

## The Influence of Psychedelics on my Personal Development

**Aaron Long**

WHILE AT FIRST BLUSH it seems obvious to me that psychedelics have been important to my personal development, the firm believer in the scientific method that I am hesitates. Can I really ascribe changes to certain aspects of my personality to the influence of psychedelics? Experiences, aging, family, friends, lovers, books, music, and pure chance also all seem like strong causal candidates. Had I never had a psychedelic experience would I be very different? Would I be more conservative, more narrow-minded? Would I be less kind? Would I have a different job? Would I be married and have children? Would I find long, meandering guitar solos disagreeable?

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Like many people, I first took psychedelics in college when my life was already very much in flux and exposed to myriad influences. I began (and finished) college as a writing major, so it wasn't as if I was majoring in warmongering, took LSD, saw the light, and switched to the humanities. And this is the thing: I have never had one of those watershed moments where a major life shift was spurred by psychedelics. Yet I would put the psychedelic experience right near the top of the list of the most important things ever to happen to me. I pondered on this and decided that it would be instructive to focus on the commonalities of my psychedelic experiences:

1) Pleasure. I find psychedelics intensely pleasurable and fun. This aspect of psychedelics often seems to be the elephant in the corner in this publication, understandable given that MAPS wants to be taken seriously in its quest for the legalization of psychedelics for medical use, though perhaps this circumspection is taken too far. I posit that fun is an underrated medicant.

2) Everything is connected.

Psychedelics reveal to me, like applying heat to invisible ink, the strands that connect all the matter and ideas in the universe. The patterns of connection are beautiful and fascinating. I believe there is valuable carryover in terms of lateral thinking ability in my normal life.

3) Music is fantastic. Related to both pleasure and connectedness, psychedelics highlight patterns in music, impart to me new appreciation of and openness to a variety of musical types, which has made me a better musician.

4) Nothing matters. The whole ball of wax - the societal facades that try to keep us behaved, the structures our own egos have made to make ourselves important - none of it matters, none of it means anything, there is no god, everything is ridiculous.

5) Opposites are often both true. Yes, everything is connected, but we are also all alone, just a solitary consciousness here in the command center trying to make sense of chunks of sensory input that have been hurled over the wall. Yes, nothing

matters, but also everything matters because everything is connected and thus we are all a part of everything, so really there is just one thing—everything—ergo, you and everyone and everything else are god.

Those are the things I commonly experience while tripping. What do I bring back with me from the other side of the door to everyday life? What have I brought back that has influenced my personal development?

I think I can sum it up like so: winning stopped mattering very much. I was born with a very competitive nature. I played all sorts of sports and games, I loved to argue, I loved to stand out in class. All of it mattered a lot: I hated to lose. I believe psychedelics have softened my edge. Psychedelics revealed via the “nothing matters” factor that things like winning and losing, winner and loser, are mostly counter-productive societal constructs (based on innate Darwinian instincts) that lead us to compete selfishly for resources rather than to share them for the common good. I still love sports and games, but now the love is for the playing. I still like a good argument, but have come to believe that the happiest interpersonal relationships result from achieving consensus rather than proving that you are righter than everyone else. I still like to perform well in my endeavors, but I cut myself some slack.

I must acknowledge that the argument could also be made that psychedelics have hurt my competitive edge, which possibly has had negative repercussions in matters of career and mating. Maybe so, but I think I am a kinder, happier, better-balanced individual than I used to be, which I think tallies as a win. •



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