# IS THERE A PLACE FOR PSYCHEDELICS IN PHILOSOPHY?

## Fieldwork in Neuro- and Perennial Philosophy

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Is there a place for psychedelics in philosophy? I set out in 2005 to conduct anthropological fieldwork on the revival of hallucinogen research since the 1990s, which was the decade that US President George H. W. Bush had dedicated to research on the brain and to education in brain science.[1] I was prepared to address a series of widely recognized questions of epistemology and ontology, but my project was motivated by what William James would have called "live questions"—the sort of question that no philosophy seminar would ever discuss. When I had first taken LSD, at age eighteen, I experienced symptoms of psychosis but also a mystical sense of finally being at home in the world. Can a drug-induced experience be spiritually meaningful? As a youthful but staunch materialist, I did not know what to make of an experience that I would have felt ashamed to describe in religious terms.

The anthropologist Paul Rabinow has proposed that, when approaching problems of largely philosophical import that are not part of the academic canon of acceptable questions, we conduct "fieldwork in philosophy."[2] Following

1. Presidential Proclamation 6158, July 17, 1990.

2. Paul Rabinow, *Anthropos Today: Reflections on Modern Equipment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 85.

*Common Knowledge* 22:3
DOI 10.1215/0961754X-3622224

this prompt, I took my confusion to neuropsychopharmacology laboratories in Switzerland and California. I can refer readers interested in this ethnographic bildungsroman to my book *Neuropsychedelia*, but in this essay I would like to connect the dots between that book and my current research, which concerns neurophilosophy.[3] This research is a different kind of "fieldwork in philosophy" than Rabinow's, closer in some ways to Pierre Bourdieu's, in that it submits an area of academic philosophy to anthropological inquiry.[4]

During the time of my fieldwork in Franz X. Vollenweider's neuropsychopharmacology and brain imaging laboratory in Zurich, I was a graduate student in an American anthropology department, but Vollenweider treated me less as a social scientist than as a philosophical interlocutor with whom he could develop his own more speculative ideas about the effects of psychedelic drugs. I sat up and took notice when I first heard that he exchanged ideas as well with a professor of philosophy. At the 2006 LSD Symposium in Basel, Vollenweider introduced me to Thomas Metzinger, arguably Germany's most prominent neurophilosopher. Metzinger's interest in hallucinogenic drugs differed sharply from, but was also related to, the other form of philosophical thought that I encountered in the field, Aldous Huxley's perennial philosophy. I will relate Huxley's rearticulation of this simultaneously early and nonmodern philosophy of religion to Metzinger's distinctly modern philosophy of mind, which he has used to reanimate the ancient conception of philosophy as a cultivation of the soul. To give away the answer to the question that I posed at the outset: yes, there can be and there already is a very small place for psychedelics in philosophy, on which we could build by bringing perennial philosophy into conversation with empirically oriented forms of research, such as neurophilosophy and ethnographic fieldwork on "consciousness cultures."

## Hallucinogens, Neurophilosophy, and *Cultura Animi*

Metzinger considers himself an analytic philosopher but works in a tradition of neurophilosophy that does not limit itself to conceptual analysis, instead opening up the philosophy of mind to experimental psychology and brain research. *Neurophilosophy* is not a term of Metzinger's choosing. He does not see himself as part of any movement or school, and, biographically, Patricia S. Churchland's book *Neurophilosophy* was not instrumental for his turn toward the neurosciences.[5] But the family resemblance is sufficiently close for me to use Churchland's word

3. Nicolas Langlitz, *Neuropsychedelia: The Revival of Hallucinogen Research since the Decade of the Brain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

4. Pierre Bourdieu, "'Fieldwork in Philosophy'" (1987), in *In Other Words: Essays towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 3–33.

