Naranjo (2017) believes that virtue arises from a natural, healthy state of being, and it seems that the state of being he is referring to is a liberation from egotism. For Naranjo, the imposition of morality by way of patriarchy and paternalism are only reflections of the self-aggression which is occurring internally as a result of ignorance of one's interconnectedness. In taking these ideas together, it seems that by purging the ego-identity—through entheogenic experiences or by other means—an awareness of interconnectedness seems to follow which then creates the conditions for goodness, compassion, and the promotion of happiness for others to arise. This natural, intuitive type of ethics is aptly summed up in Suzuki's closing remarks on practical Buddhism,

In conclusion let me say most emphatically that the ethics of Buddhism is summed up in the purification of the heart, in keeping oneself unspotted even though living in the world; and from this eternal root must sprout such things of God as love, a heart of compassion, the virtue of strenuousness, humbleness of mind, longsuffering, forbearing one another, forgiving one another, and freedom from all evils (77-78).

To summarize what has been said, the ethics of Buddhism is built on the notion of interconnectedness and rests upon this foundation to be realized; however, this fundamental interconnectedness does not create a normative imposition of morality. Rather, it seems to naturalize ethics as an accidental property that arises from proper understanding—as Naranjo had stated, “the key to goodness is pure understanding” (Naranjo 2017). One would simply not act in a way that is harmful to others if one properly understood that they were inseparable from others, and that their fates are intimately and inextricably bound.

Another twist on this theme of interconnectedness that resonates with Buddhism can be seen in Roberts' remarks acknowledging that an experience of interconnectedness can lead to

altruistic actions. In Roberts' hands, however, there still seems to be some trace of ego present. He writes, "When transcendence reduces self-centeredness, when unity helps us feel oneness with other people and groups and even all humanity, when these combine with a sense of blessedness and agape, the result is loving-kindness, compassion, a desire to be active in service to others and to help humanity and the world" (2004, 49). It seems that in the Buddhist sense, an experience of interconnectedness naturally brings about virtue and proper conduct; however, in an entheogenic sense, this experience of interconnectedness creates what seems like an imperative for one to act in such a way after having had the experience. For Suzuki, it seems that desire—even the desire to promote the welfare of all—should be dissipated, whereas for Roberts, a sense of ego and desire still seem to remain, albeit newly infused with altruistic intentions. This seems to run counter to Naranjo's notions about the imposition of morality, however, it seems that entheogen users are quite outspoken about the fact that compassion and empathy are higher values which should be sought and promulgated. In drawing upon the entheogenic experiences cited in this work, I believe that Roberts' position is more prevalent than Suzuki's since entheogen users still report having the experience of interconnected oneness, but seem to maintain some sense of themselves as separate entities.

To conclude, a resonance between the ethical insights gleaned during entheogenic experiences and Buddhist ethics is undeniable; however, it seems unlikely that entheogen users at large—especially those contained in this study—will resolutely convert to Buddhism, as opposed to just adopting some of its ideals in terms of how they can parallel them with their own lives and experiences. After all, entheogen users in my study are all workaday people who live in the United States and must adapt to the encounters of everyday life in America, with several living in the some of the most congested metropolitan areas in the country. This is not to say that this is incompatible with an ethics which burgeons intrinsic virtue, but it seems much more the case that some type of utilitarianism is likely to be involved in their ethical scheme rather than a

diminishment of the ego, and that the interconnected notion does not naturally spring forth as Buddhism intends it to, but is rather more of an altruistic disposition made by those who still largely attached to an ego-identity. I believe that these notions give rise to another philosophical system which I believe is much more in line with entheogenic culture since entheogen users in the United States still seem to be more rational and analytically-driven in their approach to ethics and reality at large.

Interconnectedness in Process Thought

The simple notion of an enduring substance sustaining persistent qualities, either essentially or accidentally, expresses a useful abstract for many purposes of life. But whenever we try to use it as a fundamental statement of the nature of things, it proves itself mistaken. It arose from a mistake and has never succeeded in any of its applications. But it has had one success: it has entrenched itself in language, in Aristotelian logic, and in metaphysics. For its employment in language and in logic, there is...a sound pragmatic defence. But in metaphysics the concept is sheer error. This error does not consist in the employment of the word "substance"; but in the employment of the notion of an actual entity which is characterized by essential qualities, and remains numerically one amidst the changes of accidental relations and of accidental qualities. The contrary doctrine is that an actual entity never changes, and that it is the outcome of whatever can be ascribed to it in the way of quality or relationship (Whitehead 1978, 79).

