

Dr. Abram Hoffer Leads Research In LSD Cure For Schizophrenia

Harvey Ovshinsky

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The Fifth Estate talked recently with Dr. Abram Hoffer, Director of Psychiatric Research at University Hospital, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. Dr. Hoffer was one of the first legitimate scientists to become involved in research with the controversial drug LSD. In hopes of cutting through the hysteria currently clouding the use of the drug, The Fifth Estate discussed the problem, its origins and the prospects for the future with Dr. Hoffer.

D-Lysergic Acid-25... ACID...LSD...Consciousness Expansion... Turn On... Get High...

The terminology may vary, but the debate on the growing use of the hallucinogenic drug is sharply delineated.

On the one hand, led by the messianic Dr. Timothy Leary, are those that consider the drug a wonderful boon to mankind to be exploited freely. On the other, its proponents of the scientific method urge extreme caution and seek to emphasize what they see as extreme danger in indiscriminate usage. The police establishment is arrayed with the latter, although with some reason of its own.

LSD, the diethylamids of d-lysergic acid—an ergot derivative with much the same clinical effects as mescaline, although tremendously more powerful—was introduced in 1943 by the Swiss pharmacologist Dr. Albert Hofmann of Sandoz A.G., Basel. Discovery of the drug was accidental. Although the scientific community was slow to grasp the significance of LSD as a therapeutic tool, by 1950 considerable experimentation had begun.

Dr. Hoffer's professional interest in LSD began soon after its discovery and has included applications to alcoholic therapy and the treatment of schizophrenia. He described the legitimate uses of the drug in these areas as potentially very valuable. But, in response to a question about the effects of recent popularization, Dr. Hoffer remarked: "The widespread attention focused on the drug, in recent years, advanced the understanding of its capabilities and potentials, initially. However now that controls limiting its use and availability are being enacted, in response to growing nonprofessional experimentation, the legitimate researcher will be hampered." He further pointed out the paradox that easy manufacture, and the drug's odorless, colorless and tasteless properties, will allow continued non-professional experimentation through "black-market" outlets. Dr. Hoffer shares the curiosity of many people in asking HOW prohibitions against the drug will be enforced.

The Doctor emphasized strongly that the drug is not a panacea, and is not fully understood even in the most promising areas of therapeutic application. "There is a need for considerable further professional experimentation before the therapeutic role of LSD can be clearly defined," he said.

Asked to comment on the rise of pseudo-religious and mystic feeling about the drug and the "experiences" it may precipitate, Dr. Hoffer criticizes the role of Dr. Timothy Leary as 'high-priest' in a burgeoning acid-cult. Dr. Leary's role has not been that of scientific investigator, Dr. Hoffer pointed out. By romanticizing the significance of a dangerous and misunderstood drug, Dr. Hoffer added, Leary and the other advocates of amateur experimentation are endangering all that heed their gospel.

Dr. Hoffer was especially concerned that the very real threat to the emotional well-being of those who take LSD indiscriminately be recognized. He branded as foolhardy the reckless search for Nirvana and the belief that genius

can blossom forth from an arid mind under the influence of the drug. Dr. Hoffer did agree, citing Aldous Huxley as an example, that creativity CAN be enhanced through the use of hallucinogens. But, he emphasized that the creativity MUST be latent, for the drugs can only—and in rare cases—help to liberate it. Much more important, said Dr. Hoffer, is the possibility of the drug liberating a latent psychosis! When a borderline psychotic, or highly unstable subject is exposed to a drug of this type, Dr. Hoffer told *The FIFTH ESTATE*, he may be actually pushed over the brink. There is no simple remedy then, he added. Nicotinic acid (commonly: Niacin or vitamin B, and readily available without prescription) can in some cases, arrest or partially arrest the LSD experience. More powerful drugs available only by prescription also have some value in counteracting the hallucinogen's effects. However, Dr. Hoffer firmly emphasized that once a person has released psychotic tendencies, for instance, the mere taking of Nicotinic acid or any other drug will not be enough. It is a question of opening Pandora's Box.

Dr. Hoffer strongly condemned the indiscriminate use of all powerful hallucinogenic drugs without competent professional advice and supervision. He urged that people interested in the possibilities of personal use of this type of drug realize the dangers involved and weigh them in relation to the expected benefits; and finally, not to make their decision without seeking a professional opinion.

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