

## THE MENACE OF MESCALIN

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MR Aldous Huxley has recently published yet another book.<sup>1</sup> It is not a very good book; nor is it a very attractive book; but it is, alas, in its way an important book. Its importance consists in this: that anyone who may feel an inclination to enjoy, here and now, what Christians call the Beatific Vision or the experience which the Zen Buddhists call *satori*, has merely to buy himself three-pennyworth of mescaline at the nearest chemist's, and behold, the ineffable vision is his. Whether or not the drug is available in this country in commercial quantities, I am afraid I have been too idle to find out. However, there it is for any who may care to make the experiment—heaven in a capsule.

It may be surprising to learn that Mr Huxley, who has for so long written in a tone of such great authority on mysticism and the mystical experience, confesses that before he achieved 'liberation' through mescaline, he had not actually had a mystical experience of any kind himself. 'For', says he, 'until this morning I had known contemplation only in its humble, its more ordinary forms—as discursive thinking; as a rapt absorption in poetry or painting or music; as a patient waiting upon those inspirations, without which even the prosiest writer cannot hope to accomplish anything; as occasional glimpses in nature, of Wordsworth's "something far more deeply interfused"; as systematic silence, leading, sometimes, to hints of an obscure knowledge.' In other words, Mr Huxley, despite his brash assertion that all mystical experiences are reducible to one pattern, had never experienced any emotion that has not been experienced by any normally sensitive and cultivated human being who is neither tone-deaf nor colour-blind nor congenitally indifferent to beauty. Under the circumstances, then, it seems well-nigh incredible that one who has busied himself much with art criticism and who is therefore fully aware of the qualitative differences between different works of art, should naïvely assume that experiences which transcend art but are

1 *The Doors of Perception* (Chatto and Windus).

nevertheless akin to it and which hitherto had been a closed book to him, must necessarily be identical; for he must know that the 'numinous' experiences caused by the seeing, hearing, or reading of great works of art, though all in their way pleasurable, are nevertheless wholly different in kind. And not only are they different in kind; they produce different effects on different people at different times. If, then, this is demonstrably true of artistic experiences which are available to the majority of educated men, it is probable that this is also true of 'mystical' experiences which admittedly transcend the artistic but are, according to Huxley, similar in kind.

And here I might instance an experience of my own by way of introductory illustration; it would seem to be directly comparable to Huxley's experience with mescaline. I do not pretend that my own experience, which was purely aesthetic, can be compared in intensity to the transports that Huxley seems to have enjoyed while under the influence of the drug. The significant point of resemblance is that objects took on a new meaning which they did not appear to have before.

Before 1952 Raphael had not even struck me as being a particularly great painter. He seemed to me slightly mawkish and not to be put into the same class as Michelangelo or Leonardo, for example. Then, one rainy day in Milan, I reluctantly transferred my attention from a superb Madonna of Piero della Francesca to the 'Sposalizio' of Raphael which hung in the same room. For several minutes I could see nothing remarkable in the picture: the grouping was good, certainly, but how dreadfully vapid the faces were. Then, if I am to believe Huxley, a substance called adrenochrome must have become abnormally active round about my kidneys. For the first time I saw the picture as the artist must have meant it to be seen. It took on a quite extraordinary, I might almost say a supernatural, beauty. It seemed to be grace through and through, both in the natural and theological sense of that word. Suddenly one realized wherein the harmony lay and how the otherwise meaningless space between the group of human figures in the foreground and the immense portico in the background had to be there. It was absolutely right, and gave the picture the depth and largeness it would otherwise have lacked. I had in fact seen the painter's view of the picture which had totally eluded me before.

I only quote this quite trivial and by no means unusual experience as a parallel from ordinary life to Huxley's more extraordinary experience. All that had happened was that I had discovered beauty that, for me, had not previously been there. This is precisely what occurred to Huxley under the influence of mescaline.

