

COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS EXPERIENCE AND PSYCHEDELIC EXPERIENCES: A FIRST PERSON COMPARISON

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Abstract: The descriptions in the literature of mystical experience and psychedelic experience, such as that induced by LSD, are usually written by persons who have actually experienced only one or perhaps neither of the two states. Because many of the most important effects can be understood by direct experience but only partially described in ordinary language, such lack of direct experience is a major drawback. Since there is disagreement over the question of whether mystical experience and LSD experience can be ‘the same’, it would be helpful if an individual who has experienced aspects of both states would compare them. One of the authors (ALS) describes his experience with both states. A particular form of mystical experience, cosmic consciousness (CC), occurred spontaneously; no mind altering drugs were used. ALS later took LSD on 12–15 occasions. Both states of consciousness involved alterations in time sense, subject/object boundary, cognition, mood and perception. However, the changes with CC were qualitatively and quantitatively different from those of LSD. The authors conclude that CC and LSD can be quite different states of consciousness, although we cannot completely rule out the possibility that psychedelics might sometimes induce the same kinds of mystical experiences that occur for non-drug reasons.

The literature on states of consciousness contains descriptions of the phenomenology of both psychedelic experiences (Huxley, 1963; Tart, 1969; 1975) and mystical experiences (Bucke, 1961; Parrinder, 1976; Cohen & Phipps, 1979; James, 1925; Underhill, 1974). Some psychedelic experiences bear little resemblance to mystical consciousness, but the claim has been made that a few psychedelically induced experiences can be very similar to or perhaps identical with naturally occurring mystical experiences (Huxley, 1963). Other scholars deny this assertion (Zaehner, 1957).

Attempts to resolve the disagreement have been hampered by the fact that states of consciousness are notoriously difficult to describe and compare. Important aspects of these states may leave clear experiences as data in memory, but accurate verbal expression of these data in ordinary language is quite difficult and may be misleading. Further, it seems that almost all authors reporting these comparisons have not had first hand experience of *both* naturally occurring mystical states and chemically induced psychedelic states, and perhaps sometimes neither. For example, neither Huxley nor Zaehner claimed to have had a spontaneous mystical experience. In the only experimental comparison we know of, the well known Good Friday experiment, Pahnke (1966) studied the effects of psilocybin on volunteers in a religious setting. Insofar as mystical phenomena can be assessed by verbal descriptions on questionnaires, the psilocybin group experienced a significantly greater incidence of mystical-like phenomena, including unity, transcendence of time and space, and deep positive mood. Pahnke and Richards (1969) believed that psilocybin induced a ‘drug facilitated mystical consciousness.’ However, neither authors nor subjects had experienced spontaneous mystical consciousness. Similarly, Grof (1976) has had extensive experience with LSD psychotherapy, but not natural mysticism. Even so,

he believes that LSD psychotherapy offers a genuine key to transpersonal realms. We would agree that psychedelics can open a person to experiences of a transpersonal nature, but that is not the same as equating a mystical experience like cosmic consciousness with psychedelically induced experiences.

Both of these altered states consist largely and importantly of experiences that are observable only to the individual having them. Although there may be communication difficulties, we think it would be an important contribution, based more on data than on mere verbal inference, if a person who had experienced both mystical and psychedelic states of consciousness would report on their phenomenology and compare them. This paper reports the experiences of one of the authors (ALS) with a profound mystical state once and with psychedelically induced states numerous times. We use the singular pronoun 'I' for ALS's descriptions. The other author (CTT) is familiar with psychedelically induced and other altered states and has worked with ALS to clarify his account. The plural pronoun 'we' represents our joint thinking about the material of this article.

