

THE PSYCHEDELIC REVIEW

without once suffering a serious fall or deterioration, though he would leave off before he reached the final draught from fear of our universal human weakness before the liquor.

CLINIAS: Why yes, sir, even such a man as you speak of would be wise to do that.

ATHENIAN: Then let us resume our conversation with the legislator. Very good, we shall say to him, as for such a fear-inducing specific, providence has given us none, and we have invented none ourselves, for we need not take quacksalvers into account, but what about fearlessness, excessive confidence, improper confidence at the wrong moment? Is there a liquor which has these effects, or is there not?

CLINIAS: He will, of course, say yes, and he will mean wine.

ATHENIAN: And are not its effects the very opposite of all we have just mentioned? When a man drinks it, its first immediate effect is to make him merrier than he was, and the more he takes, the more it fills him with optimistic fancies and imaginary capacity. In the very final phase the drinker is swollen with the conceit of his own wisdom to the pitch of complete license of speech and action, and utter fearlessness; there is nothing he will scruple to say, nothing he will scruple to do. I think this will be universally conceded.

¹ See the article by Wasson in this issue.

² Friedlander, P. *Plato: An Introduction*. New York, Pantheon Books, 1959, pp. 70ff.

Provoked Life:

An Essay On The Anthropology Of The Ego

GOTTFRIED BENN

Gottfried Benn (1886-1956) was one of the leading German lyric poets of this century and the major spokesman of the writers of the expressionist period in Germany. A physician by profession (he practiced medicine throughout his life) he did a considerable amount of original research in his field. In poetry he stood for the exploration of novel and often extreme experiences for the expression of which he created a new language combining divergent elements from the medical, vernacular and refined poetic vocabularies, coining new expressions, using daring images, and revolutionary ideas.

A trenchant social critic, Benn exposed the dangers of our technological era and the trend toward overemphasis of the rational and intellectual. He was anything but conservative in his writings and supported unlimited creative expansion and expression. He strove for a reconciliation between the natural, instinctual basis of man and his intellect; he worked for the resolution of dichotomies characterizing our lives, inner and outer, real and unreal, natural and artificial. Benn advocated the realization of our "antinaturalistic" nature, the creation of a "cerebral reality," a "provoked Life out of the materials of dream and stimulation."

The essay "*Proviziertes Leben*" (Provoked Life) was written in the early 1940's and appeared in the volume: "Ausdruckswelt, Essays und Aphorismen," 1949, Limes Verlag, Wiesbaden, Germany. We gratefully acknowledge the permission of the Limes Verlag, Wiesbaden, Germany, to translate and reprint this essay.

I

Several years ago a film was shown in Berlin, a film about Negroes called "Hosiannah," in which one saw Negroes getting intoxicated through communal singing. The disposition to do this lies in their nature, the process itself was sensual and conscious. Similar phenomena are reported about the North American Indians: The "Great Nightsong" is one of their principal ceremonies, where the men hold one another, move rhythmically and go into a trance. Closeness to intoxication is evidently a primitive quality as is the transition to a collectively heightened sense of being. The assembly provokes the transition through rites, movements, and certain ancient chants. It is a call of the race. Its nature is religious and mythical, an exciting communion with the totality which expands individual existence.

THE PSYCHEDELIC REVIEW

Over against the trances induced by ritual movements and rhythm, are those induced by plant extracts, whose distribution is far more universal. Several million of the earth's inhabitants smoke or drink Indian hemp, as countless generations have done so through two thousand years. Three hundred million people chew betel; the great rice-eating population would sooner give up rice than the areca-nut; not to chew means to die. The three largest continents stimulate themselves through caffeine; in Tibet, time is measured using a cup of tea and its effects; tea was found among the remains of prehistoric people. Chemicals which affect the brain, means of altering consciousness — these were primitive man's first approaches to his nervous system. How the effects were discovered is a mystery. A primal urge and a secret. Among a thousand roots, shrubs, trees, mushrooms, flowers — this one! Countless individuals probably died of poisoning before the race had reached its goal: enhancement, expansion — provoked life. Caravans with opium travel through the desert. Sykone is renamed Mekone, i.e. poppy-ville. On the tomb of Ariadne, a bearded god bends over her sleeping form, the god of sleep, carrying poppy-heads and the poppy-horn. The queen of the Incas was named after the miraculous plant Erythroxolon Coca; Mama Cuca; the stone idols have one cheek filled with coca leaves as a sign of divinity; everywhere there are bottle-shaped pumpkins, in which the leaf is kept, mixed with chalk and plant ashes, ready to be taken; the long needle with which you take it out is moistened by mouth. The effects of a mouthful of coca last forty minutes, equivalent to three kilometers on flat terrain, two kilometers in the hills — this is the dosage measure.