The experiences Mr Huxley describes are a well-known phenomenon to any serious student of religion, and you will find many parallels in William James' admirable book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. These phenomena are usually referred to as natural mysticism: they might equally well be described as the pantheistic experience or, as I should prefer to say, as the pan-en-hen-ic experience, the experience of all as one and one as all. It does not in the least surprise me that such a condition can be brought about by the taking of drugs. But where I must join issue with Huxley is when I read such enormities as the following: 'the Beatific Vision, Sat Chit Ananda, Being-Awareness-Bliss—for the first time I understood, not on the verbal level, not by inchoate hints or at a distance, but precisely and completely what those prodigious syllables referred to.' Brave new words, perhaps; but are they brave, true words? Apparently not, for it would appear that we have mistaken their purport. For on page 58 Mr Huxley more modestly confesses: 'I am not so foolish as to equate what happens under the influence of mescaline . . . with the realization of the end and ultimate purpose of life: Enlightenment, the Beatific Vision'. Yet this, or very nearly this, is what he was so foolish as to imply on page 12. For here, if we read a little further, we find that not only has Mr Huxley 'precisely and completely' understood the meaning of the Beatific Vision and of the Vedantin Sat Chit Ananda; he has become so convinced of the truth of the Zen Buddhist saying that the Dharma-body of the Buddha is the hedge at the bottom of the garden that he, in his higher vision, can treat this lightly as a matter of course. I leave it to Hindus and Buddhists to decide for themselves whether Mr Huxley's ecstasies correspond to what they mean by Sat Chit Ananda or the Dharma-body of the Buddha. I hope they do not. For my part I feel tolerably certain that this state, the reality of which I do not for a moment doubt, has nothing at all to do with what Christians, whether theologians or mystics, mean by the Beatific Vision.

Such a state is only achieved by holy living; and even if we are prepared to make all due allowances for the numerous vulgarities of this little book and for such questionable phrases as 'sacramental vision of reality', grace and transformation, etc., in this context, *The Doors of Perception* cannot by any stretch of the imagination be classed as a holy book; for holiness implies peace. There is no peace here: and that peace is one of the conditions of man's last estate seems to be agreed by Hindus, Buddhists and Christians alike. *Shantih, shantih, shantih*, the Upanishads say in harmony with St Paul. Step through the doors of perception; you will find a transfigured world, but peace you will not find.

Let us now pass on to what we do find and what it is that mescaline provides. Here, however, a word of warning is necessary; for whereas Mr Huxley himself had unifying experiences which caused him great joy, he also maintains that persons whose livers are sluggish are likely to experience something very different and wholly alarming. In other words the experience is likely to vary with the person. This is what we would expect; for the same can be observed in the case of alcohol, the effects of which can be studied or experienced by anyone who wishes to make the experiment. In general it can be said that alcohol releases those parts of the individuality or 'self' which are normally repressed, whether from shyness, or from prudery, or from fear of flouting current conventions. Yet everyone knows that the consumption of alcohol affects different people in different ways. Some drunks become irascible and break things up; others become amorous; yet others maudlin, miserable, or merely silly. The effect of the drug is to bring out characteristics normally kept firmly under in the subconscious.

Mr Huxley implies that mescaline has effects similar, but infinitely superior, to those produced by alcohol. He further implies that the effects may be as various in different persons as they are in the case of alcohol. There is, however, really not enough evidence to draw a firm conclusion either way. It is, however, worth pointing out that it is scarcely legitimate to conclude that because alcohol has different effects on different people, the same must necessarily be true of mescaline. Hashish, for instance, seems to have similar effects on all who take it: it produces a greater clarity of vision, a sense of slightly ridiculous happiness, and, if one persists long enough, visions. The difference between alcohol

on the one hand and hashish and mescaline on the other seems to be that alcohol releases repressed *instincts* whereas hashish and mescaline appear to release *faculties* that are normally quiescent. Moreover Mr Huxley's experiences under mescaline bear so marked a resemblance to what is called 'natural mysticism', which means a state in which the individual feels himself to be somehow identical with his surroundings, that it deserves to be classed in that category.