Process thought is a combination of Alfred North Whitehead's (1978) process philosophy, also known as the philosophy of organism, and an offshoot from it known as process theology, which assesses the moral and religious implications that can be drawn from Whitehead's metaphysics. It has been noted that Whiteheadian metaphysics does not contain an inherently ethical disposition (Lango 2001), but requires an ethical system to be added to it. I agree with this reasoning based on what was seen in the case of Buddhism, since just adopting the principle of interconnectedness seemed to only lead to an ethical disposition of intrinsic virtue, rather than some rationally-based ethical system. This being the case, I believe that Whiteheadian metaphysics can still incite one to subscribe to an ethics that is based on an expanded sense of self and one's interconnectedness

with others, albeit in a manner that seems consistent with the rationality of entheogen users in the United States.

Whitehead developed the “philosophy of organism” to propose a worldview which could reconcile the disparate disciplines of religion and science in a way that also matched up with lived experience. Process philosophy presents a metaphysical system which incorporates the flux-like nature of reality into its conceptualization of the world, and puts forth the notion of process over substance. In this view, there is no ultimate, fundamental substance of the universe that we can point to—material or spiritual—only enmeshed relationships embedded upon one another in an interdependent system. “Actual occasions” or “actual entities” refer to the drops of experience that interdepend to make up the world (Whitehead 1978, 18); these entities, or societies of entities, can be “prehended” in countless ways by other actual entities, each of which reproduces some generality of its characteristics in a manner that is suitable for the prehending entity. Thus, “Actual entities involve each other by reason of their prehensions of each other” (20). The principle of “creativity”—also referred to as *novelty*—is the unifying, “universal of universals” which allows for the resolution of the one and the many, and allows the “universe disjunctively” to become the “universe conjunctively.” Whitehead writes,

The ultimate metaphysical principle is the advance from disjunction to conjunction, creating a novel entity other than the entities given in disjunction. The novel entity is at once the togetherness of the “many” which it finds, and also it is one among the disjunctive “many” which it leaves; it is a novel entity, disjunctively among the many entities which it synthesizes. The many become one, and are increased by one. In their natures, entities are disjunctively “many” in process of passage into conjunctive unity. This Category of the Ultimate replaces Aristotle’s category of “primary substance.” Thus the production of novel togetherness is the ultimate notion embodied in the term “concrecence” (1978, 21).

Notwithstanding the fact that several crucial elements of process philosophy have been left out of this inadequate summation, in short, the philosophy of organism constructs a worldview in which there are no fixed substances that can exist apart from all others, and that each actual entity in the

world is in a state of perpetual synthesis, incessantly establishing its actuality in each unifying moment of its becoming or concrescence. It is a metaphysics where all actualities interdepend, and thus has given rise to several theological and ethical concepts that have been built on this notion of interconnectedness.

In *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*, authors David Ray Griffin and John B. Cobb Jr. have written on this theme of interconnection, stating that,

Process theology hopes that, when we lift up this element in our prethematized consciousness to full conceptual clarity and affirmation, our awareness of participation in one another will be heightened so that it will again shape our deepest sensitivities and responses to one another. If so, it will be the recovery at a new level of what was present in primitive tribal experience. The new level will recognize that the “tribe” is now the whole of humanity. Starvation of an Indian peasant will be felt to diminish each one of us...One seeks to conform one’s life to the disinterested concern for others. The sense of mutual participation reduces the sense of difference between self and other (Cobb and Griffin 1976, 154).

What seems to be proposed in this passage is something akin to the idea expounded upon in Buddhism; namely, that an experience of prethematized consciousness—or interconnectedness—will naturally lead to more compassionate, virtuous actions by heightening “our awareness of participation in one another.” Cobb and Griffin, however, still seem fixated on the concept of an ego-identity which realizes its interconnectedness; so in this sense, process theology seems akin to Roberts’ position which is more of an altruistic imperative. In extending this concept of interconnectedness to the environment, Cobb and Griffin have claimed that according to process thought, humans and nature are inseparable: “the whole of nature participates in us and we in it” (55). The confusion reflected in our common sense about us being independently existing things has arisen, in part, due how we have come to confuse the symbols of ourselves for ourselves; in other words, the description of things for things-in-themselves. Reality, as we have seen in the case of Buddhism, is something like thusness, and thusness can only be referred to in the negative. Concepts—including the concept of thusness—are linguistic grappling hooks which bring thusness down to the concretized realm of ideology from which ‘reality’ can then be spoken

about in a manner that can be communicated and thus worked upon. This crude description of reality, however, is not reality, and so, with regard to “human beings” and “nature,” it seems that we can make no analytical distinctions between virtually anything in existence from the unified perspective of thusness. This realization of interconnectedness, according to process theology, creates an expanded awareness of mutual participation, which makes it imperative for one to take the welfare of others into consideration.

