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### The MDMA Question

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Recent news-media attention to the "new" drug MDMA has focused on its supposed benefits as an adjunct for psychotherapy versus its supposed potential for abuse. While the MDMA question is important itself, it represents still larger questions our society fails to consider due to restricted ideas about human nature. The key is our failure to apply the idea of states-of-consciousness to MDMA and to the group of similar issues <sup>it</sup> /is embedded in.

The most fundamental issue, the one which stands at the root of many contemporary social concerns, is a new idea of human nature -- new for our culture and times, at least. In the last decade and a half there has been growing and widespread recognition that the human mind is capable of producing and using a large number of states of consciousness. That is, we function in many different patterns in addition to our usual awake state. This diversity has been seen before, but the current intellectual direction is that these states are not -- as the still-dominant mid-twentieth century view sees them -- childlike, pathological, and inferior but additional ways for the human mind to function which may have important, valuable and productive uses. At the very least, these states deserve attention as a previously neglected aspect of human nature.

Invention, artistic expression, and creative problem solving are often associated with shifts in states of consciousness. Apparently, the most innovative and intelligent members of society are those who

are skilled in using a number of states well. More recently, healing, highly skilled performance, and learning have been linked with the ability of the human mind to place itself in the best state of consciousness for a given task. If human abilities are stronger in some states than in others, then the full development of each person depends on the more general ability to produce and use a variety of states of consciousness.

Methods of achieving different states (state-of-consciousness psychotechnologies) range from millennia-old techniques such as prayer, meditation and martial arts to newer methods such as hypnosis, certain aspects of biofeedback and psychoactive drugs. As more state-of-consciousness psychotechnologies are invented, developed and imported from other cultures, the questions surrounding their proper use will multiply. At the present, we do not even see these as instances of the same state-of-consciousness topic.

The MDMA problem is another instance of our society's general inability to deal successfully with state-of-consciousness issues. Other examples include the use of drugs such as caffeine, alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine; the right to life and right to die; school prayer, silent period, and/or meditation; forensic hypnosis and temporary insanity; chemotherapy and psychotherapy of the terminally ill; and a host of scientific, humanistic and educational concerns. Until we are able to think about the state-of-consciousness aspect of these issues, our nation will be unable to resolve them.

For example, suppose a dying person requests LSD to assist his/her spiritual transition at the time of bodily death. From the point of view of some spiritual traditions, the state of consciousness at death determines one's infinite afterlife. Who has the right to decide

this issue? Is it a legal, medical, psychotherapeutic or religious concern? State-of-consciousness issues cut across institutional lines, as the conflict between law-enforcement and psychotherapy over MDMA illustrates.

Problems of intellectual, academic, and constitutional freedom are raised by MDMA and states-of-consciousness issues too. Thoughts, ideas and concepts depend on underlying psychological processes such as memory, perception and cognition, but these processes vary from state to state. Enormous censorship issues are raised. Historically, unorthodox ideas were seen as coming from heretical writings, and books were banned to stop the spread of unpopular ideas. In our enlightened age, we realize that ideas come from experience, so we legislate against heretical experiences. The prohibition of certain states by illegalizing the methods of achieving those states limits both the particular ideas one can consider and prohibits thinking about all ideas using the perspective of several states. Thus, control over access to a variety of states is a form of thought control.

This is not to say that all states should be open to anyone who wishes to explore them -- some seem socially detrimental -- but the categorical prohibition against exploring certain states and/or against methods of exploring them severely limits our knowledge of the state-of-consciousness aspect of human nature and limits what we can know. Intellectual and academic freedom are similarly restricted. We need more knowledge, not less.

As well as being useful psychotherapeutically, MDMA and other psychotechnologies are methods of exploring and developing the human

mind. As an emerging academic specialty, Consciousness Studies investigates different states of consciousness, psychotechnologies for producing them, abilities that may reside in other states but not our usual awake state, and how such activities as learning, thinking and perception vary from state to state.

MDMA and the other state-of-consciousness psychotechnologies are also research methods for investigating and developing the state-of-consciousness aspects of human nature. If we are to develop the mind-body's full capacities, we must find ways to develop them in every state, not just our ordinary awake state.

The MDMA issue is not just a question of whether the drug has psychotherapeutic potentials or which schedule of the Controlled Substance Act it should be assigned to. The MDMA issue is embedded in a larger shift in our view of human nature and in our understanding and development of intelligence. MDMA and the questions surrounding it deserve close attention.

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