

## My Evolving Views on Drugs and Human Consciousness

By  
Julian Cooney  
[jc5692a@american.edu](mailto:jc5692a@american.edu)

American University  
Washington, DC  
April 19, 2005

This course [Drugs, Consciousness & Human Fulfillment] has profoundly expanded and reinforced my views on drug use and consciousness. Though the course has opened my mind to many new ideas that I had not yet considered I feel the course has also acted as a guide in taking my mind further into its own understanding of the conscious experience and what it means to be human. This course has, more than anything, acted as a catalyst for my own spiritual development. The course has helped my spiritual development in several ways. One way is that it has increased my base of empirical factual knowledge. The second way is that it has provided a framework or structure in how to think ontologically (just how to think about the nature of my being). The third way is that the course has helped me to understand my relationship to others on another level, not just explaining why I do the things I do, but why others might do the things they do. In short the course has helped to set me on a challenging path to a higher understanding of myself and others, no longer allowing me to simply look at cause and effect or be satisfied with other people's unsatisfactory explanations of events, but challenging me to look first within myself, to understand my own fearful impressions, and then engage in the near impossible task of discerning any kind of truth.

The first half of the class was, although admittedly less interesting than the second, necessary to break down and challenge already accepted norms. I had never

heard before that addiction did not exist or that mental illness and the disease model was in fact a myth. I had never questioned the idea that psychology was a solid science engaged in the activity of discovering fundamental truths about human nature. Yet Dr. Schaler quickly demonstrated and presented all of the opposing schools of psychiatric thought, an act that in itself exemplified the notion that psychology was not a concrete science tantamount to either astronomy or physics, but merely a system of culturally based values judgments. The first major idea learnt in the class was that “addiction is not a disease but a behavior and there is no such thing as an involuntary behavior.” Now this idea is essentially two ideas but each is only meaningful in its relation to the other. I had never before heard anything like this and thus initially met the idea with much resistance. For instance, prior to this course if one were to tell me that psychologists had decided that a person becomes uncontrollably compelled to drink alcohol as a direct result of being spanked due to the effect on the psychological scarring of the mother son relationship or any other hypothetical type of analysis I would have taken it to be a scientific fact true to all human beings. A fact transcending culture or nationality but true on the fundamental level of what it means to be physically human. I did not question psychology just as I would probably not question Newton’s laws of gravity. Of the many arguments presented by Dr. Schaler that changed my concept of psychology there was one in particular. The story of Benjamin Rush, the father of modern psychology, who began the trend in classifying behaviors as diseases. Rush was the first to pronounce alcoholism as a disease and also labeled homosexuality and blackness as a disease. I was dumbfounded by the idea that medical rhetoric could be used to enforce prejudice. The more I began to seriously think about it the more it became clear to me just how often this is done. Just as

people may have taken Benjamin Rush's theories for fact over a century ago I began wondering how many theories I and my generation also took for fact today.

The second major idea that I had never been introduced to before was that of drug use as a religious activity. To understand this required a definition and understanding of religion, which in turn provoked an understanding of the idea of God, existence, and self. Even after I had accepted the idea that drug users were not out of control or victims of themselves or some "disease", I still found it difficult to see the relationship between getting high and performing a religious act. This is where the understanding of what a religion actually does came into use. Understanding what a religion does required an understanding of why people need religion which required an exploration into the very nature of human existence. One emotion seemed to be at the heart of the relationship between drug use and religion, anxiety. Dr. Schaler demonstrated how people use religion to cope with existential anxieties and that the use of drugs fulfills this same purpose. Rather than understanding the truth of one's self, confronting fear and desire, and trying to know the self, drug use is a cop out . Religion is used by many people as a cop out too. Rather than empirically and logically trying to understand the world people find it easier to use the explanations and rules offered by religion as a crutch, distracting the self from ever having to confront the self.

After struggling to realize this, a realization still in progress, I became familiar with Schaler's narrative on the history of the therapeutic state. The concept of the modern day therapeutic state as a replacement of the theological state makes sense to me in many ways. The terms good and bad have been replaced with healthy and unhealthy. Just as people looked towards the clergy for guidance on how to run society and who to accept

within that society now people look towards therapists, psychologists and psychiatrists. Just as condemnations from the church were pure values judgments so are the condemnations from the modern day psychologist. I do believe psychology is trying to help people and in many ways it does. But it often believes itself to be an infallible science and many people fail to recognize that it is only representative of the framework of norms from which it is produced. The problem with this is that blanket laws are applied to all of society condemning people for do what they want to do on the basis that others disagree with them. And that is not supposed to be tolerated in America.

The second half of the course served to open up my mind to my spiritual understanding of myself and life. By learning about Buddhist philosophies I became aware of many overlooked details within myself and possibly humanity. Fear was something I had not come to fully appreciate as a force ruling over so many actions and emotions in life. I had of course brazenly believed myself to not be afraid of anything and had proclaimed I had no fear many times. But that was before I understood what fear really meant and how deeply it penetrates all men's souls. The fear of death is on so many levels responsible for even the most seemingly unrelated actions and thoughts. Even the fear of another's death is really only the fear of one's own mortality. The fear of God, the fear of pain, the fear of suffering, of isolation and loneliness, are all so hard for oneself to confront and so many daily actions and desires are means of ignoring or masking these fears. Now this may seem like the same psychological pseudo-science which I had earlier denounced but I feel it is different by the following way. Whereas psychology is concerned with changing a person to fit another's perception of what reality should be the Buddhist like philosophies are concerned with breaking down

perceptions of reality to find one's true self and not change that self but come to accept it. The logic thus far appears sound, if one does not fear death then one will not fear life or anything that is a part of living and will have no choice but to be in a state of internal peace and not seek conflict nor change in the external environment.

These are just some of the ideas I have come upon with the guidance of this course and are still a work in progress. I have no idea whether I will come to further appreciate these ideas over the course of my life or if I will one day throw them away as rubbish, but I feel the key is to remain open and free from fear so I may look at every idea with a logical and clear mind. I feel I was already headed on this path of thought and had made some progress but, as I said before, this course has acted as a catalyst for my journey; providing a better framework and direction that would have perhaps taken me a long time to arrive at on my own, if ever. I will also try to avoid any introjection. Though it is tempting to regurgitate the things I have read and heard I feel it is important not to do so until I am myself sure of what I believe and fully capable in my understanding of the material. In conclusion there is a poem by Mathew Arnold titled *Empedocles on Etna* that I feel does justice in describing the state of man, here is just an excerpt:

The out-spread world to span  
A cord the Gods first slung,  
And then the soul of man  
There, like a mirror, hung,  
And bade the winds through space impel the gusty  
toy.

Hither and thither spins  
The wind-borne mirroring soul,  
A thousand glimpses wins,  
And never sees a whole;  
Looks once, and drives elsewhere, and leaves its last

employ.

The Gods laugh in their sleeve  
To watch man doubt and fear,  
Who knows not what to believe  
Since he sees nothing clear,  
And dares stamp nothing false where he finds  
nothing sure.

And we feel, day and night,  
The burden of ourselves—  
Well, then, the wiser wight  
In his own bosom delves,  
And asks what ails him so, and gets what cure he  
can.

Once read thy own breast right,  
And thou hast done with fears!  
Man gets no other light,  
Search he a thousand years.  
Sink in thyself! there ask what ails thee, at that  
shrine!

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