

The Chemical Manipulation of Consciousness

THAT AMERICA IS A DRUG culture is no news. Though this reputation first brings to mind illicit drugs, whose illegality occasions tremendous violence and cutthroat profiteering, far more profit and just possibly more violence, though of a subtler nature, are associated with legal drugs that flood the American marketplace and the bloodstreams of its consumer citizens.

Legal drug users are quick to distinguish between their legitimate ingestion of synthetic chemicals and the criminal practice of using drugs simply to “get high” or to induce a mood change. Licit drug use is remedial, or, to invoke the full sanction, medical. One has an illness or dysfunction which drugs may be able to eliminate, or at least make more tolerable so that, for instance, one may live with less pain, or get more sleep, or reduce anxiety, or weight or... Whereas, so the argument goes, the recreational use of drugs is not medically motivated. The user simply wants some excitement or a quick ticket to euphoria.

The drawback with most drugs is their harmful and even fatal side effects. Many, particularly pain reducers, carry the potential for addiction. Yet it is commonly thought that the most addicting drugs are illegal, which is *why* they are illegal. Where does that put cigarettes, whose primary active ingredient, nicotine, has been demonstrated in clinical tests to be more difficult to stop using than heroin and which alone is causally related to over 400,000 deaths annually in the United States?

Recent pharmacological studies (*Time*, cover article “How Mood Drugs Work...and Fail,” September 29, 1997) have investigated a class of chemicals called neurotransmitters, including norepinephrine, dopamine, and serotonin, whose function is to carry electrical impulses between noncontiguous nerve cells. The drug-induced activation and release of these neurotransmitters, or the improvement of their contact with receptor sites, has made possible the treatment of a host of disorders that seem to derive from this neurotransmitter func-



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St. John's wort

Described as “Germany’s favorite antidepressant” (Time 9/22/97), this herbal folk remedy (Hypericum perforatum) is almost as potent as Prozac without Prozac’s troubling side effects.

tion. Chemical manipulation of this mechanism has spawned: the antidepressants prozac, zoloft, paxil, and elavil, whose naturally occurring analogue, St. John’s wort, has been used in Europe for centuries; redux and pondimin for inducing the “full” feeling that dieters seek; prozac and zoloft for a variety of problems, including eating disorders and obsessive-compulsive behavior; and clozapine, the antipsychotic drug that reduces schizophrenic hallucinations. All these drugs affect serotonic activity in various ways.

Surely amelioration of these

conditions is desirable. But two mitigating considerations dampen our enthusiasm. One is purely medical. It is rare that a man-made chemical designed to treat a human disorder, be it physical, emotional, or mental, doesn't have side effects ranging from the merely annoying to the life-annulling. The subtle hazard is posed by those drugs whose negative impact is imperceptible in the short term but grave with extended use. The human organism is averse to virtually any synthetic compound that does not replicate a naturally occurring substance. Because the human body is an astonishingly intricate network of interrelated subsystems, the introduction of one active compound may have repercussions that affect the entire physical ecology. It has been observed that knowledge of the universe is greater than that of the micro cosmos, the human body. Most drug therapies are therefore experimental and fraught with unknown consequences.

A second concern with the pharma-chemical "doctoring" of the human body is that it is done in ignorance of both occult anatomy and the esoteric understanding of the origin of human disorder—at whatever level. The human ego—as threefold spirit indwelling a threefold body, from which, with the link of mind, it elaborates a threefold soul—has bequeathed its present bodies to itself as the deserved inheritance of the sum total of its former lives. What we each are is a living chronicle



Oil on Canvas (c.1580), 42-1/2 in. x 31-1/2 in., Paolo Veronese (1528-1588), Brera Museum, Milan

Christ in the Garden Supported by an Angel

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us....And we know that all things work for good to them that love God."—Romans 8:18, 28

and embodiment of our cumulative past's will and testament. My today is heir to all my yesterdays. My discomforts, my so-called abnormalities (be they a heart murmur, hare lip, hodgkins disease, hemorrhoids, or hallucinations) present to me the effects of self-initiated prior causes. Typically, the abuse or misuse of a higher body in one life manifests in a lower-body impairment the succeeding life: from the desire body to the vital and from the vital to the dense physical. The correlations are not always obvious!