The term 'mystical experience' is used in many different senses by reporters and investigators of various religious and metaphysical doctrines. Moreover, many different phenomena have been termed 'mystical' (Stace, 1960; Underhill, 1974). The present report is concerned only with one specific type of mystical experience, which was termed cosmic consciousness (CC) by the nineteenth century physician Robert Maurice Bucke (1961). For Bucke, CC referred to an experience of the ground of being: 'The prime characteristic of cosmic consciousness is, as the name implies, a consciousness of the cosmos, that is, of the life and order of the universe' (Bucke 1961, p. 2). We include Bucke's classic account of his own CC experience in the Appendix. James (1925) and Huxley (1944) discussed a similar phenomenon, but usually used different terminology. For these three investigators, CC denotes a state of consciousness characterized by a cluster of phenomena including (1) passivity, (2) transience, (3) unity, (4) knowingness and (5) ineffability. Passivity means that the subject does not voluntarily control CC. Transience refers to the observation that CC is rarely sustained for longer than a half hour or at most an hour or two (James, 1925, p. 381). Unity is the experience that subject and object merge into one seamless whole. Sense of separate self weakens or dissolves. Knowingness refers to a direct insight into the nature of reality that is self validating: '. . . as a rule they [the experiences] carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time' (James, 1925, p. 381). Subjects of CC say that the state is ineffable. It is completely different from other states of consciousness and cannot be completely and adequately described either in words or by metaphor. Some or all of the characteristics resembling those described above may occur in deep meditation states, but this report does not address the question of how those states relate to CC.

The intent of this report is to compare the phenomenology of two conditions of consciousness, a series induced by LSD and a naturally occurring incident of CC. Its unique contribution is that the comparison is made by an individual who has experienced both states, so that he can compare phenomena, rather than merely words about phenomena. Our goal is to be as fully descriptive as possible, since these better quality data are an essential foundation for further understanding, and it is not within our scope to present an exhaustive analysis of CC or LSD in terms of the psychology of perception or cognition.

Experiencer's Personal Background

A few comments on my personal background follow. I was raised in a traditionally religious household, where I learned that God was both demanding and vengeful. Throughout most of my childhood my relation to God consisted of a mixture of guilt and fear. I had very little exposure to other traditions and therefore little chance to explore other thought systems until I entered university. There I was influenced by people who seemed (to an impressionable eighteen-year old) quite sophisticated and bright, but did not believe in God at all. The thought of Jean-Paul Sartre was very much in vogue and by the end of my freshman year I had become an atheistic existentialist. Such a rapid 'deconversion' was surely facilitated by a strong late adolescent reaction against orthodox religion. I was angry that I had been deceived by my parents and teachers into believing a collection of fairy tales about the existence of an imaginary God who had made my childhood so miserable. The anger gradually faded over the years, but had not quite dissipated when I experienced CC at age 38. By that time religion had no place in my life at all. I was an academic researcher, scientist and materialist. I was not interested in nor was I searching for any sort of transcendent or supernatural experience. I had no idea of what a mystical experience was.

At the time of the CC event I had never taken a psychedelic drug, but did have some previous experience with marijuana in social settings. It might be worthwhile to comment on the profundity of those experiences. Tart has reported a detailed analysis of the subjective effects of marijuana in experienced users who are educated westerners at seven levels of intoxication varying from 'just stoned' through 'maximally stoned' (Tart, 1971). My own experiences rarely exceeded Tart's middle level, which does not include experiences that might be loosely called mystical. Table 1 details some of the effects that I did and did not experience. I have given only a general outline of my level of marijuana effects, as my memory would not be accurate enough to warrant a detailed presentation in terms of Tart's criteria. (Note that my feelings about the inadequacy of my memory for long ago events in connection with marijuana intoxication are quite different from my feelings about complete and accurate recall of my CC experience.) Before the CC event, I was not very sophisticated in the realm of drug altered states of consciousness. I had no experience of those high level marijuana effects such as merging or loss of body consciousness that are reminiscent

Table 1: Subjective Marijuana Effects

| <i>Modality</i> | Medium-level effects experienced by ALS | High-level effects not experienced by ALS |
|------------------|--|--|
| <i>vision</i> | visual imagery more vivid | hallucination |
| <i>hearing</i> | quality of own voice changes | synesthesia |
| <i>taste</i> | enjoy eating more | taste broken into components |
| <i>time</i> | time passes more slowly | actions have archetypal quality |
| <i>body</i> | sexual orgasm more pleasurable | lose consciousness of body |
| <i>social</i> | giggle a lot | merge with others |
| <i>cognitive</i> | more here-and-now | lose control of thought |

of CC. I had experienced no drug effects that resembled CC. It is not likely, therefore, that my marijuana experiences could have suggested or prompted the CC experiences.