The ingestion takes place in the rancho of dreamers in Ecuador, in tents, while the medicine man beats the drums, or in empty cellars lined with stone projections used as seats by the guests, sometimes with the women, sometimes without: the "black drink," the "white water," the "happiness pills," or the "weed of graves," which brings unity with the spirits. Stages of excitement, stages of dream — you are beside yourself, but you feel, you learn from twitches and breathing disturbances, you get apathy or mobility as desired. From hidden centres, from the depths it emerges: to rest, to move no more: withdrawal, regression, aphasia. Hours are filled with the satisfaction of the desire to drift along as formless life. To call this animalistic is to be mistaken: this process is far below the animals, below the reflexes, it is near roots, chalk and stone. This is not the apathy of a dying race, not degeneration, these are youthful

Provoked Life

people; it is something more primary: defense against the beginnings of consciousness, its senseless imperative projects — thus, change space, obliterate time, blow away the grim passage of hours.

As long as memory traces, and civilizations, have existed in the brain, this organ of classification: forget them! In front of the Bistro drawn figures, home-owner idealists, worn out child-bearers, curves without deflections, normalized garbage — ah — garcon — another cocain-pulque, or in the restroom a pinch of snuff applied to the mucous membrane of the anus; or plug a soaked filling into a specially cultivated decayed tooth — ah — already the perspectives are beginning, ceaselessly spilling out of crosslines, winding and flickering; — Helena gave the heroes Nepenthes with their food, certainly an opiate preparation, when the mood was low or just before the battle, — ah, my battle too begins — first fields, colored like jewels, then red birds, — a *purely cortical reality* — lattice patterns are particularly frequent — "jewelers and artists should see this, they could take patterns from it," the colors become finer, strings are hanging from the surfaces, marvels are looking out of things.

The ego disintegrates, the places of disintegration are the planes of attachment. There is a kind of cosmic coldness, sublime and icy, in the structure, but fire in the medial axis; feelings of limbs lengthening and shortening, feelings of swelling and joining; simultaneously more sensitive thresholds: a storm of impressions, suggestibility to external influences, directed toward something universal, a feeling of totality: "Noon feeling." The senses exchange functions: "at the stroke of the clock purple color emerges"; alternating experiences of merging and distancing; cutting through ego-feeling, smiling without affect, crying without object. Feelings of capacity: "the solution of dimly sensed problems seems immanent," — "everywhere the unheard of rejoicing of powerful harmony" — "Lord, let me bloom," — (Bucke's "cosmic emotion").

Another: "A great tension came over me. Great things had to be revealed to me. I would see the nature of all things, all the problems of the world would dissolve. I was out of my senses." Promenade of a god on the banks of the Po. "Golden late afternoon light." Then: "Only beauty in the eternal transformation of forms and colors. An increasing feeling of liberation came over me. Here everything would be resolved, *in the end everything was rhythm.*" (Klages came to the same conclusion, not so suddenly, but at the

end of a long life and with the aid of many books. Quantum theory says the same thing.)

Strange penetration of depth, cosmic osmosis (Magnaosmose): "I need time to finish my world view, which in skeleton form already is grounded on one sentence: *God is a substance.*" God is a substance, a drug! An intoxicating substance with affinity for the human brain. Certainly possible, at any rate more probable than that he is an electroshock machine or a Spemann Tritonlarva, formed by stuffing tadpole tissue in the mouth area. . . .