5. Patricia S. Churchland, *Neurophilosophy: Toward a Unified Science of the Mind-Brain* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986).

as an umbrella term covering Metzinger's project as well. In comparison with Metzinger's, however, the empirical orientation that Churchland has developed with her husband, Paul, is a more cerebral affair—an outcome of the couple's shared love of science. In Anglo-American philosophy departments, the Churchlands had to overcome significant intellectual resistance at a time when ordinary-language philosophy was just beginning to lose its predominance. Since experimental psychologists had been driven out of German academic philosophy at the beginning of the twentieth century, the opposition to any form of "psychologism" has been deeply rooted on both sides of the Atlantic.[6] By contrast, Metzinger's interest in mind and brain is not a product of the seminar room but grew out of his participation in the counterculture of 1970s Frankfurt, which experimented with numerous consciousness-altering techniques, from meditation to psychedelic drugs. Politically, however, the radical Left to which Metzinger belonged opposed any form of "biologism" because of its association with Nazi ideology. Disenchanted with the pipe dreams of his milieu, Metzinger eventually set out to establish a naturalistic perspective on human beings.

I point to the opposition that both Churchland and Metzinger had to overcome to suggest why psychedelic drugs have failed to find a place in academic philosophy. As mind-altering drugs, their experimental uses are already making a modest contribution to a neurobiologically informed philosophy of mind. But epistemological and political objections to "psychologism" and "biologism" continue to be prevalent in the discipline and are bound to impede the reception of psychopharmacological studies of hallucinogenic drugs, just as they frustrate interest in every other neuroscience literature.[7] Besides facing hostility from outside the discipline, neurophilosophy is struggling with internal problems as well. An effort to establish continuity between empirical facts and conceptual frameworks must negotiate the epistemological hurdles that ordinary-language philosophers have long emphasized, and there are also practical difficulties of interdisciplinary exchange.[8]

Vollenweider told me that Metzinger was interested in some of the same questions as he himself was; for example, to what extent we construct and simulate the world. Is the trip only a hallucination? Vollenweider said he would have been proud to help the philosopher "operationalize" these questions. Historically,

6. Martin Kusch, *Psychologism: A Case Study in the Sociology of Philosophical Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1995); Nicolas Langlitz, "Vatted Dreams: Neurophilosophy and the Politics of Phenomenal Internalism," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 21, no. 4 (2015): 739–57, doi:10.1111/1467-9655.12285.

7. I have discussed these critiques, with reference to dream research, in two articles on neurophilosophy: Langlitz, "Vatted Dreams," and Nicolas Langlitz, "On a Not So Chance Encounter between Neurophilosophy and Science Studies in a Sleep Laboratory," *History of the Human Sciences* 28 (2015): 1–22, doi:10.1177/0952695115581576.

8. Max Bennett and Peter Hacker, *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003).

the idea of "operationalizing" philosophical problems traces back to a positivist theory of meaning that logical empiricists used to reduce the meaning of theoretical expressions to empirically verifiable observation sentences. In practice, however, philosophical theorizing and neuroscientific experimentation do not always work well together. As Metzinger put it in an interview with me: "In general, my experience with neuroscientists is that they say: Thomas, philosophy is very nice, but tell us what we should do. Then I propose an experiment to them, and they say: No, for technical reasons that doesn't work. Nine out of ten times, that's how it goes." Vollenweider was equally self-critical: "I often wonder whether we aren't doing classical psychophysiology of a peculiar state of mind and to what extent this allows us to address philosophical questions." Other collaborations of philosophers and neuroscientists have produced experiments or coauthored publications, but neither came out of the informal conversations between Metzinger and Vollenweider.[9] Most neurophilosophy, however, requires only that philosophers base their arguments on the published scientific literature and therefore is not based on direct collaboration between philosophers and scientists.

Metzinger's larger project seeks to demonstrate the nonexistence of selves and to understand how the brain constructs the illusion of selfhood. From the start, neuroscientific studies of psychedelic drugs have provided one of many building blocks for this undertaking. In his magnum opus, *Being No One*, Metzinger discusses the hallucinations triggered by drugs such as LSD, dimethyltryptamine, and mescaline.[10] The pharmacological disinhibition of neural activity in different brain regions results in internally produced contents of phenomenal consciousness, such as abstract geometrical patterns, that do not correspond with anything in the organism's environment. Psychedelics can dissociate an intensification of subjective experience from the production of knowledge of the outside world (for example, colors can be brighter than anything we can see with our eyes). In this experimental situation, the phenomenal content is decoupled from the intentional content of experience, that is, from its directedness at an object. This phenomenon allows Metzinger's philosophy of mind to underpin, with empirical evidence, the otherwise purely speculative conceptual distinction between phenomenal and intentional content.