Cosmic Consciousness Experience

My CC event occurred unexpectedly while I was alone one evening and was watching a particularly beautiful sunset. I was sitting in an easy chair placed next to floor-to-ceiling windows that faced northwest. The sun was above the horizon and was partially veiled by scattered clouds, so that it was not uncomfortably bright. I had not used any marijuana for about a week previously. On the previous evening I probably had wine with dinner; I do not remember the quantity, but two glasses would have been typical. Thus, we would not have expected any residual drug effects.

The CC experience began with some mild tingling in the perineal area, the region between the genitals and anus. The feeling was unusual, but was neither particularly pleasant nor unpleasant. After the initial few minutes, I either ceased to notice the tingling or did not remember it. I then noticed that the level of light in the room as well as that of the sky outside seemed to be increasing slowly. The light seemed to be coming from everywhere, not only from the waning sun. In fact, the sun itself did not give off a strong glare. The light gave the air a bright thickened quality that slightly obscured perception rather than sharpened it. It soon became extremely bright, but the light was not in the least unpleasant.

Along with the light came an alteration in mood. I began to feel very good, then still better, then elated. While this was happening, the passage of time seemed to become slower and slower. The brightness, mood-elevation, and time-slowness all progressed together. It is difficult to estimate the time period over which these changes occurred, since the sense of time was itself affected. However, there was a feeling of continuous change, rather than a discrete jump or jumps to a new state. Eventually, the sense of time passing stopped entirely. It is difficult to describe this feeling, but perhaps it would be better to say that there was no time, or no sense of time. Only the present moment existed. My elation proceeded to an ecstatic state, the intensity of which I had never even imagined could be possible. The white light around me merged with the reddish light of the sunset to become one all-enveloping, intense undifferentiated light field. Perception of other things faded. Again, the changes seemed to be continuous.

At this point, I merged with the light and everything, including myself, became one unified whole. There was no separation between myself and the rest of the universe. In fact, to say that there was a universe, a self, or any 'thing' would be misleading — it would be an equally correct description to say that there was 'nothing' as to say that there was 'everything'. To say that subject merged with object might be almost adequate as a description of the entrance into CC, but during CC there was neither 'subject' nor 'object'. All words or discursive thinking had stopped and there was no sense of an 'observer' to comment or to categorize what was 'happening'. In fact, there were no discrete events to 'happen' — just a timeless, unitary state of being.

CC is impossible to describe, partly because describing involves words and the state is one in which there were no words. My attempts at description here originated from reflecting on CC soon after it had passed and while there was still some 'taste' of the event remaining.

Perhaps the most significant element of CC was the absolute knowingness that it involves. This knowingness is a deep understanding that occurs without words. I was certain that the universe was one whole and that it was benign and loving at its ground. Bucke's experience was similar. He knew, ' . . . that the universe is so built and ordered that without any peradventure all things work together for the good of each and all, that the foundation principle of the world is what we call love and that the happiness of every one is in the long run absolutely certain' (Bucke, 1961, p. 8).

The benign nature and ground of being, with which I was united, was God. However, there is little relation between my experience of God as ground of being and the anthropomorphic God of the Bible. That God is separate from the world and has many human characteristics. 'He' demonstrates love, anger and vengeance, makes demands, gives rewards, punishes, forgives, etc. God as experienced in CC is the very ground or 'beingness' of the universe and has no human characteristics in the usual sense of the word. The universe could no more be separate from God than my body could be separate from its cells. Moreover, the only emotion that I would associate with God is love, but it would be more accurate to say that God is love than God is loving. Again, even characterizing God as love and the ground of being is only a metaphor, but it is the best that I can do to describe an indescribable experience.

The knowingness of CC permanently convinced me about the true nature of the universe. However, it did not answer many of the questions that (quite rightly) seem so important to us in our usual state of consciousness. From the perspective of CC, questions like, 'What is the purpose of life?' or 'Is there an afterlife?' are not answered because they are not relevant. That is, during CC ontologic questions are fully answered by one's state of being and verbal questions are not to the point.