Complex structures become brittle, one can see through the rifts: "I had a peculiar muscle sensation. I *could have removed every single muscle separately from my body.*" (Long, long ago! The "muscle soul" arises, its contribution to the development of consciousness.) The cortex loses its recently acquired property of specific sensory quality (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting) and answers in forms of general resonance. The "external" is not yet there; grounds yes, but hunting and fishing grounds: — the prehistory of "reality."

II

With the formation of the concept of "reality" the crisis began, the premorbid stage, its depth, its nihilistic existence. Indian-Javanese art (the socle of Borobudur) was in the other stage as late as 800 A.D. In its almost obscene luxuriance and exuberance of limbs and shapes, in the endless relief of animals, plants, human growths, bears, flowers, Bahadurs, hermits, tortoises, jackals, monkey-princes, all represented without pointedness, undifferentiated, inexhaustible, — the human beings all with the same roundish, smooth, full bodies with relatively small heads, all the same shape, all naked: in all this you can read the "Tat-tvam-asi," the "you are this also" of the Hindu doctrine, you can see ethical and physiological promiscuity, the original monosexuality of the primitive organism, which performed seed-formation, copulation and impregnation within itself, but you can also see the inner world still accessible to everyone, serene, mild and joined in dance, a world that knows a binding principle which in constant renewal surrounds the spiritual core of being. From this core emerges the great Night-or-Day chant, the great chant of the socle, of prelogical worlds still capable of giving fulfillment.

1300 years before this socle, in the southern part of our continent, the concept of reality began to be formed. The Hellenistic-European agonistic principle of victory through effort, cunning, malice, talent, force, and the later European Darwinism and "superman," was instrumental in its formation. The ego emerged, domin-

ated, fought; for this it needed instruments, material, power. It had a different relationship to matter, more removed sensually, but closer formally. It analysed matter, tested, sorted: weapons, object of exchange, ransom money. It clarified matter through isolation, reduced it to formulas, took pieces out of it, divided it up. Compared to the soft Javanese wave-feeling, this attitude appears brutal and low. Its price was the separation of ego and world, the schizoid catastrophe, the inevitable western neurosis: reality. A tortuous concept and all were tortured by it, the intelligence of countless generations was divided over it. A concept which hung like a punishment over the West, with which the West fought, without grasping it, to which it sacrificed enormous quantities of blood and happiness; a concept whose inner tension and fragmentations it was impossible to dissolve through a natural viewing or methodical insight into the inherent unity and peace of prelogical forms of being. At a certain critical juncture Kant attempted to insert formal protections, but succeeded only in driving the development still further, so that it ("reality") now contained only causal-analytical results, including those of biological experiments, everything else was dream, animism, psychogenic arabesque. Goethe alone succeeded in overcoming the split, in a process lasting several decades, publicly recorded; his was a permanent solution but it was of a purely personal nature. Except for him no one else overcame the concept, no one else could; instead the cataclysmic character of this idea became clearer and clearer, as for example with Nietzsche. The latter took the idea of "reality" so much at its face value that (in extremely bold fashion) he attempted to "penetrate" it with ideas and thoughts of breeding, sending out Zarathustra "to create the creator." Nothing would have been further removed from the mind of this ancient Ormudh-Ahriman dualist; he would presumably, after taking one look at the impenetrable sun, have contemplated the poppies growing between the rose fields of Schiras and then lightly touched the ground with his forehead: you gave the Schire-Teriak and I take it! Finally, a state, a social organization, a public morality, for which life is economically usable life and which does not recognize the world of provoked life, cannot accept its destructive force. A society, whose hygiene and race cultivation as a modern ritual is founded solely on hollow biological statistics, can only represent the external viewpoint of the mass; for this point of view it can wage war, incessantly, for reality is simply raw material, but the metaphysical background remains forever obscured. The preceding, however, deals with this

THE PSYCHEDELIC REVIEW

background and relates it to the problem of sublimation, to the "emotions sublimes" of Janet, i.e. to enhancement phenomena and expressive values.

