The Kranzke Psychedelic/Entheogenic Research Scholarship at the California Institute of Integral Studies

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At long last we are beginning to emerge from the dreary, dark ages of academic censorship, intellectual suppression and the politically-motivated repression of psychedelic research and exploration. This evolving renaissance has spawned a wave of ground-breaking investigations in a panoply of psychological, medical, and spiritual disciplines. Organizations such as the Heffter Research Institute, the Beckley Foundation, Cures not Wars, and MAPS have helped open doors that have been locked and shuttered for too many years.

In an interview with Albert Hofmann, PhD, Charles Grob, MD, asked the discoverer of LSD, “Do you believe it is possible to re-establish psychedelic research as a respectable field?” Dr. Hofmann replied, “I think there are many good signs. After years of silence there have recently been some investigations in Switzerland, Germany, and the United States. I have enjoyed meeting with Rick Doblin and Professor David Nichols and I think both of their organizations are doing fine work. Their approach appears to be quite different than that of some of their predecessors from several decades ago.”

In this new climate of relative openness and informed inquiry, a wide range of expansive studies are springing forward, brimming with paradigm-challenging questions and useful applications for these time-honored healing tools. Yet, those of us emboldened to look deeply into these questions continue to face the challenge of obtaining available funding and securing governmental approval. The genie is out of the bottle again. How will we choose do dance with the cosmic serpent this time?

Enter Robert J. Barnhart, the indefatigable philanthropist behind the Robert Joseph and Wilhelmina Ann Kranzke Psychedelic/Entheogenic Research Scholarship. Robert chose to honor his birth-parents with this inspirational award. Robert’s parents divorced when he was still a toddler and his mother married again to Joe Barnhart who then adopted young Robert. Robert speaks with an obvious affection for his parents. He describes his mother Wilhelmina as from a “well- to- do background, who was incredibly sweet and caring” and his father Robert Kranzke as “a wild German-Irish Catholic boy from the wrong side of the tracks.” As a teenager, Barnhart ingested some legendary ‘window pane’ LSD which precipitated a “classic psychedelic and spiritual experience” that changed his life. Instantly, he recognized a profound “sense of connection and that the fundamental reality is...one of love.” Robert began to recognize that these substances/medicines/tools are “a channel and a doorway, and can be catalysts toward a state of grace.”
A friend told him about the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), and after extensive correspondence with Rick Doblin, who confirmed CIIS’ connections with the venerable psychedelic researchers Stan Grof and Ralph Metzner, Robert decided to endow this remarkable scholarship at CIIS. Barnhart’s intention was (and is) for the Kranzke award to provide an opportunity, and to lend encouragement to psychedelic scholars “who are engaged in solid, rigorous research and also committed to undoing the stifling repression of the last few decades … with the intention to bring, in as broad and unrestricted way as possible, this field of study out into the open.”

It seems natural that Robert Barnhart would find a receptive home for this scholarship at CIIS, which has a long and storied association with original thinkers, philosophers, innovators and pioneers in the fields of psychology, philosophy, spiritual disciplines, and consciousness research. Great illustrious lights such as Alan Watts, Huston Smith, Richard Tarnas, Ralph Metzner, Terence McKenna, and Stanislav Grof have been key actors in the CIIS narrative. This past August, I had the pleasure of a conversation with CIIS President Joseph Subbiondo in his comfortable office on the campus in San Francisco. In response to my questions regarding CIIS’ mind-set and setting (if you will) for the Kranzke scholarship, President Subbiondo enthusiastically replied that, “Research and inquiry into psychedelics is now (again) of interest to scholars in higher education; it is not something that has to be conducted in secret or underground. Stan Grof will tell you ‘the sensationalism is over’ and we are brought back to ‘can this help?’ which is a good question. We in higher education are asking better questions!”

Historically, academia has not always been a receptive environment for psychedelic research. The subjective and unpredictable nature of this work has not commonly been a comfortable fit for the hide-bound traditional ivy-covered walls, or the ivory tower of the entrenched educational establishment.

From my personal experiences as a graduate student in CIIS’ Clinical Psychology program, and through the positive encouragement I have received for my dissertation research examining the efficacy of ibogaine as a treatment for opiate addiction, I can attest that CIIS provides an environment where there is innately less resistance to this area of research than in most universities. President Subbiondo agrees, stating that this free flow of ideas is “not just pertaining to the subject of psychedelics, but what makes CIIS distinct is that we often look at subjects that other institutions (for whatever reason) may not look at as openly, but with the same degree of academic rigor as other centers of higher learning. This is why I am especially grateful to Robert Barnhart because he has made it possible for students and faculty to conduct research of such a high quality.” Joe adds that, “What I love about being at this institution as President (or in any capacity) is to be in a community that is so open and so consistently strong in sustaining and endorsing multiple and alternate ways of knowing.” What is salient from my discussion with Joe Subbiondo is that psychedelic/entheogenic research has evolved now to the point that it is not only accepted and encouraged, but is actually becoming part of the mainstream of academia.