Although Metzinger acknowledges that hallucinogen-based psychotherapy can bring significant insights to therapists and patients, his discussion focuses on the hallucinatory component of the psychedelic experience, which he describes

9. Bigna Lenggenhager, Tej Tadi, Thomas Metzinger, and Olaf Blanke, "Video Ergo Sum: Manipulating Bodily Self-Consciousness," *Science* 317 (2007): 1096–99; Jennifer M. Windt and Valdas Noreika, "How to Integrate Dreaming into a General Theory of Consciousness—a Critical Review of Existing Positions and Suggestions for Future Research," *Consciousness and Cognition* 20, no. 4 (2011): 1091–1107, doi:10.1016/j.concog.2010.09.010.

10. Thomas Metzinger, *Being No One: The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 237–51.

as "epistemically vacuous."[11] Philosophically and neuroscientifically, it would be important to clarify how these contradictory qualities of hallucinogenic-drug action are related to each other. The standard medical term *hallucinogen* expresses the assumption, whether right or wrong, that they induce experiences that are very intense without generating any knowledge, at least none that can be articulated verbally. This understanding of hallucinogens as being of no epistemic value might help to explain why Timothy Leary's grandiose prediction in 1965 that, within one generation, the University of California at Berkeley would have a department of psychedelic studies was not fulfilled. When Berkeley students come home on vacation, their parents continue to ask, what books are you reading? rather than, which molecules are you using to open up which Library of Congress inside your nervous system?[12]

But even if ingesting psychedelic drugs does not convey philosophically relevant knowledge, such experiments still could be useful to philosophers. Metzinger has emphasized that consciousness research would profit significantly if researchers were "well traveled in phenomenal state space, if they were cultivated in terms of the richness of their own inner experience."[13] As a philosopher who insists on the kind of objective evidence supplied by the neurosciences, Metzinger neither advocates a revival of introspectionist psychology nor evinces partiality to the phenomenological tradition of philosophy that implicitly builds its accounts of human consciousness on the philosopher's own experience. But personal familiarity with altered states "would thoroughly shatter [consciousness researchers'] folk-phenomenological intuitions and endow them with completely new *theoretical* intuitions."[14] And these theoretical intuitions could then be tested experimentally. A controlled experience of hallucinations that are recognized as such (which is the case for most hallucinogen-induced misperceptions) would enable philosophers, Metzinger argues, to experience firsthand how the *content* of their experience is *constructed*.[15] Undermining the naive realist assumption that seeing is knowing would make his colleagues more susceptible to his more radical theoretical claim that *all* experience is fundamentally hallucinatory.

Metzinger's *Being No One* is a philosophically provocative but not an edifying book. Almost seven hundred pages of dense jargon and detailed discussion of neuroscientific and psychiatric studies express the aspiration of analytic philosophy to turn the love of wisdom (φιλοσοφία) into a professionalized and highly technical academic discipline. Pierre Hadot, familiar to readers of this

11. Metzinger, *Being No One*, 249.

12. Timothy Leary, *Turn On*, *Tune In*, *Drop Out* (Berkeley: Ronin, 1999), 113–14.

13. Thomas Metzinger, "Reply to Hobson: Can There Be a First-Person Science of Consciousness?" *Psyche* 12, no. 4 (2006): 2.