Eventually, the CC faded. The time-changes, light, and mood-elevation passed off. When I was able to think again, the sun had set and I estimate that the event must have lasted about twenty minutes. Immediately following return to usual consciousness, I cried uncontrollably for about a half hour. I cried both for joy and for sadness, because I knew that my life would never be the same.

Long-term Effects of Cosmic Consciousness

CC had a major impact on the course of my life. I had received a national prize for my research and had a grant funded for five years, but any interest I had in becoming a famous academician evaporated. My research seemed more like an interesting puzzle than work of immense importance to the world. I left my secure and successful university faculty position and supported myself as a part-time freelance clinician. I needed time to explore spirituality and to integrate the CC experience into my life. Those explorations included theology, psychology, mysticism, eastern religion, parapsychology, consciousness studies and holistic health. Eventually, I earned a M.A. in Consciousness Studies and another in Theology. Since CC, I have not had a 'career' in the usual sense of the word.

One important after-effect of CC that I soon discovered was the ability to create a subtle shift in consciousness. By quieting myself within, my inner mental chatter almost stopped and I became calm and present centered. Perception of the world and myself were both especially clear. The world seemed benign and 'right' with everything as it was 'supposed to be'. There was a great sense of inner peace. As the years

passed since CC, my ability to attain this state at will has diminished. When it does occur, it seems less profound than previously. I am personally very sad at this loss.

CC did not make me into an instant saint or enlightened being. I still occasionally lose my temper, worry, judge people, and need ego support. But from the time immediately following CC there were lasting personality changes. My general anxiety level was considerably reduced and remains low. I do not (usually) strive at living, but truly enjoy it. When I do 'lose it', there is a subtle way in which I can mentally 'step back' and see the real significance (or lack thereof) of whatever disturbed me. I have not been able to return to CC, although I have a real longing to do so. However, I can usually recall enough of the experience to know that the world is benign and that my ordinary conscious phenomenal experience can only hint at the true nature of reality.

The CC experience occurred in 1976. I did not make any notes until about a month later. Unfortunately, those original notes are lost. Even so, I feel quite confident that my memory of the essential aspects of CC is accurate. There are several reasons for this belief. (1) The CC experience was the most powerful event of my life and such a momentous experience is not possible to forget. (2) From the early weeks afterwards, I compared my experience to published accounts of CC. The comparisons constitute an independent way to stabilize the memory. (3) I frequently review the experience as a technique to achieve inner peace. (4) My remembered accounts are similar to the accounts reported in the literature (see below). In addition, many other CC experiencers have reported that their experiences have remained fresh after the passage of many years (James, 1925; Bucke, 1961). We cannot claim that memory is infallible and the long period between the events and the report is unfortunate. However, we do believe it very likely that the above phenomenal report has not been significantly distorted by the passage of time. Furthermore, my belief that my memory is accurate is data: CC produces that feeling.

Psychedelic Experience

My experience with psychedelic drugs is almost entirely limited to about 12-15 'trips' with LSD. I took my first trip about a month after CC. Part of my original motivation for tripping was the supposed 'mystical' nature of LSD. I had hoped to recapture CC, but never did so. The drugs were obtained from various sources and the purity and exact dosage were not determined. However, I have no reason to believe that there was significant contamination of the drugs. Comparing my experiences with those of other LSD experimenters leads me to believe that the doses I used were sufficient to generate a full range of what my colleagues considered the usual LSD effects. Most of my 'trips' were taken with a small group of friends (usually other professional people) either at home or in a quiet natural setting. The description below is a composite of my LSD experiences.

My first sign that LSD effects were beginning was a bodily feeling that was somewhere between a deep shivering from within the muscles and a crawling feeling in the skin. It was not localized, but seemed to be throughout the body. I have usually found it to be mildly unpleasant, but it passes within ten to fifteen minutes. The other effects, described below, came on slowly over a period of about an hour.

Time seemed to slow down, but never stopped.