Before considering Mr Huxley's experience I would like to quote a passage from a novel by Forrest Reid which illustrates admirably what I mean by natural mysticism, and which, I think, must be based on an actual experience.

'It was as if I had never realized before how lovely the world was. I lay down on my back in the warm, dry moss and listened to the skylark singing as it mounted up from the fields near the sea into the dark, clear sky. No other music ever gave me the same pleasure as that passionately joyous singing. It was a kind of leaping, exultant ecstasy, a bright flame-like sound, rejoicing in itself. And then a curious experience befell me. It was as if everything that had seemed external and around me were suddenly within me. The whole world seemed to be within me. It was within me that the trees waved their green branches, it was within me that the skylark was singing, it was within me that the hot sun shone, and that the shade was cool . . . I could have sobbed for joy.'

Here you have expressed with clarity by a modern novelist what is generally called the natural mystical experience. Its characteristic is the identification of the individual with the whole of nature, literally expressed in the Kaushitaki Upanishad as 'Thou art this all'. Perhaps an even more interesting case of a modern natural mystic is that of the French poet Rimbaud whose visions in *Une Saison en Enfer* seem to be even more closely parallel to Mr Huxley's experiences under the influence of mescaline.

After taking the drug Mr Huxley's first experience was that ordinary objects were utterly transformed. A group of flowers was no longer a group of flowers. 'I was not looking now at an unusual flower arrangement. I was seeing what Adam had seen on the morning of his creation—the miracle, moment by moment, of naked existence.' He was seeing the Dharma-body of the Buddha in the hedge at the bottom of the garden. He was seeing things as

they really are, *Dinge an sich*, things in themselves, stripped of the usual limiting adjuncts that the ordinary conscious waking mind imposed on them. The very books in the bookshelves were 'so intrinsically meaningful, that they seemed to be on the point of leaving the shelves to thrust themselves more insistently on my attention.'

This, then, was the first experience. Common things were seen not as we normally see them, but as they are, or as I think it may be perhaps more true to say, as they are in the mind of their Creator. In this respect Huxley's experience is similar to my own experience with Raphael. What previously I had seen as an ordinary and not very interesting picture, I later saw as something incomparably beautiful. I saw or thought I saw the artist's view of the picture. If the parallel holds, I do not think it is unreasonable to say that Huxley also saw the artist's vision of the picture: but in this case the artist was not Raphael but God. Huxley had not seen the Beatific Vision as he states on page 12 and denies on page 58, for the Beatific Vision is defined as seeing God face to face; nor had he seen Sat Chit Ananda which is the threefold essence of Brahman. What he seems to have seen, rather, was a part of creation as God sees it, or he saw *maya* in individuation as thought by Brahman, not as normally seen by men. He saw a transfigured creation: he did not see the Creator.

When, however, Huxley states that he saw the Dharma-body of the Buddha exhibited in each individual thing, it seems to me that he is on safer ground, first because it is impossible for the unenlightened person to say what the average Zen *koan* means, and secondly because to Huxley under the influence of mescaline these *koans* seemed supremely meaningful; and this is exactly what happens to the Zen adept when he achieves *satori*. Prior to taking mescaline the identity of the Dharma-body and the hedge at the bottom of the garden had only been 'a vaguely pregnant piece of nonsense. Now it was all clear as day, as evident as Euclid.' Assuming that Huxley is telling the truth (which there is no reason to doubt), it seems fair to conclude that he did in fact experience what the Zen Buddhists mean by *satori*.