14. Metzinger, "Reply to Hobson," 2–3.

15. Metzinger, *Being No One*, 249–51.

journal, substantiated in the course of his career that philosophy in antiquity was not based primarily on the writings of wise men but rather on their way of life. Philosophy was a therapeutic practice—aiming at peace of mind, inner freedom, and cosmic consciousness—that would cure humankind of its anguish.[16] In the Middle Ages, however, schoolmen teaching at the newly founded European universities repurposed philosophical discourse as a conceptual basis for theology. Since the Occidental way of life had to be based on Christian faith, they turned philosophy into a purely theoretical activity, separated from the spiritual exercises of the classical pagans. Although philosophy, during the Enlightenment, emancipated itself from its role as "handmaid of theology," philosophy maintained its scholastic character as it became an academic discipline. As Hadot noted, "in modern university philosophy, philosophy is obviously no longer a . . . form of life—unless it be the form of life of a professor of philosophy. . . . Modern philosophy is first and foremost a discourse developed in the classroom, and then consigned to books."[17] Thus, philosophy departments were no place for revitalizing the old quest for peace of mind, inner freedom, and cosmic consciousness. In the 1950s, these goals began to be pursued outside of the academy with the help of psychedelic drugs.

One of the reasons I have been interested in Metzinger's work, both philosophically and ethnographically, is that it does not fit neatly into the theory-dominated tradition of neurophilosophy exemplified by the Churchlands. Shaped by the German counterculture's experiments with daily living, Metzinger suggests introducing a sort of "driver's license" for the legal use of psychedelic compounds.[18] Having begun to practice meditation on a daily basis before he had set foot in Frankfurt's renowned department of philosophy, he advocates the inclusion of secular forms of meditation and autogenic training in school curricula.[19] Thus, Metzinger regards his scholarly engagement with brain research not only as a contribution to the empirically informed theory of mind but also as an attempt at bringing Cicero's conception of philosophy as *cultura animi*, a cultivation of the soul, into the age of cognitive neuroscience and psychopharmacology.[20]

16. Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. and trans. Arnold I. Davidson (1987; repr. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 265.

17. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 271.

18. Thomas Metzinger, "Intelligente Drogenpolitik für die Zukunft," *Gehirn und Geist*, nos. 1–2 (2006): 32–37.

19. Thomas Metzinger, "Wenn die Seele verlorengeht. Der Fortschritt in den Neurowissenschaften erfordert eine neue Bewußtseinskultur," *Die Zeit*, no. 45 (1996): 46.

20. Thomas Metzinger, "Introduction: Consciousness Research at the End of the Twentieth Century," in *Neural Correlates of Consciousness: Empirical and Conceptual Questions*, ed. Metzinger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 1–16.

## An Ethnography of Neuropsychedelic Consciousness Culture

These practical-minded contributions to the formation of a new consciousness culture are meant to keep our form of life livable, while at the same time neuroscience and neurophilosophy are teaching us to think of ourselves in materialist terms. In analogy to "technology assessments," which evaluate the potential risks and social consequences of new technologies, Metzinger proposes that neuroethicists conduct "anthropology assessments" to anticipate the sociocultural ramifications of the naturalist image of human beings produced by the life sciences.[21] His own predictions in that regard are bleak: the neuroscientific disenchantment of the self may entail that we become disenchanted with each other; the replacement of a Judeo-Christian conception of ourselves by a vulgar materialism may result in an ethical vacuum; the resulting divide between scientifically educated populations of the developed world and prescientific cultures in poorer countries may aggravate international conflicts.[22]

As an anthropologist of science, I too am interested in the problems of living that arise as people come to internalize neuroscientific knowledge and integrate neurotechnologies, including psychotropic drugs, into their ways of life. In a study of historical prognoses, Reinhart Koselleck has remarked that predicting political revolutions occasionally succeeds if only because *revolution* means "a revolving motion" and because history *can* repeat itself.[23] Historical fortune-tellers do not fare well, however, when predicting events that have no antecedents. I think that the same can be said of revolutions in our image of humankind. New forms of materialism have appeared time and again since Democritus offered atomism to his contemporaries. Materialism informed the theories and lives of Enlightenment thinkers such as Julien Offray de La Mettrie, of disgruntled 1848 revolutionaries involved in the German *Materialismusstreit*, and of the freethinking anthropologists of the Société d'autopsie mutuelle who proved the nonexistence of the soul, at least to one another, by cutting up each other's brains after death. The autopsists made few scientific discoveries but drew from the materialist armamentarium in their struggle against religion and in favor of feminism and socialism.[24] In societies that continued to be shaped by religion, these

21. Metzinger, "Consciousness Research at the End of the Twentieth Century."

22. Thomas Metzinger, *The Ego Tunnel: The Science of the Mind and the Myth of the Self* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 213–15.

