

the european college for the study of consciousness

PROF DR. MED. CHRISTIAN SCHARFETTER

THE ECSC is a multidisciplinary forum aiming to promote interdisciplinary exchange of experience and research in the field of consciousness studies. Psychological, social and

cultural factors contributing to the non-ordinary states of consciousness (called altered states of consciousness by Tart) are considered, as well as psychoactive substances inducing extraordinary experiences and their consequences for the life of the individual and society.

Consequently, in this forum cultural anthropology and social sciences such as the phenomenology of religious and spiritual experiences, philosophy of consciousness and research in creativity meet basic sciences such as neuroanatomy, neurophysiology,

neurochemistry, psychophysiology, pharmacology and ethnobotany. Psychology and psychopathology as well as psychotherapy are very much interested in the communication and classification of the various states of mind, the inducing factors and the therapeutic potential of such states for psychotherapy in general, and psychological help (*intervention*) in oncological disorders as well as in the process of dying. In this field we are very interested in the study of ethnomedicine and shamanism:

the use of hallucinogenic substances in various cultural contexts in combination with non-pharmacological techniques (e.g. music, dance) in religious, spiritual and healing rituals.

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The ECSC was founded in 1985 by Hanscarl Leuner, an eminent psychotherapist of Göttingen, Germany who created the catathymic imagination as a psychotherapeutic technique and who studied model psychoses and psychedelic and psycholytic-aided psychotherapy. The ECSC met every year for a symposium of the members (about 120) and organized in 1992 the first large international congress (the volume *Welten des Bewusstseins*, "Worlds of Consciousness", ed. by A. Dittrich, A. Hofmann, H. Leuner, now available by Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, Markgrafenstr. 67, D-1000 Berlin 61). The honorary president of the forum is Dr. Albert Hofmann. The members of the ECSC are now from many European countries and are in constant contact with researchers in this field in the US.

Recent symposium

The 1993 symposium (ECSC's 6th) took place in Zürich December 3-4. Here various aspects of research were presented. In his historical overview of 50 years of LSD, Albert Hofmann noted with regret the misuse of LSD in the uncontrolled subculture with the consequence of discrediting LSD and greatly hindering serious research on its use in basic research and applied studies to psychotherapy. The cultural anthropologist Rátsch presented a slide show of LSD-related arts and graphics. Vanini and Venturini reported on their study of the history of LSD in Switzerland (on the basis of extensive interviews with pharmacologists and psychiatrists active in LSD research).

Hermle gave a talk on the possibilities of getting permission from the German ministry of research and technology for studies with psychoactive substances in healthy volunteers and reviewed the plan for a multicenter study with neuropsychological and PET investigations. Vollenwieder presented a study of the metabolic activity of various brain regions in altered states of consciousness.

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In the section on psychotherapy research, Leuner summarized outcomes of his own studies of psycholytic psychotherapy, Styk dealt with the difficulties of realizing methodologically exact therapy studies in the context of his private practice and Dittrich discussed the methodological requirements of a scientific therapy study. Lamparter reported on his and Dittrich's studies of altered states of consciousness, comparing various inducers (Dimethyltryptamin (DMT), NO₂, sensory deprivation). Schlichting presented his study with the phenethylamine 2CD.

Jacobowitz summarized her study of extraordinary states of mind and glossolalia among members of the charismatic pentecostal movement. The professor of religious phenomenology Braun presented a text of Ludwig Feuerbach on death and immortality, showing how this text represents a shift of the underlying state of consciousness while at the same time inducing such a shift in the reader or listener. Scharfetter dealt with crises of psychopathological intensity in the religious and spiritual context.

The symposium concluded with an essay on the modern philosophy of consciousness based on recent progress in the neurosciences, aiming towards a revision of philosophical anthropology. The development of a thorough code of ethics for dealing with various states of consciousness was postulated by Metzinger.

Future plans

In the future of the ECSC, working groups should be established for neurochemistry and pharmacology, psychiatry, psychotherapeutic and psychological research, ethnomedicine, religion, and cultural anthropology. International researchers interested in these fields are invited to participate in ECSC activities. The next symposium should take place in 1995. •



Dr. Albert Hofmann and Dr. Hanscarl Leuner