As one can see, what complicates this matter is that humans have confused concepts for reality—including the ideas of fixed space, linear time, and mechanistic philosophy—and this confusion is what has solidified our notions of being independently existing entities. Process thought at once exposes this “fallacy of misplaced concreteness,” which refers to the mistake of confusing the abstract for the concrete, all the while acknowledging that it is an insufficient system in itself for accounting for reality. Whitehead’s admits of this problem, and suggests that “The philosophy of organism is an attempt with the minimum of critical adjustment, to return to the conceptions of ‘the vulgar’ (Whitehead 1978, 72). Whitehead’s challenge, then, is to develop a language with which to speak about reality that can do justice to its complexity and interconnectedness, while at the same time understanding that it is a limiting project from the outset. What process thought offers is a rational approach to understanding our embedded interconnectedness, and for this reason, seems to make it a viable worldview for entheogen users within the United States to embrace. The philosophy of organism offers a metaphysics of interconnectedness which serves as a platform for ethics. In referring back to the ethical implications which can be drawn from this metaphysics of interconnectedness, Griffin and Cobb state,

Whiteheadian process thought gives primacy to interdependence as an ideal over independence. Of course, it portrays interdependence not simply as an ideal but as an ontologically given characteristic. We cannot escape it. However, we can either exult in this fact or bemoan it. We can actualize ourselves in such a way as either to increase or decrease it...[and] the perfection of human life involves

maximizing our relatedness to others, and hence our dependence upon them (Cobb and Griffin 1976, 21).

As can clearly be seen from this passage, there does seem to be a moral imperative—namely, maximizing our relatedness to others—which rests upon the notion of interdependence and interconnection. One can choose, therefore—as was seen in the reports of entheogenic experiences as well—to either heed this calling, or reject it; but either way, an awareness of one’s interconnectedness is undeniable. Therefore, since entheogenic experiences tend to give rise to an experience of interconnectedness, entheogen users may adopt a metaphysical system in which interconnection is fundamental, but which still speaks to everyday existence in a way that Buddhism does not seem to capture. The entheogen users in this study in particular still maintain some notion of ego-identity, although regenerated with an experience of interconnectedness, along certain ideals with regard to what constitutes right or appropriate ethical behavior. In most cases, these higher ethical values are described as empathy, understanding, and compassion, to name a few, and clearly show that there is still some ego-identity, but now with a novel “live option” which posits an altruistically-inclined moral imperative based on interconnectedness.

Two other ethical systems exist which seem to fit hand-in-glove with Whiteheadian metaphysics are the ethics of care and the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas. With regard to the former, also known as care ethics—which is often associated with feminist theory—relationships are seen as fundamental and must be taken into account in any ethical quandary. The reason this is associated with feminist theory is because some feminist philosophers have argued that women—as mothers, caretakers, and nurturing figures—find themselves in ethical situations in which relationships are central. While care ethics is a normative ethical system, it is often contrasted with deontological and consequentialist ethics given that these systems of ethics present abstract, general concepts which apply universally and do not take relationships into account. One feminist philosopher who has written on care ethics is Joan Tronto, who puts forth

four elements that comprise an ethics of care, each of which is rooted in relatedness: attentiveness, responsibility, competence, responsiveness (Tronto 2005). In light of the entheogenic experience reports from this study, these elements seem consistent with several of the reports, especially those which have made mention of becoming more understanding, having more empathy, or being able to understand their interpersonal relationships in expanded ways.