What we now experience as ill health and dysfunction is a reformulation and outpicturing of our former beliefs, feelings, and deeds. We are meant to experience this present condition, to live, if need be, disabled, disordered, discouraged, seemingly deprived—*until* we can see more light, better understand how we got to be where we are, know in our heart that whatever distress and pain we now sustain is neither arbitrary nor unjust. Indeed, it is finally a means by which we can be brought to the knowledge of a deeper, a holy, a God-blessed purpose to life. Then we realize that the most potent, the most effective medicine we can be given, we ourselves must prescribe and administer—and it starts with acceptance of our condition as we perceive it. This honesty, this frank, good-natured self-encounter is the portal to real healing. Not resignation but transformative understanding. Whether or not we carry our particular debility or suffering through the rest of our life, a deeper sense will circumscribe the affliction, make it more finite, because our mind has been reconciled to our plight. We know that God can only be unbounded goodness and total wisdom and that in His Mind we are always and only

whole. This understanding, perfectly realized, or at least fully affirmed, is the substance of miracles—those transformations medically classified as “spontaneous remissions,” or, as some allow, “acts of God.”

Drugs have their role. Certainly anesthetics are a mercy to those who require surgery, and it is but common decency to prescribe palliatives for persons suffering excruciating terminal and even temporary pain. But increasingly the esoteric student, intent upon in-personing the Christ life, shuns no Gethsemane or Golgotha in his desire to bring light to the universe of his physical, vital, and desire bodies through spirit-infused thinking. In all honesty, we can't really profess Christ, put Him on, and then not submit all that hinders this spiritual investment to the conviction that God the Father, the Great Physician, is attending our “case” and seeking our complete cooperation. We might ask, were he living today, would the Apostle Paul consult a physician about the mysterious “thorn in his flesh”? He did thrice consult his spiritual Doctor, the Lord, with the hope that his affliction might depart from him. “And he [the Lord] said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee.” Heroic medicine? Yes, but then our strength can be made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:7-9).

To medicate our problems, to chemically manipulate our moods, is to deny ourselves the opportunity to learn from our past actions, to defer their full impact and teaching value, and to tacitly rebel against our lot, as if it weren't of our own making. And the lot of many seems grievous indeed. In close, it is. But no one is spared what is necessary to arrest their careering into loveless egoism and turn them toward the saving power of the inner Christ.

The greater the understanding of the physical body's biochemical processes, divorced from occult laws and the soft heart, the greater the temptation to use wonder drugs to make us feel more like natives of the material world. The dangers of such accommodation, such delusion, such dumbing down, are grave. Knowledge of esoteric truths and acting on this knowledge is the best possible medicine that can be prescribed for all our mortal ills. □

A Few Thoughts on

THE LORD'S PRAYER

- I cannot pray **Our**,
if my faith has no room for others and their need.
- I cannot pray **Father**,
if I do not demonstrate this relationship
to God in my daily living.
- I cannot pray **Who art in heaven**,
if all of my interests and pursuits
are in earthly things.
- I cannot pray **hallowed be Thy Name**,
if I am not striving, with God's help, to be holy.
- I cannot pray **Thy kingdom come**,
if I am unwilling to accept God's rule in my life.
- I cannot pray **Thy will be done**,
if I am unwilling or resentful
of having God's will direct my life.
- I cannot pray **on earth as it is in heaven**,
unless I am truly ready to give myself
to God's service here and now.
- I cannot pray **give us this day our daily bread**,
without expending honest effort for it,
or if I would withhold from my neighbor
the bread that I receive.
- I cannot pray **forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us**,
if I continue to harbor a grudge against anyone.
- I cannot pray **lead us not into temptation**,
if I deliberately choose to remain in a
situation where I am likely to be tempted.
- I cannot pray **deliver us from evil**,
if I am not prepared to fight evil
with my life and my prayer.
- I cannot pray **Thine is the kingdom**,
if I am unwilling to obey the King.
- I cannot pray **and the power and the glory**,
if I am seeking power for myself
and my own glory before the glory of God.
- I cannot pray **forever and ever**,
if I am too anxious about every day's affairs.
- I cannot pray **AMEN**,
unless from my heart I can say,
“Cost what it may, this is my prayer.”

—Anonymous