Perceptual changes were very prominent. With the eyes closed, there were colourful kaleidoscope-like light shows. With the eyes opened, coloured patterns occasionally appeared on walls. Sometimes, actually existing spots or patterns appeared to move about. Colour intensity was greatly heightened and objects stood out with great clarity. My mood varied during an LSD trip. It could be anywhere from mildly depressed or even frightened to moderately elevated or 'high'. Typically, at the peak of the experience, my mood was extremely positive. I have never had a 'bad trip' i.e. one in which negative emotions were prolonged or very severe. The next section contains additional comments about mood elevation.

There was sometimes an experience of a wordless significance of certain objects. Often, these were quite ordinary things, like the pattern of a carpet or the cover of a book. I may have passed an inordinate time absorbed in the beauty of one of these objects. At times, the wordless significance extended to life itself. I have felt, for example, that a certain flower had great meaning for my life. Sometimes, there was even a feeling of merging with one of these objects or even with everything around me. However, my sense of self was never completely absent. The inner observer and inner dialogue were always readily available, even though they may have been diminished or even absent for brief periods. By 'readily available' I mean the following. I may not have experienced my sense of separate self for short periods during an LSD trip, but at some wordless level I knew that I was having an experience and that my 'self' could be recovered.

Comparison and Comments: Personal/Phenomenologic Approach

In my experience and consistent with what we can learn from the scattered literature, CC is a specific constellation of phenomena and the instance we report is quite typical. My experience had each of the major 'diagnostic' criteria proposed by James (1925, pp. 380–1) and/or Bucke (1961, pp. 60–3):

- 1) *ineffability* — inability to be described adequately in words
- 2) *noetic quality* — absolute certainty about the truth of the experience
- 3) *transience* — it lasted only about twenty minutes
- 4) *unity* — sense of the universe as a single whole
- 5) *passivity* — not controlled by the subject

I also experienced immersion in bright light that clouded perception and ecstatic emotional state, both of which are characteristic of CC, but not seen in every case. My experience of time slowing and stopping is not described explicitly by Bucke, but some of his subjects reported a 'sense of eternity' or immortality, which seems similar. In summary, my mystical experience is obviously characterizable as an instance of 'classical' CC.

LSD experience, by contrast, is defined as what follows drug ingestion rather than by a specific constellation of phenomena. The phenomenology is quite variable, but my experiences are clearly similar to those reported in the literature. The major effects on visual perception, time-perception, mood, and ego-sense have all been well described and will not be repeated here (Downing, 1969; Mogar, 1965).

There are numerous apparent similarities between LSD and CC. However, based on my personal experience, I believe that they are two very different 'states' of consciousness. As discussed previously, words generally fail adequately to describe

states of consciousness, but I shall endeavour to articulate the differences between the two kinds of experience. We do believe that appropriate words can evoke useful knowledge in the reader with some similar experience, even if words cannot completely capture and define these experiential realities.

I do not place much significance on either the shivering during LSD onset or the tingling that preceded CC. These were physical sensations and were clearly different phenomenologically. The perineal tingling may remind one of so-called kundalini experience, but is not typical of a full-blown kundalini phenomenon. The sensation was located anterior to (in front of) the base of the spine and did not move up the spine as kundalini is reported to do (Sanella, 1987).

Visual or light effects were associated with both LSD and CC, but they were very different. During the LSD experience colours were perceived more intensely and objects seemed to stand out. Clarity of perception was generally enhanced. With CC, the light was intensified, but perception was greatly diminished. In fact, there was no actual perception because there was nothing (i.e. no objects) to be perceived. With the exception of the light, I do not recall seeing or hearing anything during CC. There were no ‘events’.

The mood changes were both quantitatively and qualitatively different. During LSD intoxication, my mood was brittle. A ‘high’ state could be rapidly converted to a depressed one and vice versa. In my own experience, the mood swings were infrequent. In contrast, the CC mood elevation was constant, solid and all-pervasive. It was so intense that the words ‘joy’ and ‘high’ fail to capture the experience.

The mood elevation of CC and a positive LSD peak not only differ in intensity, but have a different feel. I would describe the LSD experience as ‘high’ and CC as ‘ecstatic’. The best verbal description that I can give for the difference between the two is the extent of associated ego loss. However, there are other ineffable differences. An example may help clarify my use of these terms.