With regard to the latter ethical system that can potentially be added to the philosophy of organism, the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas also seem to take relatedness into account as a fundamental principle. Emmanuel Levinas' ethics seem to rest on the assertion that there is a fundamental relationship with the "other" which comes before the ontological acknowledgement of the "other" as such (1969, 48). This primordial relationship to the other at once incites an obligation to care for the other, and also reveals one's dependence upon the other. The "Face" of the other exposes their fragility and mortality, and this experience can lead one to a renewed perception of the self-other relationship, and thus change one's ethical disposition as a result. While Levinas' ethics is largely anthropocentric, it seems possible, in light of entheogenic experiences especially, to alter his ethics in such a way that "the other" includes beings other than humans as well. In fact, entheogenic experiences of interconnectedness often grant the "Face" of other lifeforms, including the universe, or especially the Earth, and have given people an expanded sense of their dependency unto others as well as insight into the intimacy of their relationship. In stressing the importance of relationship and interconnectedness, Levinas maintained that ethics is "[perceiving] that we come after an other whoever he may be..." (Levinas 1982, 167). If we can expand the Levinas' notion of "the other" to include non-human lifeforms as well, then it seems that this system of ethics can be seen to be compatible with both Whiteheadian metaphysics and entheogenic experiences at large.

Whitney Bauman (2014) has incorporated process thought into his work in attempting to promulgate an ethics based on interconnectedness. He rejects foundationalist epistemological

claims out of hand, given that he believes that they engender a conceptual violence against all other understandings of reality. These foundationalist claims—whether they be idealist or materialist—cannot be proven despite their longstanding reign in the history of thought, and have resulted in the creation of anthropocentrically-based ethical systems—both religious and secular—among other unhelpful concepts such as fixed-identities which have given rise to nonnegotiable social hierarchies and oligarchies. Bauman maintains that all knowledge claims can only be made from shifting grounds, and adopts a context-dependent epistemology which he believes is in line with the worldview put forth in process philosophy. Since Bauman takes the nature of reality to be emergent or becoming—in a word, process—he, like Whitehead, opens the possibility for re-envisioning ourselves and our relationships based on the unreality of a fixed and separate identity, as well as the fundamental awareness of interconnectedness.

Being aware of this “becomingness” grants insight into the unreality of a fixed ego-identity, and thus allows for a redefining of self-identity which can potentially give rise to an ethics of interconnectedness based on this novel identity. In this vein, Bauman claims that given our ability to redefine our identities at will, we should also include the awareness of our interconnectedness in our novel notions of self-identity and envision ourselves primarily as planetary beings before anything else. Bauman’s position at once seems to synthesize the ideas of Whitehead, Roberts, and the entheogenic experiences cited here insofar as each of these perspectives grant insight into the unreality of the ego and our inextricable interconnectedness. In my view, entheogenic experiences seem to provide the planetary ethical viewpoint that Bauman is looking for; however, during entheogenic experiences, this insight seems to be much more potent given that it is based on an experience, rather than theory. In short, given that entheogen users will most likely tend to find affinities with a worldview which is part rational in nature, I propose that entheogenic experiences can potentially catalyze the planetary ethic Bauman is claiming by way of granting an experience that is beyond language in which one *experiences*

interconnectedness and thus feels motivated to act in such a way which takes this planetary awareness into account.

Interconnectedness in Traditional Knowledges

A modern “ecosophy” would be about the rediscovery of meaning as it relates to our universe. It would require not only a different way of thinking, but also a different way of knowing and living. Such an ecosophy would rebuild a unitary view of the cosmos in which everything is interdependent and moved by creative energy, one that views the Earth and the universe with reverence and explores our essential relationships and responsibilities therein. It would be, essentially, the philosophy Indigenous people have lived by for generations, writ large (Cajete 2000, 60).

Many of the ideas which have been put thus far—process, interconnectedness, flux, regeneration, cyclic time—also seem to be characteristic of many of the Native American and indigenous paradigms which have been put forth by indigenous scholars and scholars of indigenous peoples alike. While it is not the case that some homogenized “indigenous knowledge” can exist that is representative of all native peoples, there are, however, certain recurring elements which seem to arise across traditions—including, primarily, the notion of interconnectedness—in the works that have been written about traditional ways of knowing.

The difficulty in integrating native and indigenous knowledges into Western academia arises in part due to the compartmentalization of Western worldviews into disparate categories such as religion, science, recreation, and medicine, to name a few. Indigenous worldviews are holistic through-and-through, and any attempt to constrict them to modern and contemporary paradigms runs the risk of distorting their knowledge to varying extents. Eurocentric paradigms of education have also, by and large, failed to respect traditional knowledge systems; indigenous scholars are often forced to use foreign concepts to convey their ideas, leading to many things being lost in translation (Tucker, Grim and Metzner 1993, 163). Highlighting some of these difficulties, Professor Gregory Cajete, himself a Tewa Indian, writes,

There is no word for *epistemology* in any American Indian language. However, there is certainly a body of understandings that can be said to include what this branch of Western philosophy would explore as the origins, nature, and methods of coming to know a way of life... Indeed, one might say that there are as many American Indian epistemologies as there are American Indian tribes (2005, 69).

