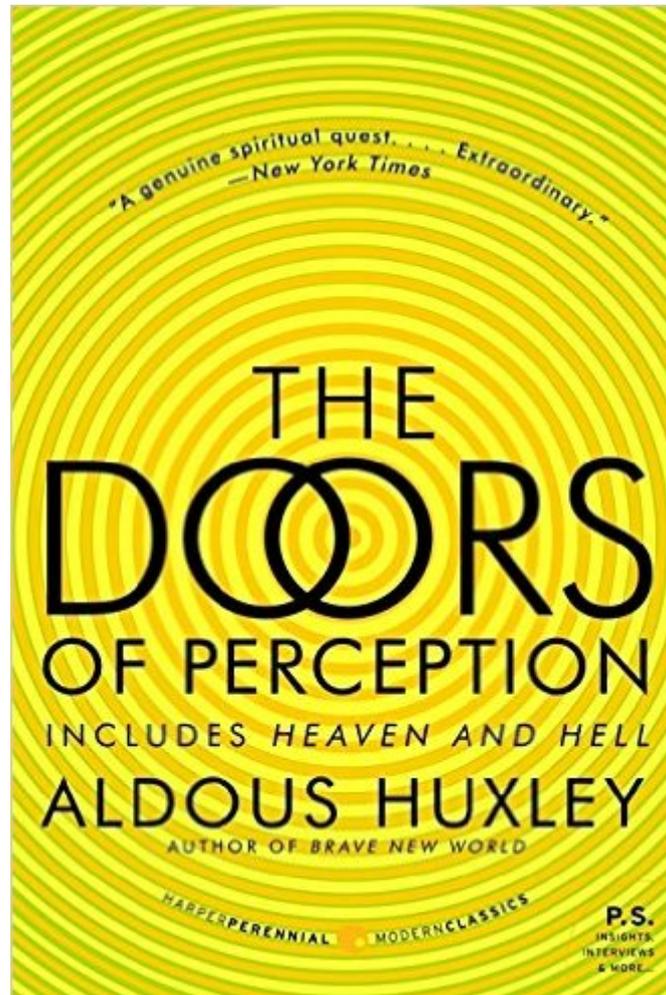


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The Doors Of Perception And Heaven And Hell



Synopsis

Half an hour after swallowing the drug I became aware of a slow dance of golden lights . . . Among the most profound explorations of the effects of mind-expanding drugs ever written, here are two complete classic booksâ"The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell" in which Aldous Huxley, author of the bestselling Brave New World, reveals the mind's remote frontiers and the unmapped areas of human consciousness. This new edition also features an additional essay, "Drugs That Shape Men's Minds," which is now included for the first time.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In the first half of the book, DOORS OF PERCEPTION--originally a separate volume--Huxley offers a cogent and erudite argument for the use of hallucinogens (specifically, mescaline) as a means for opening up the thinking mind to new ideas and perceptions, or even as a method for jumpstarting human creativity in the common man. Not only does he offer compelling historical precedents and sound medical research, but he also reveals positive details about his own personal experimentation with the drug. As is always the case with Huxley's essays, his various hypotheses are very articulately expressed and not easily dismissed. The second part of the book, HEAVEN AND HELL--also originally published separately--Huxley introduces the idea that spiritual insight and personal revelation can also be achieved through the use of hallucinogens. (By the time he had written this volume, Huxley had added LSD to his psychedelic repertoire.) While just as articulately written and researched as the first volume, the idea that religious insight can be gained through drugs may offend some readers (theists and atheists alike), and the premise seems odd and

contrived or expedient (was he trying to gain support of the clergy?) coming from a generally non-theist thinker-philosopher such as Huxley. Nevertheless, it is still thought-provoking reading for both professionals and amateurs interested in the positive potential of mind-altering drugs.

Huxley's 'experiment' in *The Doors of Perception* was a rite of passage for many in my generation, and it's interesting to have such an intelligent analysis of the experience. He does waste a lot of words on something that is indescribable, but it seems to have been written in the first blush of excitement. And Huxley makes some very sound observations, as well, that have probably helped many people reconcile their own indescribable experiences. His conclusion that Mescaline and Lysergic Acid are relatively harmless for people in good health with an untroubled mind is probably objectionable today, especially among people who have never tried them. Looked at objectively, however, I wonder how this conclusion has stood the test of time. For myself, I believe he underestimated the long-term psychological challenges that cleansing those doors poses. I remember something I read long ago from Philip K. Dick saying how difficult life is after you've seen God's face. The realization afterwards that you'd been forced back to a colorless, banal existence - a prison, if I recall the sense of what Dick wrote - must surely be considered one of the long-term psychological challenges that Huxley could not have fully appreciated when he wrote this book. The feeling of being a prisoner in the normal world of perceptions might conceivably result in a hunger to return often to that 'Antipodes of the mind' which, if felt too keenly, could cause permanent damage to be done to the mind's function as a 'limiting valve.' This suggests to me that blaming acid casualties on a 'troubled mind' may not be wholly satisfactory: some people choose to pack up their belongings and move to an island in Huxley's *Antipodes*, and these people can't always continue to function in the society their bodies continue to inhabit. But the situation is complex: whether these 'immigrants to the Antipodes' can continue to cope in the normal world is surely also a function of the society they live in. An American Indian tribe in the 1800's or Amsterdam today probably offer the mental 'immigrant' more of a chance for social survival than Riyadh, for example. One of the strengths of this book is to provide a good line of reasoning that explains why this might be true. Heaven and Hell follows the extended, and appropriate, Blake reference. But to me this essay feels more like a long article you'd find in a magazine written by a cocky critic. Sure, there's much erudition on display and many valid aesthetic points are made; but the spirit behind it feels negative: like many of the new ideas and associations that had formed in his mind hadn't had a chance to mellow and mature. On the other hand, what seem like random observations to me may form a pattern I just didn't pick up on. Huxley was a smart cookie, and I wouldn't presume to speak

authoritatively on his shortcomings.

This book is truly a classic. It has a timeless quality and youth-like enthusiasm. Mr. Huxley does such a superb job at capturing the "feel" of the whole experience. He weaves wonderful prose with intriguing ideas. Not being an avid art aficionado, I was left a bit daunted with the numerous art references, but overall he has left me with a newfound interest in art. Huxley touches on some good questions concerning psychoactive substances (and general "chemical vacations") and perception. I am intrigued with his idea of the brain acting as a sort of "reducing valve" for the whole of what could be perceived (experiencing "mind at large"). It is surely a quick read, but still packed full of philosophy, little tidbits, history and a myriad of other such though provoking ideas. A great quote: "The need for frequent chemical vacations from intolerable selfhood and repulsive surroundings will undoubtedly remain." And Huxley does a wonderful job at explaining why this is so. This is a must read for anyone trying to understand the whole why and what for of hallucinogens, or for the aspiring philosopher, the general curious about life, mystery, etc. It is a necessary read.

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