We must now pass on to his second experience. What happened to time and space? They did not cease to exist; they merely ceased 'to be of much interest. Position and the three dimensions were beside the point.' So with time, it was 'entirely irrelevant'. He

and his watch were in a different universe. His world was now of 'a perpetual present made up of one continually changing apocalypse'. The distinction between subject and object were lost: he 'spent several minutes . . . not merely gazing at those bamboo legs, but actually *being* them' . . . being his 'Not-self in the Not-self which was the chair'. This is the pan-en-hen-ic experience, the experience that the macrocosm and the microcosm are one. It is basically the same as the experience described by Forrest Reid and Rimbaud.

We now reach what seems to me to be the most interesting experience of all. In this state 'the will suffers a profound change for the worse. The mescaline taker sees no reason for doing anything in particular and finds most of the causes for which . . . he was prepared to act and suffer, profoundly uninteresting. He can't be bothered with them, for the good reason that he has better things to think about'—the better things being, of course, this entirely new mode of perception. Thus human beings, unlike flowers and chairs, cease to be of any importance. So far from being transfigured, they are a positive nuisance. 'For', as Huxley frankly remarks, 'persons are selves, and, in one respect at least, I was a Not-self, simultaneously perceiving and being the Not-self of the things around me.' Seen from this new vantage-point, how could mere human beings matter? Since they were no part of the transfigured vision, they were positively in the way.

In this state, then, morality, and particularly its highest manifestation which is charity, ceases to have any meaning. As Huxley says, it simply is not relevant. Given such a state of mind—which apparently is the state of mind of what Huxley calls 'Mind at Large', and which is possibly comparable to the *Buddhi* or *Mahat* of the Samkhya system among the Hindus—those passages in the Upanishads which describe the released soul as being beyond good and evil, become comprehensible. 'He who understands me—by no deed whatsoever of his is his world injured, not by stealing, not by killing an embryo, not by murder of his mother, not by the murder of his father.' So says the Kaushitaki Upanishad; and respectable people are shocked. But, says Huxley, 'when we feel ourselves to be sole heirs to the universe . . . what motive can we have for covetousness or self-assertion, for the pursuit of power or the drearier forms of pleasure?' None, perhaps, for these particular vices: but surely, if it is true that human beings

are positively out of place in this pantheistic environment, there would seem to be a clear motive for removing them from it: and this might lead to conduct of an anti-social nature. For this particular experience—it must be said in common with most *genuine* mystical experiences—far from promoting charity towards one's fellow-men, actually seems to nullify it. Aldous Huxley was plainly neither in nor near that seventh heaven from which, according to Eckhart, the saint should willingly descend in order to bring a cup of water to a sick brother.

It is now time to pass on to Huxley's next experience: this is less pleasant. He has been sitting in a chair; and now he emerges into the light of day. He sees a chair, and what he saw and experienced in that chair must be quoted in full. 'That chair—shall I ever forget it? When the shadows fell on the canvas upholstery, stripes of a deep but glowing indigo alternated with stripes of an incandescence so intensely bright that it was hard to believe that they could be made of anything but blue fire. For what seemed an immensely long time I gazed without knowing, even without wishing to know, what it was that confronted me. At any other time I would have seen a chair barred with alternate light and shade. Today the percept had swallowed up the concept. I was completely absorbed in looking, so thunderstruck by what I actually saw, that I could not be aware of anything else. Garden furniture, laths, sunlight, shadow—these were no more than names and notions, mere verbalizations, for utilitarian or scientific purposes, after the event. The event was this succession of azure furnace-doors separated by gulfs of unfathomable gentian. It was inexpressibly wonderful, wonderful to the point, almost, of being terrifying. And suddenly I had an inkling of what it must feel like to be mad.'