Cajete's passage shows that we cannot reduce "indigenous knowledge" to a convenient whole without homogenizing and misrepresenting them. Unfortunately, the Western academy has a history of violently essentializing indigenous knowledges in just this way, and these instances have ended up damaging the cultures that they set out to valorize. On this same token, as individual indigenous bodies of knowledge are created by indigenous scholars to present their own localized traditions, it opens up the possibility of conducting comparative analyses between some of the main features which emerge from each.

Another reason traditional knowledges have had trouble being fully integrated into Western thought is because these knowledges are maintained through oral tradition. While this allows traditional peoples to regenerate their worldviews by continually wedding ancestral wisdom with newly acquired empirical knowledge, it is a method that is often at odds with rational thought, which proceeds by building a set of propositional knowledge claims and then constructing probabilistic generalizations from there. By contrast, indigenous knowledges are often encoded into myths and metaphors and do not adhere to rigid systems of logic. Further difficulties arise since traditional worldviews are each reflective of their own particular geographical locations and the relationships which exist therein, making them local and context-dependent, and thus, incompatible with universal generalizations. These circumstances, in combination with the fact that traditional knowledges dynamically adapt to shifting circumstances, appear to make it impossible to speak about indigenous or native ethics without referring to one specific tribe or group, or even the same group in different generations. However, despite these circumstances, it nevertheless seems a fruitful endeavor to explore the central

themes of interrelatedness and interconnectedness, which seem to be shared across many of the works written about traditional knowledges.

As a starting point, it can be said that for most traditional cultures, the land—including the relationships which exist within it—is everything, including the source from which traditional knowledges and ethical understandings are formed. These understandings are shaped by way of by intimately observing all of the different natural processes within a particular place, and understanding that they all work together in harmony to create a thriving, balanced ecosystem. From these observations, some have claimed that traditional peoples have developed an intuitive sense of balance, unity, and harmony with their environments and co-inhabitants, as well as a sense of responsibility to them as individuals within that system who seek to uphold this harmonious relationship. Given that native knowledges are place-based, and therefore predicated on recognizing the profound relationship existing between humans and the natural world (Cajete 2000, 4), the relationship between traditional peoples and the land cannot be understated, for, “This relationship is predicated on the fact that all Indigenous tribes—their philosophies, cultural ways of life, customs, language, all aspects of their cultural being in one way or another—are ultimately tied to the relationships that they have established and applied during their history with regard to certain places and to the earth as a whole” (Gorelick 2014, 47).

The recognition of this intimate relationship with the land and its inhabitants by traditional cultures gives rise to an awareness of interconnectedness, which in turn, creates an imperative to act in a way that reflects the principles of respect and reciprocity—principles which arise from empirical observations of nature and its biorhythmic cycles (Pierotti 2011, 17). In further adding credence to this relation-based ethos that can be seen emerging from traditional knowledges, professor and scholar of Global Indigenous Nations Studies (GINS), Raymond Pierotti, has claimed that traditional philosophies or knowledges are based on two fundamental premises: “All things are connected” and “all things are related” (2011, 18).

Echoing these tenets of interconnectedness, several others, including indigenous scholars themselves, such as Gregory Cajete, have also argued that relationships are of central importance in Native value systems, claiming that,

Understanding the depth of relationships and the significance of participation in all aspects of life are keys to traditional American Indian education. *Mitakuye Oyasin* (we are all related) is a Lakota phrase that captures an essence of tribal education because it reflects the understanding that our lives are truly and profoundly connected to other people and the physical world (Cajete 2005, 70).

For Cajete, the essence of tribal education is reflected in the notion of interconnectedness; the understanding of this concept gives rise to acknowledging oneself as a participant within this interconnected system. This understanding of one's responsibilities commit one to an ethical disposition in which one's actions should take this understanding into account in all situations. The recurring theme that immediately becomes evident across these works is the fact that indigenous and native knowledges are place-based, process-oriented, and fundamentally built from notions of interrelatedness and interconnectedness. Given these precepts, an intuitive awareness of the interdependent relationship between self and other seems to be a fundamental premise across most traditional ways of knowing. From this awareness, it naturally follows that whatever ethical disposition a particular indigenous group will have, it will likely take these notions of interdependency into account in all of their actions.