Table 2 shows the words I would use to describe a spectrum of positive experiences. I have also included some states that could be described by the term ‘joy’. The numbers in Table 2 indicate the relative intensity (in my experience) for each mood term in the spectrum. ‘Joy’, ‘high’, and ‘ecstatic’ describe qualitatively different feeling states, with overlap among them. When I receive good news, I am joyful and fully aware of my separate self. There is some slight weakening of the ego feeling when newly in love and there is a further loosening in the ‘high’ of recreational drugs.

Table 2: Descriptors of Positive Emotional States

| <i>joy</i> | <i>high</i> | <i>ecstatic</i> | emotional condition |
|------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | x | x | good news about personal life |
| 3 | 1 | x | being newly in love |
| 5 | 3 | x | LSD, marijuana |
| x | 8 | 1 | average orgasm |
| x | x | 4 | best orgasm of my life |
| x | x | 40 | Cosmic Consciousness (CC) |

Numbers indicate relative intensity on an arbitrary scale; x = not applicable.

'Joy' and 'high' are both applicable to these last two conditions. An orgasm involves more ego loss and could be described as ecstatic. In an extremely intense orgasm, ego sense is reduced to the point where there is 'nobody' to feel high. The French epithet 'la petite mort' (the little death) affirms the weakened sense of self. Using this quantitative analogy, CC is an order of magnitude more ecstatic than the best orgasm.

My intention in the preceding example was to use words to point towards the differences in feeling state between LSD and CC. It is not to be taken as an attempt at a general classification of positive states

I noted above that in contrast to LSD there was no verbal experience during CC. This is an important difference between the two conditions of consciousness. I suspect that lack of words also contributed to the apparent loss of subjectivity during the unitive experience of CC. Although the word 'merging' was used in the descriptions of both states of consciousness, the experiences were not the same. (There is no adequate word to describe either experience or the difference between them, but I will try to do so.) The experience of merging under the influence of LSD was still an experience. That is, even though there may have been blurring of the subject/object distinction, there was usually still a person present to whom some thing could happen. On a few occasions, the sense of self was absent, but the absence was not nearly as 'complete' or 'deep' as that of CC. As noted above, the 'self' was never far away with LSD, but was totally beyond recall with CC.

Although I have used the word 'experience' in the description of CC, it may be misleading. There could be no sense of an experience happening to 'me', because there was no sense of a separate me. During CC, there was just *being*, as opposed to *experiencing*. I was the 'being' during CC, but 'I' had an *experience* during LSD. In summary, the 'merging' that occurs with CC is qualitatively different from that of LSD.

The feeling of knowingness is also different. With LSD there was an apparent comprehension of relations with persons or objects and an apparent understanding of their significance. This knowingness is in the realm of deep feelings, not words. During CC, the knowingness is quantitatively greater in that it extends beyond individuals to encompass everything. It is also qualitatively different in feel. Its level of surety is so much greater that the insights of CC cannot be doubted. From the point of view of my present 'ordinary rational' state, I can understand that a person who had never experienced CC might think that my experience was an illusion. However, I have no doubts whatsoever of its truth. I could be more easily convinced that the computer at which I now sit is illusory than I could be convinced that CC was.

A final but important difference between knowingness of the two states of consciousness is in the evaluation of the knowingness after return to ordinary waking consciousness. It has been said that an LSD trip can be important to one's life because it demonstrates the fact that reality may be much more than we ordinarily experience. This may be so. However, the wordless experiences of meaning or significance that I experienced during LSD had nowhere near the value to me that CC did. Many of the LSD experiences that seemed significant at the time turned out to have no lasting value at all. For example, I recall a great 'revelation' about beauty that I received during an LSD trip when absorbed in the pattern of plant leaves. The next day, the leaves were nothing but ordinary leaves with no unusual significance and I had learned nothing new about beauty. On the other hand, my experience of CC changed my whole life. The memory that reality can look and feel different with LSD may be

an important after-effect for some people. It may not have been so important to me because I experienced the more profound CC first.