The Sufi mystics have a word for these abnormal conditions. They are called *halat*, 'states', or *shathat*, 'overflowings'. They are disconnected episodes independent of the Sufi adept's regular progress through the various 'stations' to union with God. They are not to be understood, nor are they to be encouraged, for they may either be of God or the Devil. Huxley found this out too: he found himself 'on the brink of panic. This, I suddenly felt, was going too far. Too far, even though the going was into intenser beauty, deeper significance. The fear . . . was of being overwhelmed, of disintegrating under a pressure of reality greater

than a mind, accustomed to living most of the time in a cosy world of symbols, could possibly bear.' Mystics have experienced this before: one of the greatest of their number experienced much the same. Describing it she says, 'to say that it was as if the soul were continually torn from the body is very little, for that would mean that one's life was being taken by another; whereas in this case it is the soul itself that is tearing itself to pieces. . . . I felt, I think, as if I were being both burned and dismembered.' The resemblances between Huxley's experience and this seem to be striking; and had he gone further this is the state that he might well have reached. But this state was neither the Beatific Vision nor the Dharma-body of the Buddha. His fear of disintegration was a sound instinct, for the burning and disintegration that St Teresa was privileged to see was nothing less than Hell. As the Bible says, 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God'.

It is significant that at this stage it is no longer Zen Buddhist terminology that comes naturally to Huxley: he almost unconsciously drops into the more sombre symbolism of Christianity: for this would seem to mean that if his experience with mescaline can be used to prove anything, that is to say that if any general conclusion can be drawn from Huxley's single experience which, obviously, was real enough—and more than enough—for him, it means that the Zen Buddhist experience of perceiving the identity of the Dharma-body of the Buddha with the hedge at the bottom of the garden is only one stage on this exciting and perilous path. What is usually miscalled the pantheistic experience is not the final goal: it is only one stage—and not even a necessary one—on a way that should lead to God. It is neither heaven nor union with God. Possibly it is a foretaste of heaven; but it is not heaven yet. Between the two, it seems, there lies a place of terror. Thus it seems perfectly possible that the pantheistic experience corresponds to what Catholics mean by limbo, while the next stage seems to bear all the marks of what Catholics call Purgatory.

What sort of experience, then, can mescaline be said to produce? According to Huxley it contains three elements which may either be regarded as succeeding each other or as being simultaneous; for when asked about time Huxley could think of nothing better to say than that there was plenty of it, so supremely irrelevant did it appear to be. The three elements may be classed as (a) transfiguration of natural objects into things of unimaginable beauty,

(b) the feeling that one both sees things transfigured and *is* them, and (c) the sudden panic when the vision seems too overpoweringly real even to face.

The first experience seems to me to bear a striking resemblance to what the Zen Buddhists call *satori*. This is borne out by the fact that Huxley himself instinctively makes use of Zen terminology when speaking of this experience. Mescaline, in this case, seems to be a short cut to *satori*, and an adequate substitute for the arduous Zen training plus that final touch which provides the occasion for the achievement of *satori*—the sudden sight of almond-blossom in spring or the unexpected dropping of an otherwise insignificant object on the floor. It is enlightenment in the sense that all objects are illumined with a beauty which they had never possessed before.

The second experience is the feeling of identity with external objects. This sensation is conveniently summed up in the Upanishadic, 'Thou art this all', or in the even more obscure phrase of the Mahayana Buddhists, '*Nirvana is samsara*', which can be best translated into English as 'Being is Becoming'. This, at any rate, appears to have been Huxley's experience, since he accuses poor Plato of having made 'the grotesque mistake of separating Being from Becoming'. It is an experience of identity: the subject allegedly feels himself actually to *be* the objective world. The corollary of this sensation appears to be that the ordinary humdrum business of living is utterly unimportant and without significance. The transformed person is beyond good and evil which, like time and space, have only relative value. He has become 'like a god', and he is deliriously happy in his sense of identity with nature. Other persons no longer have any meaning; they are 'enormously irrelevant'—so much so indeed that Huxley avoided their eyes (and his wife was one of those present) and longed, as he puts it, 'to be left alone with Eternity in a flower, Infinity in four chair-legs and the Absolute in the folds of a pair of flannel trousers'. In this Eternity, Infinity, and Absolute, other human beings had no part. From this we can only conclude that the sense of unity or identity extended only to inanimate and vegetable substances (for animals are not mentioned). With rational beings, on the contrary, even normal communication was cut off.