Along these lines, we can already begin to see several themes emerge that have affinities with the worldviews of Buddhism and Whitehead, while these themes also seem to resonate with the entheogenic experiences in this study. Regarding the entheogenic cases shown here, several instances can be found where the users had an experience which involved imagery of ancient indigenous cultures or other traditional-culture-related phenomena. While these, at first glance, may appear to be superficial, meaningless phenomena, there does seem to be a significant theme which connects entheogenic experiences and traditional knowledges; namely, the experience of interconnectedness. For an entheogenic user to adopt a view which is considered native or

indigenous, however, can be seen as a red-hot issue, often met with scorn and deemed cultural appropriation and neocolonialism; in fact, at best, it is regularly perceived as a New Age regurgitation of Orientalism. While granting that these outcries are rightfully weighed, one cannot deny the fact that many entheogen users tend to feel drawn to these type of worldviews for some reason or other. Perhaps it is just a yearning to create a new identity for themselves which is still ego-centric by way of appropriating indigenous cultures; however, it seems that what may be occurring instead is that there is a resonance between entheogen users and traditional worldviews based on the ideas of interconnectedness and interrelatedness.

The message which comes out of traditional ways of knowing is one of maintaining harmony with nature, including with the planet and all its inhabitants; it is a message of interrelatedness, interconnectedness, and responsibility. Recalling McKenna's opening passage at the start of this section, he claimed that the ideas of Buddhism, feminism, psychedelics, ecological thinking were all fragmented parts of a larger project which was to reconnect with planetary values. This is what McKenna refers to as the "Archaic Revival," or a sense of "Gaian Holism," and the theme of interconnectedness is the golden thread which runs through all of these fragmented ideologies McKenna had mentioned. The adoption of traditional knowledges and ethics can be viewed as an extension of this project, and the desire to reconnect with planetary values is what seems to be drawing entheogen users to these traditional ways of knowing and being. The fundamental premise of interconnectedness is also an experience which has created a new philosophical option for entheogen users, and their gravitation towards all systems of thought which incorporate interconnectedness as a fundamental principle seems to be inevitable.

In reviewing all of the ethical systems of interconnectedness mentioned in this section—namely, Buddhism, Whitehead, and traditional knowledges of American indigenous peoples—it seems that an emphasis on the present moment and the unreality of linear time are both precepts which can be found in all three worldviews. Each of these systems also seem to be compatible

with a notion of regeneration, given that they all give primacy to experience, and thereby glean insight into the space between symbols and reality. In the case of Buddhist ethics, there appears to be a focus on intrinsic goodness and organismic wisdom that stems from an understanding of interconnectedness. In process thought, the metaphysics of interconnectedness seems to lean more towards a notion of an altruistic moral imperative, and can potentially be interpreted in consequentialist or even deontological terms. Traditional ethics seem to fall somewhere between the former two, given that a deep understanding of one's interdependency with others gives rise to an understanding of interconnectedness, impelling one to follow the reciprocal principles which originate from nature; at the same time, however, these principles also seem to be moral imperatives that are promulgated in native education. As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, I do not wish to ascribe a singular ethical system that claims to represent all entheogen users; but in the cases I have researched, there does seem to be a new philosophical understanding of interconnectedness that is derived from the entheogenic experience, and can thus potentially motivate one to find a worldview—including an ethics—that is compatible with this newfound understanding.

Conclusion

It requires intelligence to understand the chemistry of a drug one takes, but it requires courage to understand the ceremony one performs; and while it requires intelligence to understand the chemistry of a drug others take, it requires both courage and tolerance to understand the ceremony they perform... (Szasz 1974, 17).

Before endeavoring to synthesize this overall investigation, I believe that an important issue must first be addressed. This is the notion that any and all attempts to delimit entheogenic experiences in any way—such as ethically, in this case—are prone to rendering all analyses and results meaningless, given that entheogenic experiences come in seemingly infinite forms. I partially concede to such a claim insofar as I acknowledge that I am only using a small portion of entheogenic experiences that have also been selected at my behest; however, my results are far from meaningless since my findings can be exponentially replicated as more phenomenological reports are gathered and analyzed. Furthermore, this type of inquiry is the first of its kind, to my knowledge, which attempts to understand the ethical import of entheogens in terms of creating new live options using phenomenology. As such, this work not only adds a gloss on the small amount of literature which has been written about the subject of entheogens and ethics, but has also paved a new path in which entheogenic experiences can be philosophically considered for their ethical import.