23. Reinhart Koselleck, "The Unknown Future and the Art of Prognosis," in *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, trans. Todd Samuel Presner (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 131–47.

24. See Olaf Breidbach, *Die Materialisierung des Ichs. Zur Geschichte der Hirnforschung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997); Frederick Gregory, *Scientific Materialism in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1977); Michael Hagner, Hirnforschung und Materialismus," in *Weltanschauung, Philosophie und Naturwissenschaft im 19. Jahrhundert*, vol. 1, *Der Materialismus-Streit*, ed. Kurt Bayertz, Myriam Gerhard, and Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Meiner, 2007), 204–22; and Jennifer Michael Hecht, *The End of the Soul: Scientific Modernity, Atheism, and Anthropology in France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

radicals faced many existential challenges, but living in an ethical vacuum was not one of them. An assessment of the sociocultural consequences of materialist self-conceptions could profit from less bioethical imagination and more historical research. As a social scientist, I feel closer to Metzinger the naturalist than to Metzinger the speculative philosopher of history.

And, of course, more often than not, history does *not* repeat itself. To get a better sense of what the most recent naturalization of humanity might hold in store, I have studied ethnographically how people intimately familiar both with neuroscience and with pharmacological consciousness technologies live and conceive of themselves today. The powerful mind-altering effects of hallucinogens have led psychopharmacologists who have experimented with them to internalize the neuroscientific knowledge that they have produced. Who would have a better sense of what it means—not just theoretically but existentially—that inner experience is determined by brain chemistry? Hence my special attention to this subset of neuroscientists.

These psychedelic researchers continue to be preoccupied with an issue, deeply embedded in the history of hallucinogen research, that Aldous Huxley addressed as early as 1954, in his famous study *The Doors of Perception*.[25] That issue is the truth value attributed to the psychedelic experience, whether it is interpreted as mystical or as psychotic. Following the philosophers Henri Bergson, William James, and Charlie Dunbar Broad, Huxley came to conceive of the brain as a filter that, in normal waking life, protected human beings against the dazzling awareness of a cosmic consciousness transcending our finite existence. Schizophrenics had the misfortune of being exposed constantly to this higher reality, which psychedelic drugs allow one to peek at in lighter and spiritually wholesome doses.

In my book *Neuropsychedelia*, I have shown how this transpersonal philosophy of mind became key to nonacademic psychedelic philosophy. As some of the flower children of the 1960s set out on careers in science, they operationalized Huxley's account in one of the most reductionist experimental paradigms of contemporary biopsychiatric research. To this day, they use psychedelic drugs to modulate the "startle reflex" of mice and other rodents to better understand the biological basis of schizophrenia. Huxley assumed that religious consciousness technologies, from chanting to self-flagellation and from meditation to drug ingestion, opened a "cerebral reducing valve" and enabled a mystical experience that had informed religions of all times and places. This universal experience-centered spirituality was at the heart of his rearticulation of Leibniz's perennial philosophy.[26] In twenty-first-century hallucinogen research, that philosophy has

25. Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1954).

26. Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1974).

been given a materialist form. As one of my informants puts it: "What students of religion since Leibniz have discussed as *philosophia perennis*, namely, that all religions share the same core of absolute truth, is currently undergoing a modern neurobiological reinterpretation. Maybe the spiritual experiences of human beings do not resemble each other across cultures because they point to the same God or universal truth but simply because human brains all work alike." Huxley's thought turned out to be so pervasive even in the laboratory that I am tempted to call my ethnographic explorations a sort of fieldwork in perennial philosophy.