III

The issue concerns the mythical collectivity as a foundation for life, as an unreflective sense of being, and its remnants in our nature and ways of realizing it. Compared to the tribal life of primitives which arises naturally from their inner properties, compared to the image-soaked faith of the Asitic peoples, what life-content the denatured European brains can realize in terms of occupational activities, clubs, family gatherings, summer excursions and so-called feasts can only be regarded as flat, conventional and shopworn; the few primal crimes which may occur in one decade are not sufficient to maintain the belief in a moral tradition of the race. Above all what is lacking is any systematic educational effort in the direction of conscious enhancement of vitality, since the epoch as a whole has no fundamental principles at all. If it were not so, one could, by increasing visionary states, say with mescaline or hashish, supply the race with a stream of spiritual insights, which could lead to a new creative period. Or they might hit on the idea of using hypnosis — at present exclusively in the hands of causal-analytical, norm-oriented physicians — not to increase potential in terms of economic utility, but for the liberation of the unconscious, i.e. suppressed, organic functions and archaic mechanisms — surprising experiences would be the result. Pervitin, instead of giving it to bomber pilots and explorers, could be purposefully used in the high schools and colleges for the induction of cerebral oscillations. This may sound extreme to some, but is merely the natural continuation of an old human idea. Whether through rhythm, drugs or autogenic training — we have the ancient human urge to overcome intolerable tensions between outer and inner, between god and not-god, between ego and reality — and we have the old and recent experience of having access to the means of overcoming them. The Buddha's systematic "prayer breathing," the ritual prayer postures of the early Christian hesychasts, Loyola's breathing with every verse of the Lord's Prayer, the dervishes, yogis, Dionysian rites, Mysteries, — all one family, which one could call the physiology of religion. German mysticism, according to Jakob Böhme "the unification of the natural self with the nothing" (note: with *nothing*, not with God), this mysticism, which one scholar has called "an almost experimental psychology of

Provoked Life

religion of the most ruthless sort," is the same thing — in other words, provoked religion.

All these are historical facts, widespread experiences; even from a biological point of view they are psychological truths. In spite of this such a conception is totally alien to the modern state. On the contrary, the government recently instituted an anti-narcotics program, and its biologists think of themselves as progressive. It would be difficult to make it clear to them that their program has the same relation to the problem of humanity as the mailman does to world government. Moreover, the possibility of helping mountaineers at high altitudes through drugs is actively studied by official physiologists, but the possibility of enhancing formal-aesthetic functions is not studied at all. We now have the establishment of centers for the collection of human milk; for example, a recent report showed that in Frankfurt 1200 mothers gave 10,000 litres in two years, one mother gave 753 litres alone, another provided 460 litres when her sixth child was born. *However, potent brains are not strengthened through milk but through alkaloids.* An organ of such small size and great vulnerability, which not only approached the pyramids and gamma-rays, lions and icebergs, but created and invented them, cannot be watered like a forget-me-not, it will find its own supplies. *Existence means nervous existence*, i.e. stimulability, discipline, enormous factual knowledge, art. To suffer is to suffer in one's consciousness, not over deaths. To work is to expand spiritual capacities. In one word: *life is provoked life.*

Of course, someone will immediately mention the notion of *damage*, individual and racial. Drugs, intoxications, ecstasies, spiritual exhibitionism — all this sounds infernal to most people. But the concept of damage belongs in the reference-frame of "causal analysis" and "biology" and has the limited applicability of these systems. But even within these systems, a state which wages wars in which three million men are killed within three years is hardly in a position to talk about damage; this is damage of individual and communal interests which far exceeds the damage of experiments on the expanding ability of drugs. The issue is not damage, but principles, and what kind you want to adopt. If you consider this idea of damage on a more general level, it becomes an interesting observation, that impairments suffered by an entire race have usually brought their compensation which far exceeded the value of what was lost. So for example, the loss of skin pigment was initially for the white race an extremely dangerous disability exposing them to unheard of intensities of radi-

THE PSYCHEDELIC REVIEW

ation; but eventually it was compensated by another descendant of the same common primary seed, or ectoderm, namely the extremely powerful nervous system which was capable of dealing with danger. (The human brain was born as a result of or at least after, this impairment.) In other words, in talking of damage the context has to be considered. Whether the degenerating central European brain *can* be damaged is in any case an open question.