There are reports in the literature suggesting that states resembling CC can be obtained with LSD. For example, Masters and Houston (1966) classified the 'depth' of LSD experience attained by experimental subjects into several levels. They found that 11% of the subjects could be guided to a level in which they experienced effects like dissolution of ego or union with the ground of being. Their work is extremely valuable as a description of LSD effects, but was done (to the best of our knowledge) by people who had not personally experienced spontaneous CC. Although it has some usefulness in comparing CC and LSD, it lacks the fundamental basis of one person being able to refer to both experiences. In my own experience, 'merging' and 'ego loss' was sometimes present with LSD, but was qualitatively different from that of CC, even though the same words are used (inadequately) to describe it.

It is significant that I did not experience CC with LSD, although I wanted very much to do so. The phenomenon of 'reverse tolerance' should have made the experience of CC even more likely. It has been observed that inexperienced marijuana users often do not get 'high' easily, even with relatively large doses. (Tart, 1975, p. 152) But, once they have learned to experience the states of consciousness available with a particular drug, they can do so with relatively small doses. In Tart's systems approach (Tart, 1975) to understanding altered states and their induction processes, previous experience of a particular altered state also makes it much easier for the induction process to destabilize the baseline state and repattern consciousness into the desired altered state. Since I had experienced both CC and LSD, and since I was highly motivated to re-experience CC, I should have been able to achieve CC with my later LSD trips, if it were available to LSD users. Failure to do so is consistent with the assertion that CC is not a usual LSD phenomenon. However, one could always argue that my LSD trips were just not profound enough.

Conclusion

A phenomenologic description of LSD and CC states has been given by an individual who has experienced both of these. Comparison and analysis of the descriptions support the conclusion that these are different states of consciousness.

It is likely that there are others who have experienced both CC and LSD. Their experiences may be similar to those reported here or may differ in some aspects. The authors would appreciate hearing from any such people who are willing to share and compare their experiences of CC and LSD. It would be particularly interesting if one of these dual experiencers could report having had a true CC experience during an LSD altered state of consciousness (d-ASC). We encourage these individuals to publish accounts of their experiences. If they do not wish to do so, we would appreciate permission to collect and publish the accounts ourselves. The combined experiences of a number of people would make a valuable report.

We are aware of no other reports in the literature in which a single individual compares the subjective phenomena of CC and a psychedelic d-ASC. For this reason, the present report should be very useful, but the addition of others' experiences may add to or alter the final picture. It would also be very interesting to find individuals who could compare the phenomenology of CC and other exalted states of consciousness involving knowingness and merging, like the near death experience.

Appendix

R.M. Bucke's Description of His¹ Cosmic Consciousness Experience

It was in the early spring at the beginning of his thirty-sixth year. He and two friends had spent the evening reading Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Browning, and especially Whitman. They parted at midnight, and he had a long drive in a hansom (it was in an English city). His mind deeply under the influences of the ideas, images and emotions called up by the reading and talk of the evening, was calm and peaceful. He was in a state of quiet, almost passive enjoyment. All at once, without warning of any kind, he found himself wrapped around as it were by a flame colored cloud. For an instant he thought of fire, some sudden conflagration in the great city, the next he knew that the light was within himself. Directly afterwards came upon him a sense of exultation, of immense joyousness, accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination quite impossible to describe. Into his brain streamed one momentary lightning-flash of the Brahmic Splendor which has ever since lightened his life; upon his heart fell one drop of Brahmic Bliss, leaving thenceforward for always an after taste of heaven. Among other things he did not come to believe, he saw and knew that the Cosmos is not dead matter but a living Presence, that the soul of man is immortal, that the universe is so built and ordered that without any peradventure all things work together for the good of each and all, that the foundation principle of the world is what we call love and that the happiness of every one is in the long run absolutely certain. He claims that he learned more within the few seconds during which the illumination lasted than in previous months or even years of study, and that he learned much that no study could ever have taught.

The illumination itself continued not more than a few moments, but its effects proved ineffaceable; it was impossible for him ever to forget what he at that time saw and knew, neither did he, or could he, ever doubt the truth of what was then presented to his mind (Bucke, 1961, pp. 7–8).

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¹ Note that Bucke writes of his experience in the third person.