Criticisms aside, the main point I wish to make is that entheogenic experiences change users' ethics in some cases, and this ethical notion is related to an experience of interconnectedness. Whether or not this experience of interconnectedness is just a projection that entheogen users are expecting to have during their entheogenic experiences, the phenomenological reports analyzed in their entirety suggest that some fundamental shift has occurred in the psyche of these entheogen users which they feel had momentous implications as well as a positive impact on their lives. This shift—insofar as ethics is concerned—has to do with the experience of oneness or interconnectedness with other people and things that is so often

reported during entheogenic experiences. This fundamental insight has ontological and metaphysical implications which can be seen to add a further ethical dimension, depending on what worldview one adopts based on this notion. In the case of Buddhism, this experience of interconnectedness seems to incite something akin to intrinsic virtue, with altruistic actions stemming from a negation of self; in process thought, there seems to be an altruistic imperative that can be drawn from this experience; and in traditional knowledges, it can be seen as both an altruistic imperative and intrinsic virtue.

By taking the results from this investigation and synthesizing them with what has already been established about entheogenic experiences throughout various discourses, the present inquiry on the ethical import of entheogens gains further validity. The interdisciplinary discourses on entheogens show that entheogens have been revered throughout history for their ability to provoke ecstasy, while they have also been linked to healing and positive transformative experiences involving changes in behaviors and values. Contemporarily scientific research has begun to unravel the neurological underpinnings of these findings, while also echoing previous generations of entheogenic discourse in demonstrating that entheogens have religious, mystical, therapeutic, and behavior-changing import. Since several entheogen users, psychologists, philosophers, and scientific researchers have all independently made the case that entheogenic experiences can lead to transformations in behavior and how one orient's oneself to the world and others, these entheogenic discourses help to prove that the philosophical investigation into the ethical import of entheogens at hand is valid. Said another way, this fundamental notion of interconnectedness which I argue is a new, or regenerated, live option for entheogen users can also be verified by considering the various discourses which have been written on entheogens, including the scientific studies which have been published within the last few years.

Throughout this work, it has been shown that there are legitimate grounds to warrant the fact that there is a dominant cultural bias which exists in the United States regarding which drugs

are sanctioned and which are outlawed. Some of the proponents of entheogens have also argued this, but have further claimed that the ecstatic experiences attained by way of entheogens are also perceived negatively in the West because of the predominance of religions which reject these practices or do not have a place for mystical experiences. Given these circumstances, it appears that the entheogen users cannot properly form communities without being scapegoated, discriminated against, and even persecuted. What this work on the ethical import of entheogens hopes to show is that: first, this cultural bias exists; and second, that entheogenic experiences have much more potential than they have been given credit for. Further, I believe that entheogen users' use of these substances has been relegated to "recreational" since modernity has not allowed any other place for Westerners to experience ecstasy.

The issue of cultural appropriation with regard to entheogens must also be addressed, since some entheogen users rely on references to indigenous use of entheogens as a way of justifying or validating their own use of these substances. Some scholars have noted, however, that the only religions in the United States which have been granted legal access to use entheogenic substances have been because they are linked to some type of indigeneity (Monteith 2016). This may be one of the reasons why entheogen users tend to rely on indigenous references when attempting to validate their use of these substances, aside from the resonances which exist between the insights entheogen users claim to attain during their entheogenic experiences—such as interconnectedness—and the worldviews which have been described as being akin to these insights. These ideas lead back to McKenna's notion of the "Archaic Revival," or a call back to planetary values based on preservation. What can be observed in the entheogenic reports given in this study is that there is a recurring experience of interconnectedness that seems to infiltrate all of these experiences, either implicitly or explicitly, or by way of ethical insights which reflect altruistic notions that can be understood in terms of interconnectedness. This notion of interconnectedness seems to draw entheogen users to worldviews which maintain a fundamental

principle of an interconnected cosmos, which seems to be why they gravitate towards indigenous knowledges as well as other worldviews which maintain this precept.