Although I encountered as many worldviews as I did researchers, I managed to distill one metaphysical form from their multifaceted perspectives and dubbed this ideal type "mystic materialism": a this-worldly mysticism that reveres not transcendence but biological life. Almost no one in the labs that I observed believed in a nonmaterial mind, let alone in Huxley's "mind at large," which was said to transcend the physical world. Still, many researchers with whom I spoke aligned themselves with mysticism, which—like materialism—emphasizes the metaphysical unity of the world. The coexistence of these ontological commitments is consistent when taking into consideration that the experience-centered forms of spirituality that have blossomed since the 1960s have disentangled mysticism from theist religion. What gave this materialism its mystical edge, initially, was an attitude that my interlocutors attributed to their psychedelic experiences: the pharmacologically induced dissolution of the self had taught them how dependent their sense of selfhood was on neurochemistry, and they associated these ecstatic states with various forms of detachment—detachment from themselves and from everyday concerns. They also learned to feel awe for the human brain and for the biotic world at large, which after all had enabled their wondrous experiences.

## Renewing Perennial Philosophy

Neurophilosophy is a decidedly modern project; perennial philosophy is not. While neurophilosophers see themselves as contributing to a historical break that separates a dingy past from a neuroscientifically enlightened future, perennial philosophy seeks to articulate a knowledge shared across all times. Both promote universalist conceptions of humankind, but neurophilosophers assume that human nature will be revealed only by modern science, whereas perennialists believe that, since time immemorial, humans have been in possession of an anthropological and cosmological understanding that they need to recover if they are to return to living the good life. Perhaps it is no accident that it was this philosophy that proved the most appealing to the aficionados of psychedelic drugs. As the chemist Alexander Shulgin remarked after experimenting on himself with one of the numerous novel compounds he had derived from phenethylamine

and tryptamine hallucinogens: "Funny, I'd forgotten that what comes to you when you take a psychedelic is not always a revelation of something new and startling; you're more liable to find yourself reminded of simple things you know and forgot you knew—seeing them freshly—old, basic truths that long ago became clichés, so you stopped paying attention to them."[27]

Although the *philosophia perennis* is in no sense modern in its attitudes, it emerged as a response to the divisive nature of modernity. Leibniz borrowed the term from the Vatican librarian Agostino Steuco, the author of *De perenni philosophia*, published in 1540. At the same time that Protestant reformers were proclaiming a break with the past—a break that would entail centuries of religious wars and other disruptions—this humanist scholar and theologian was reinvigorating a premodern trope, *discordia concors*, aimed at producing harmony within the context of discord. And while European traders, conquerors, colonialists, and missionaries were confronting an increasing number of cultures radically different from their own, Steuco explained that this variety bespoke the corruption of a divine wisdom with which prelapsarian humanity had been familiar before the human race was dispersed over the whole Earth. According to Steuco, moreover, all peoples, including Protestants and pagans, continued in principle to be able to retrieve that wisdom by studying and rearticulating the *philosophia perennis*.[28]

Huxley believed that mescaline and LSD offered chemical shortcuts to the unitive experience that he imagined to have inspired the *philosophia perennis* from the beginning.[29] He reconstructed for twentieth-century readers what he took to be this all-embracing wisdom in the form of an anthology, comprising mystical writings from the various spiritual traditions (with the exception of Judaism and Confucianism). This jumble was not the product of systematic historical and cross-cultural comparison; methodologically, Huxley followed the epistemological tradition of eclecticism that had been associated with perennial philosophy since its early days. In antiquity, eclectics were philosophers who did not belong to Plato's Academy, Aristotle's Lyceum, Epicurus's Garden, or any other school of thought. Free of the bonds of discipleship, eclectics could pick and choose as they pleased from among the various schools' teachings. The most famous book promoting this attitude is Diogenes Laeërtius's *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, most likely written in the first half of the third century BC; the book enabled its readers to learn from different masters, from both their theories and their conduct of life.[30]

27. Alexander Shulgin and Ann Shulgin, *PIHKAL: A Chemical Love Story* (Berkeley, CA: Transform Press, 1991), 262.

28. Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia Perennis: Historical Outlines of Western Spirituality in Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern Thought* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2004); Charles Schmitt, "Perennial Philosophy: From Agostino Steuco to Leibniz," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27, no. 4 (1966): 505–32.

29. Aldous Huxley, *Heaven and Hell* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1956).

30. *Diogenis Laertii Vitae Philosophorum*, trans. H. S. Long, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964).