The outstanding faculty who have stepped forward as active and ardent members of the Kranzke Scholarship Selection Committee also exemplify CIIS’ commitment to openness. Committee Chair Frank Echenhofer, PhD, a professor in the APA-accredited Clinical Psychology program and a noted psychedelic researcher (and a member of the Kranzke Scholarship Selection Committee), has been a mentor for several Kranzke Scholars. He says that the Kranzke “is an inspiration and validation for students who have previously been marginalized and unsupported.” Dr. Echenhofer, a committee member for six years, has witnessed the tangible benefits this important award has provided for CIIS students. “CIIS in general and the Kranzke in particular instills a camaraderie in spirit with revered, highly respected genuine elders in psychedelic/entheogenic exploration such as Grof and Metzner…and this has a powerful and positive effect on students.”

Sean Kelly, PhD, is a Kranzke Scholarship Committee member, as well as Professor and Program Director of the Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness program at CIIS. Dr. Kelly is interested in the evolution of consciousness, and he believes that “entheogens can be a bridge from modern western civilizations’ current phase of disenchantment with natural systems, to the traditional world-views that see the world as sacred, with human beings as full participants in the sacred dance of the cosmos.” Dr. Kelly adds that research projects such as those the Kranzke supports “can lead people to strategies to face and move through this critical period in human history, the exploration of these non-ordinary states might give us access to insights and resources that might not readily be available.”
Janis Phelps, PhD, Professor of Clinical Psychology and the newest member of the Kranzke Scholarship Committee, explained that, “In the current era of fear and hesitation regarding exploration of altered states of consciousness, there are valiant pockets of scholarly research being conducted through institutions such as MAPS, Heffter, and CIIS. The US is fortunate to have a visionary citizen the likes of Robert Barnhart, who has supported research on psychedelics, healing and the transformation of consciousness through the Kranzke scholarships. The Kranzke research at CIIS is being conducted by dedicated doctoral students whose published dissertations disseminate entheogen research data to internet sites which are easily accessible to scholars and the general public alike. By dispelling anxieties and misunderstandings about the therapeutic use of these psychoactive substances, research programs such as the Kranzke have shed light on entheogens as sacraments of emotional and spiritual transformation.”

CIIS Professor Emeritus CIIS Ralph Metzner, PhD, is a former member of the Kranzke committee. He says that, “The Kranzke scholarships at CIIS ... are to my knowledge unique in higher education, in their explicit focus on furthering research with consciousness-expanding plants and substances. Since the practices involved are often of questionable legal status, CIIS students are obviously unable to administer such substances. However, nothing prevents graduate students from studying the use of psychedelic or entheogenic plants by various people, as well as other catalysts for heightened states of awareness, as long as the usual legal and ethical guidelines for research with human subjects are observed.”

The raison d’etre of the Kranzke award is, of course, the research itself. We have selected six abstracts and summaries from a few of the Kranzke scholars that express only a weee bit of the infinite potential and the universal curiosity about what Hegel, or more recently the late, great Terence McKenna might call, ‘the Other.’ If these entheogenic tools are, indeed, the ‘keys to the kingdom,’ perhaps these dedicated researchers are actually modern psychonaut-locksmiths opening the vaults to previously hidden treasures. Perhaps reading about these explorations will inspire the next wave of researchers to grow into a tsunami of entheogenic psychedelic seekers and scientists!

Stanislav Grof, MD, discusses the importance of this work in his latest collection of papers, “New Perspectives in Psychiatry, Psychology and Psychotherapy: Observations from Modern Consciousness Research.” In the chapter, “Psychedelic Research: Past, Present, and Future,” Grof reminds us that, “In one of my early books, I suggested that the potential significance of LSD and other psychedelics for psychiatry and psychology was comparable to the value the microscope has for biology and medicine or the telescope has for astronomy. My later experience with psychedelics only confirmed this initial impression. These substances function as unspecific amplifiers that increase the cathexis (energetic charge) associated with the deep unconscious contents of the psyche and make them available for conscious processing. This unique property of psychedelics makes it possible to study psychological undercurrents that govern our experiences and behaviors to a depth that cannot be matched by any other method and tool available in modern mainstream psychiatry and psychology… This new knowledge could become an integral part of a comprehensive new scientific paradigm of the twenty-first century.” Grof adds that what is most encouraging is that “researchers of the younger generation in the United States, Switzerland, and other countries have in recent years been able to obtain official permission to start programs of psychedelic therapy, involving LSD, psilocybin, dimethyltryptamine (DMT), methylenedioxy-methamphetamine (MDMA), ibogaine, and ketamine. I hope that this is the beginning of a renaissance of interest in psychedelic research that will eventually return these extraordinary tools into the hands of responsible therapists.”

To facilitate the continuation of this renaissance, Robert Barnhart has taken steps to ensure that the Kranzke Psychedelic/Entheogenic Research Scholarship will be endowed and continue in perpetuity at CIIS. I am confident that I speak for all entheogenic researchers, audacious psychonauts, past and future winners of the Kranzke Scholarship, and the entire MAPS community in expressing our deep gratitude to Robert J. Barnhart for his heartfelt generosity, and his oracular vision! Robert… Thank You!

So, dear reader, take a few minutes and read these research summaries. I think you will be impressed with the diversity of interests, the skillful and professional scientific method, and the researchers’ obvious devotion to, and concern for, their invaluable subjects. Enjoy!