One will not reach any insights in this area who does not meditate at length on the nature of the brain. The brain is the perfect example for the pigmy-character of causal theories, it has travelled a most acausal path, all biological hypotheses fail to explain it. It seems clear, since the work of Vershuys, Poetzl and Lorenz, that the brain developed through doubling the number of neurones and simultaneously rearranging the outer (cortical) layers. "There are no intermediary forms." There is no trace of adaptation, summation of minute stimuli, gradual growth and decay until some purposive reorganization takes place — *there were always creative crises*. The brain is the mutative, revolutionary organ par excellence. Its nature was always form, not content, its means expansion, its needs—stimuli. This store-house of rudiments and catacombs brought everything with it from the beginning, it was not dependent on impressions, it produced itself when called for. It was by no means favorably predisposed towards "life," but was equally available for lethal activities, hunger, fasting, walking on nails, charming snakes, magic, bionegatives, death.

"Mens sana in corpore sano" was a proverb of the Roman warrior caste, which has had a modern resurrection in the gymnastics of Jahn and in the Bavarian health cults. Using inner criteria the extravagant body has accomplished more than the normal body; its bionegative characteristics created and carry the human world. By these criteria there is no reality, no history, just some brains which realize at certain time-intervals their dreams, images of the ancient original dreams, made in retrospective insight. This realization may take place in "stone, verse or flute-song" — then we have art; sometimes it takes place only in thoughts or ecstasies. A marvelous sentence from a novel by Thornton Wilder describes the situation: "We come from a world in which we have known unbelievable standards of perfection and we remember faintly the beauty, which we were unable to retain, and we return to this world." Clearly Plato is at hand; endogenous images are the last remaining vestigial forms of our happiness.

(Translated by Ralph Metzner)

The Individual As Man/World

ALAN W. WATTS

(*Prefatory Note*: The following was originally delivered as an impromptu lecture for the Social Relations Colloquium at Harvard University on April 12th, 1963. Although the subject was not discussed in the lecture itself, its theme is closely related to the expansion of consciousness achieved through psychedelic substances. With proper "set and setting," the psychedelics are very frequently successful in giving the individual a vivid sensation of the mutual interdependence of his own behavior and the behavior of his environment, so that the two seem to become one — the behavior of a unified field. Those who uphold the impoverished sense of reality sanctioned by official psychiatry describe this type of awareness as "depersonalization," "loss of ego-boundary," or "regression to the oceanic feeling," all of which, in their usual contexts, are derogatory terms suggesting that the state is hallucinatory. Yet it accords astonishingly well with the description of the individual which is given in the behavioral sciences, in biology and in ecology.

Theoretically, many scientists know that the individual is not a skin-encapsulated ego but an organism-environment field. The organism itself is a point at which the field is "focused," so that each individual is a unique expression of the behavior of the whole field, which is ultimately the universe itself. But to know this theoretically is not to *feel* it to be so. It was possible to calculate that the world was round before making the voyage that proved it to be so. The psychedelics are, perhaps, the ship, the experimental instrument by which the theory can be verified in common experience.)

There is a colossal disparity between the way in which most individuals experience their own existence, and the way in which the individual is described in such sciences as biology, ecology, and physiology. The nub of the difference is this: the way the individual is described in these sciences is not as a freely moving entity within an environment, but as a process of behavior which *is* the environment also. If you will accurately describe what any individual organism is doing, you will take but a few steps before you are also describing what the environment is doing. To put it more simply, we can do without such expressions as "what the individual is doing" or "what the environment is doing," as if the individual was one thing and the doing another, the environment one thing and its doing another. If we reduce the whole business simply to the process of doing, then the doing, which was called the behavior of the individual,