In truly engaging with the topic of entheogens, one soon realizes that it opens the door to a wide variety of human rights issues involving cognitive liberty, the right to property ownership, and religious freedom, given how intimately linked humans—particularly, human diet—are to entheogens and other drugs. The realization of this as common knowledge is only beginning to unfold, and as more scientific findings are published, it is only a matter of time before entheogenic substances become legalized for medicinal purposes in either the United States or Europe. In the end, the controversies over entheogens prove to be a double-edged sword; on one end, the use of entheogens can be seen as neocolonial undertaking insofar as these substances are taken out of their original contexts and then used to justify contemporary usage of them; while on the other end, entheogenic experiences seem to be natural experiences that are understood by users as being some of the most significant and impactful experiences of their lives.

Moving forward, and in light of contemporary research, entheogens and entheogenic experiences can no longer be dismissed out of hand by cultural biases which include legal and religious opposition given that scientific evidence has finally begun to vindicate these long-maligned substances. As more scholars begin investigating entheogenic experiences as meaning-making practices that are central to the formation of identities, further understandings will be gained as to how these entheogenic-formed identities are having an impact in the world. In echoing the words of James, we have no *a priori* reason for dismissing an experience out of hand just because we do not understand it or because it does not fit our current paradigms of understanding; nor are we in a position to dismiss any experience in our attempts to gain a more comprehensive understanding of reality. Insofar as this is the case, and because it is entirely rational for those who gain insights during their entheogenic experiences to maintain them,

entheogenic experiences must be studied and included in our understandings of human experience and motivation, and must also be taken account in our understandings of the universe.

Research Limitations & Future Research

The challenge to us when any profound experience occurs is to integrate it constructively into our everyday lives...Though substances like psilocybin cannot be expected to “cure addiction” or other human ills simply by swallowing a prescribed pill, if administered with sensitivity to set and setting, they may occasion states of consciousness that could well provide a fulcrum for changes in self-concept, perception of others and the world, and motivation that could constitute a significant contribution to successful treatment. Further, beyond potential applications in medical treatment, these states of consciousness may provide experiential insights into neuroscience and enable us to better comprehend the mysteries of our own being (Richards 2008, 197-198).

Throughout the entirety of this investigation, several avenues of inquiry opened up that were remarkably fascinating, however, I was unable to explore them further given the focus of my study. Aside from these unexplored landscapes within the phenomenology of entheogenic experiences, there were also undoubtedly other limitations on this research, with the first coming from my own partiality in selecting only certain types of entheogenic experiences which I believed had ethical import. Other limitations of this research were that I was not able to conduct elaborate and lengthy investigations on the type of lives that entheogen users seem to have. This in turn, greatly affected my ability to make any profound proclamations which could classify the ethical disposition of entheogen users. Nevertheless, what this research does show is that the ethical import of these experiences is not based on what I or others perceive as “ethical”; rather, it is if the users themselves feel that it had an impact on their ethical dispositions.

One of the most significant limitations on this research was the fact that my reports were drawn from mostly male participants. As I was conducting my research, I found that it was much more difficult to find females to speak about their entheogenic experiences, and there were also fewer reports from females in the online reports I gathered for this investigation. It would be interesting to analyze the differences between the phenomenology of female participants versus

male participants, and to also investigate the motives which drew females to entheogens in the first place, and how these experiences impacted their lives.

Aside from being unable to find many female users, I was also unable to analyze the phenomenology of entheogenic experiences in terms of certain ethnicities or other demographics. Since all of the online reports were published anonymously, and because most users focused only on transcribing their experiences, many of the entheogen users did not specifically mention their ethnicity, nor did they give many other details which could inform the reader as to what social “class” they belong to or identify with. There were also not enough reports drawn from older entheogen users, which may have provided a different set of data to interpret the ethical import from.

Beyond these research limitations, there were many other aspects which emerged from this study which warrant further investigations on entheogenic experiences. The phenomenology of these experiences is so rich that I had to leave out the majority of content that users were reporting. Some of this rich phenomenological content includes: encounters with female entities or other beings, vivid rainbow or iridescent colors, and geometric patterns. It would be worth investigating each of these aspects of entheogenic experiences in themselves to see if they also have philosophical import in terms of ontological and metaphysical commitments. In the end, these experiences seem to shape what is possible for many entheogen users, and thus have contributed significantly to the formation of their worldviews and their identities. Going forward in my future research, I would like to investigate most, if not all, of the aspects which went unanalyzed in this investigation, including what an entheogen-inspired life looks like in practice.

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