



Entheogens, Myth, and Human Consciousness

By Carl A. P. Ruck, Mark Alwin Hoffman

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ENTHEOGENS, MYTH AND HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS is a much needed accessible exploration into the role of psychoactive sacraments - entheogens - in religion, mythology, and history, and also includes most treatments of the subject focus on modern scientific research, psychotherapy, are auto-bibliographic accounts, or are agenda-driven or otherwise naive and myopic.

A great mystery of altered states of consciousness and species development is expanding with new archeological and anthropological discoveries. Religious story telling (myth) is a timeless journey. Surprisingly it's not about truth. It's about finding one's self in the midst of the discovery of the "Other." It is the story of what is separate and unknown that creates self-consciousness. Our entire life consists ultimately in the discovery of the "Other," which gives meaning to the discovery of the self. The arts and language are the fossil remnants scattered on our path.

ENTHEOGENS, MYTH AND HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS discusses the influence of psychoactive substances on consciousness, human evolution and mystical experiences. It explores how religion, mythology, art and culture stem from entheogenic consciousness and why it's important to us today.

"Entheogens, or psychoactive sacraments, have a long, storied history that has played an essential role in the evolution of consciousness, mythology, culture, religion, art - and even history and politics. ENTHEOGENS, MYTH AND HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS outlines this suppressed - yet seminal - undercurrent of history, giving examples of the role of entheogens from the primal shamanic religions through, the historical religions, esoteric mystical traditions including the Mystery Religions, alchemy and Freemasonry, and into contemporary expressions.

Authors Ruck and Hoffman draw upon decades of research and personal experience in discussing the best documented examples of historically important entheogenic evidences, various ongoing threads of research and speculation to

muse upon the 'meaning' of it all..."

Our hominid ancestors experienced a spiritual wakening at the very dawn of consciousness that set them apart from the other creatures of our planet. It was a journey to another realm induced by a special food that belonged to the gods. This was a plant that was animate with the spirit of deity. It was an entheogen. It was the visionary vehicle for the trip of the first shaman.

The story was told over and over again until it achieved the perfect form of a myth. The realm was imagined as a topographical place, the outer limit of the cosmos, the fiery empyrean, or its geocentric opposite, our own planet Gaia. Myths multiplied over time, but they always preserved this primordial truth.

These myths provide a road map, a scenario, if you can read them, for whoever today wants to follow. However, it is not an easy journey, and it is also fraught with many dangers, of getting lost, of finding no return. Access to the entheogens is now largely prohibited or strictly licensed. The restrictions constitute an infringement of cognitive freedom, limiting the further evolution of human potential into productive creative imagination and experiences that lie beyond the normal, the traditional province of shamans, who can understand the speech of plants and animals, change shape at will, and journey, both physically and in the spirit, to distant exotic realms.

In addition, religions have staked out territorial claims to this realm of spiritual consciousness. They have colonized it, identified it with their god, often reserving the access for their own elite. Similarly, trade in drugs, both medicinal and illegal, has colonized the entheogens, making them only chemicals, rationally depriving them of their spirit.

ENTHEOGENS, MYTH AND HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS is a guide for the curious that provides a historical overview of the role that entheogens have played in the development of our unique supremacy as a species and offers also pathways and advice for reconnecting with the primordial sources of nature's power.

ENTHEOGENS, MYTH AND HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS investigates the role entheogens have played in the evolution of humankind's attempt to define reality in a context of metaphysical or theological dimensions. Although other botanical intoxicants will be considered (cannabis, daphne, opium, Syrian rue, datura, mandrake), none, with the possible exception of mandrake, seem to have lent themselves so readily to metaphoric personifications, which make this the subject for a course on mythology. The source of humankind's fascination and repulsion for fungi, indeed, leads to a fundamental consideration of the psychological nature of mankind's fascination or awareness of what in the categorization of religions is termed animism and rituals of ecstatic shamanism. In addition, the linking of bread and wine as sacramental foods is due to parallel concepts of controlled fungal growth as a simulacrum of the cosmos itself. The goal is not so much to acquire factual knowledge of this vast subject, but to open up pathways for reflection upon the basic nature of human existence and

consciousness.

The narrative is the awesome history of discovery and the findings of ancient rituals that meld into twentieth-century controversy and criticism of psychedelics. The future of humanity and the direction of twenty-first century brain science is challenged as well as our sense of social convention.

Entheogens have been deemed be prohibited controlled substances and as such is an infringement of cognitive freedom. Whatever the danger of potential abuse, the substance is not the fault, but the user. The hammer is not guilty, but the carpenter who misuses it because of deficient training. In order to exonerate the executioner in Classical antiquity, the axe was brought to trial and found guilty. The prohibition has drastically retarded the investigation into the therapeutic potential of proscribed drugs, including their efficacy in curing addiction. Some of these substances also offer the potential for accessing levels of cognition and consciousness beyond the ordinary, the traditional provenance of mystics and shamans, like bilocation, clairvoyance, and zoomorphism.



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Editorial Review

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IG II2 2323 The List of Victors in Comedy at the Dionysia (Leiden: Brill, 1967).

Pindar: Selected Odes (with W. Matheson) (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1967).

Mark Alwin Hoffman

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