What are we to make of all this? Now the Zoroastrians, in their

dualist way, make a clear distinction between two orders of being: the one they call *chihr*, 'nature', and the other they call *kam*, 'will'. By *chihr* they understand what we mean by nature—inanimate, vegetable and animal together with what is animal in man. *Kam*, 'will', on the other hand, is the exclusive prerogative of rational beings: it is the faculty of choice or free will which can only be exercised by rational and thinking beings. Both are creations of the Good God, Ohrmazd. The weapon of Ahriman, the Devil, against them is concupiscence which, on the natural plane, promotes disease and death and all disorder, and on the intellectual plane causes one to make wrong choices. Aldous Huxley's experience seems to prove that the distinction drawn long ago by the Zoroastrians is empirically valid. On the one hand he felt that he was one with nature, but on the other his will was disastrously weakened, and choice—a faculty which distinguishes man from the beasts—seemed no longer to be relevant.

Now the Zurich school of psychologists claims that Professor Jung has established the existence of a collective unconscious which is shared by the whole human race. I do not think that I would be misrepresenting him to say that the human consciousness is like the part of an iceberg which can be seen, the personal unconscious is like the very much greater submerged part, while the collective unconscious is the vast irrational sea from which he draws his being. The collective unconscious is neither good nor evil: it is neutral. Rather like the *prakriti* of the Samkhya system it can either help or hinder the development of the 'self' which is the term used by Jung to mean the integrated personality. If we assume that Jung's collective unconscious actually exists, then Aldous Huxley, through mescaline, would seem to have entered into communion with this entity and to have savoured its sweetness. He has seen and experienced the unity and loveliness of nature, that *chihr* which the Zoroastrians (with the Christians and Moslems as against the Manichees) see to be a creation of God and which the Brahmans see equally as an emanation or necessary adjunct of Brahman. On the other hand he had completely cut himself off from *kam*, the rational and volitional, and therefore specifically human. Jung has frequently met with this experience, and he knows the dangers of both states—the state where the conscious ego has lost contact with the unconscious, and the state where the unconscious takes its revenge by devouring the ego and bringing

on schizophrenia and madness. It is no accident that Huxley felt that he understood what it is like to be mad.

In the past, religion has maintained the equipoise between the conscious and unconscious parts of the 'self.' According to Jung, myth and religion are the exteriorization of psychological facts. The weakening of religion in Europe is directly responsible for the prevalence of neurosis in modern man and for the extraordinary manifestations of mass psychosis which culminate in such evil fruits as Hitlerism which represents the surrender of the conscious mind to the irrational forces of the unconscious. On an individual plane mescaline did much the same for Huxley: the artificial barrier between his conscious mind and the collective unconscious was broken down. The conscious mind was swamped: overjoyed at discovering its identity with the element from which it had emerged, it was suddenly faced with the horror of disintegration. It was up against something that was at the same time unbearably beautiful and terrifyingly cruel.

‘Tyger! Tyger! burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?’

That is what Huxley saw: he saw nature blazing bright in the fearful symmetry of its oneness. Was it, or was it not, God?

*Deus sive natura*, Spinoza said; and in this he comes very near to much Brahmanical thought. But this is merely begging the question; for this is precisely what we want to know. Is God the same as nature; or is he the Creator of nature? After all, Huxley's experience under the influence of mescaline has in no way added to our knowledge of religious experience except insofar as he experienced the terror after the ecstasy. That is an important fact: and Huxley has merely confused the issue by chattering glibly about the Beatific Vision, Sat Chit Ananda and the rest. It is not enough to talk about an experience of identity. The question is: identity with what? Huxley has adduced no evidence beyond the fact that he somehow felt himself to be the legs of a chair and other inanimate objects: to deduce from this, as he does, that at a higher level of consciousness 'All is one and one is all', is surely quite impermissible.