This mainly anecdotal doxography appears to be incompatible with modern epistemic practices. If we follow the narrative of the seventeenth-century scientific revolution, ours is a knowledge culture—based on rational thought, direct experience, and empirical data—that has emancipated itself from dependence on views held in the past and especially from those held by classical Greek and Roman masters. This epistemological modernism certainly has shaped neurophilosophy. A conversation that I had with Patricia Churchland about her interest in psychedelic drugs offers an example of what I mean. I visited with Churchland in her capacity as an advisory board member of the Heffter Research Institute, which has played a leading role in the revival of hallucinogen research, but we also spoke about the culture of academic philosophy. She complained about doctoral students being interested primarily in what W. V. Quine had said about things, rather than in what things are *really* like. The opponents of doxography of this sort frown upon analytic philosophy's reception of its own ancestors and revile the reverence for old texts and classical authors in the continental tradition.

The schism in Western Christendom of the sixteenth century was accompanied by the development or reconstitution of perennial philosophy, and the emergence of modern science was accompanied by a reanimation of philosophical eclecticism. At a moment in history when subjection to tradition was questioned more vigorously than ever before, the liberty to handpick from many schools of thought became an alternative to the *querelle des anciens et des modernes.* As an eighteenth-century eclectic put it: "One should not seek truth by oneself, *nor* accept or reject everything written by ancients and moderns."[31] Eclectics exercised their "liberty of philosophizing," guided by the novel practice of a critical history that did not promote relativism but aimed at wisdom and utility. Examining old and new doctrines and the conditions under which these had developed, they assembled those doctrines that appeared to be true and consequently everlasting in ways that accommodated the spirit of their own time and place.[32]

My fieldwork in perennial philosophy and neurophilosophy likewise departs from the doxographical tradition. Its dialogic mode of engaging with science and philosophy evidences that I do care about other people's opinions, for instance, Vollenweider's, Churchland's, and Metzinger's. From Steven Shapin, the historian of science, I have learned that it is among the most fundamental self-misunderstandings of the moderns that their ways of knowing no longer rely on trust in the opinions of authorities.[33] The more complex and specialized our epistemic landscape becomes, the more we will have to rely, indeed, on

31. Donald R. Kelley, "Eclecticism and the History of Ideas," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62, no. 4 (2001): 585 (italics mine). For Kelley, the pivotal work and modern classic of this kind of critical history is Johann Jakob Brucker's *Historia critica philosophiae* (1742–44).

32. Kelley, "Eclecticism and the History of Ideas," 577–92.

33. Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 409–17.

what better informed people tell us. Large parts of their knowledge we can only have faith in, as our resources are too limited to check everything for ourselves. As an anthropologist, I cannot replicate the experiments of psychopharmacologists and might be too concerned about my health and criminal record to test on myself every substance that Alexander Shulgin has developed. This situation makes it especially important to learn how to assess critically those opinions that most matter to us. The history and anthropology of science play important roles in this endeavor, as they elucidate the social and material conditions that have allowed particular claims to be made and have perhaps tilted them in directions of which we should be made aware. Based on historiography and thick ethnographic description, rather than on bioethical speculation, we should consider the forms of life that psychedelic drugs can engender. In this respect, my fieldwork in neuro- and perennial philosophy has gone beyond mere doxography. Similar to neurophilosophers, we anthropologists have also left the armchair to find out what things are really like and what people actually do, compared with what they say.

It is in this context that I also want to argue for the importance of neuroscience and neurophilosophy, which challenge convenient presuppositions by means of experimental findings. These disciplines can help us to decide whether the psychedelic experience is as epistemically vacuous as the hallucinations that it involves or whether, on the other hand, it opens doors of perception and enables new insights into our minds and even into the cosmos that we inhabit. Perennial philosophy will need much empirical research into its doctrines, including its presuppositions about mind and brain, into its historical development, and into the lives of those who have promoted it, if ever we should determine to assemble it anew as a *cultura animi*. Not inconceivably, we might pursue philosophy as a way of life that cultivates the soul not only with the help of seminars but also with the aid of psychedelic drugs. As an old-fashioned academic, however, my own hope is that students will continue to read books at home during their semester breaks.