The only value Huxley's book has is that he has honestly recorded his experiences after taking a peculiarly potent drug. Philosophically and theologically he has not only drawn quite unwarrantable conclusions; he has confused every possible issue. He does not seem to see that there is all the difference in the world between so-called pantheism, monism, and monotheism. Huxley had a 'pantheistic' or rather 'pamphysistic' experience which many have had before. This is the experience of union with nature; it is not union with God. The confusion seems to have arisen largely because the Upanishads contain both monistic and pantheistic passages; and this has led the California Vedantins into assuming that pantheism and monism are the same. To have the sensation of being the universe is not the same as being absorbed in, and, if you like, annihilated and negated in God. If there is any truth in Jung's collective unconscious, then it may be deduced that it was with that that Huxley made contact. Natural mysticism is totally distinct from theistic mysticism. And the distinction is this: the natural mystic feels himself to be identical with the outside world—in Rimbaud's words, he becomes 'a fabulous opera'. The theistic mystic, on the other hand, is divested of his own personality to such an extent that he is wholly absorbed in God and loses consciousness of all that is not God. This at least is how the Christian and Moslem mystics describe it.

On one point, however, I think that Christians, Sufis, and Hindus agree: it is dangerous to play with the praeter-natural or to try to produce artificially a praeter-natural state without a previous training in abstinence and asceticism. Aldous Huxley did precisely this, and he saw at one stage what St Teresa saw when she was granted a vision of Hell. It seems to me that Aldous Huxley, like his Uncle Eustace in *Time Must Have a Stop*, suddenly had a premonition of what lay behind nature: he was about to tread on holy ground. Understandably he panicked. The reason for his panic, following so swiftly and so disconcertingly on his joy, was that he had been allowed to catch a fleeting glimpse of a reality higher than that of transfigured nature, a reality which he, with Spinoza, had been foolish enough to believe was the same as nature. He had been guilty of what the Moslems call *shirk*; he had associated created things with God; and according to Moslem theology the punishment for this is Hell.

The result of taking the forbidden drink was altogether too

violent. That Huxley should have the experience he had of not only seeing things as they are but of being them, is not surprising. This happens to sinners and saints alike; more often, perhaps, to sinners; for Rimbaud and Proust are among typical modern examples. Had Huxley approached the experience in a more devout frame of mind, the result might have been less terrifying. Mescaline, then, proved no short cut to the Beatific Vision; but it did bring to Mr Huxley a realization of the infinite beauty and harmony of God's creation. It could not prepare him to meet his Creator face to face. For this terrible experience much more even than complete detachment from created things is required: every vestige of self must be burnt away. This is the whole meaning of the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory; for until you are purged of all self-love you may not, in your own interests, approach the presence of God. It is this that the Sufis mean when they again and again insist that the soul must detach itself from all that is not God so that God alone may be master of the soul. In such a state and with such a love the soul can willingly contemplate annihilation. For under these circumstances annihilation no longer means the fiendish disintegration described by St Teresa: it is the soul's total offering of itself to God. This, among other things, is the meaning of the Cross. Such a sacrifice has no horrors, for it is an offering freely given and graciously received. According to the most daring of the Sufis, this passing away of the soul is followed by a further passing away from the very act of passing away by which the soul is reborn in God.

If such things as these are genuine mysticism, then Mr Huxley's experiences are not. That he realized the Dharma-body of the Buddha as the hedge at the bottom of the garden, I am prepared to believe. But though he may have thought that he had approached the Beatific Vision, the evidence seems to show that he came nearer than he knew to the gates of Hell.

His experiences, however, were well worth recording: for they show that there are two types of mysticism at least. There is communion with nature, and there is communion with God. The first he has experienced: from the second he was violently driven away. For this God, who is other than nature, is both *Ar-rahman*, 'the Compassionate', and *Al-qahhar*, 'the Vengeful'; and his vengeance he reserves for those fools who 'rush in where angels fear to tread'.