

THE POSSIBILITIES FOR PSYCHIC EVOLUTION

Michael Murphy

It's a pleasure to talk about the possibilities of psychic evolution here in Canada where the terms "psychedelic" and "cosmic consciousness" were invented. In fact, Dr. Maurice Bucke who was once president of the Canadian Psychiatric Association, was one of the first people to think seriously about this whole notion that somehow the mind was involved in an evolutionary process, and his book has been much discussed in our programs at Esalen. (Bucke, 1901)

I want to start with a definition tonight. This is kind of a formidable term, "Psychic Evolution." In a way it is the least of several even worse possibilities. Our language in this area is poor. Let me begin and give some negatives before I get around to talking about the subject itself. First, by psychic evolution I do not mean the older kind of theosophical definitions which include, or are limited to, table rappings and messages from Tibet. Also, I won't want to limit the definition to traditional mysticism, although we are drawing increasingly, I think, upon the traditions of Eastern thought and Western mysticism, but these definitions are incomplete. The behavioristic and Freudian definitions, too, are insufficient. Most positivistic and behavioristic conceptions of human becoming simply don't give enough place to, and are not subtle enough in, the descriptions of inner experience, or they don't even pay any attention to them. The Freudian definitions generally do not deal with higher levels of human functioning.

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Now I am going to describe something that is going on all over North America and Europe, largely unreported. It doesn't have nearly the press that LSD has, or the hippies, but nevertheless it's engaging hundreds of thousands of people. A survey has been made of self-help groups that are operating in this area I'm about to describe, and... there are at least one thousand self-help groups in the United States alone...so it's a large kind of ground swell and it's largely unreported.

Aldous Huxley said that man was a multiple amphibian, that we move in the worlds of reason and of instincts simultaneously ... we move in a world of inter-personal relationships and then a world of private feelings and dreams. We are mind and we are body, but the bias of Western education has not led us to cultivate these many sides of our nature equally. At the end of his life Huxley suggested that we begin to study something which he coined the term for: "the non-verbal humanities." In education, another term which is trying to embrace this area is the "affective domain" (Krathwohl, 1964) as opposed to the "cognitive domain." (Bloom, 1956) Roughly this neglected area would comprise the way we use our senses, the way we use our physical bodies, our inter-personal relationships, and interior states of consciousness, such as dreams, hypnogogic imagery, the peak experiences that Dr. Maslow has described. (Maslow, 1963, 1964) and the occasional sensual oceanic and mystical experiences which I think many of us here tonight have experienced from time to time. Sometimes even in frightening ways.

These areas I will group into three main parts — the inter-personal area, the sensory-kinesthetic area, and the interior or intra-psychic or contemplative area. Now in each of these areas, in spite of the fact that they are neglected in education generally in the Western world, the "human potential movement" is moving in to fill the gap.

In the inter-personal area first, some of you may know about the work of the basic encounter groups and T-groups that was begun at Bethel, Maine, and has been going on for twenty years. This is not group therapy. It has much in affinity with group therapy but the basic purpose for people coming into these groups is to phase in on such processes as expanding perceptiveness, expanding awareness,

more effectiveness in inter-personal relations. Recently these groups have been used extensively in industry and in the past year by the American State Department. Every United States ambassador has been through one of these encounter groups in the past year, hopefully with better results for the State Department in years to come. We have conducted about a hundred of these sessions at Esalen and I can testify to their potency. People have various kinds of reactions to them and they are filling a variety of needs...they are extremely powerful....

Another basic trend in what I call this inter-personal dimension is the whole area of one-to-one relationship in a non-therapeutic setting. Dr. Gerald Goodman at the University of California has a program in training people to get along in dyads — in pairs...the styles in which one person relates to another person. Apparently, according to his research, each of us has a distinctive style with which we come into any relationship with another person. Dr. Goodman is now training college sophomores to work with sixth grade boys in something he calls "companionship therapy," taking people who have natural talent as companions....So dyad training and basic encounter groups are two approaches that are springing up in this area of inter-personal relationships.

Another major area I would characterize as the sensory-kines-thetic.... One of the people working on this is Payton Jordan, the United States Olympic track coach.... He maintains that using a kind of sensitization to the body, his athletes are getting better and better results. His 400-meter track team broke the world's record last year with runners who had not themselves broken the record.... He uses the group encounter techniques that I have mentioned and a kind of suggestive approach in which people are encouraged to listen to their own bodies and to get a sense of what is happening — it's kind of paying attention to the messages that are coming from the body....

Another person in this field, to give you an idea of the spread of backgrounds, is Dr. Alexander Lowen, a psychiatrist in New York, who has developed an approach to restructuring the physical body. (Lowen, 1966) He begins his diagnosis by studying the muscle formations of his patient, and his therapy proceeds from this starting point....

Again, this body of work has not been thoroughly researched—but he has been highly effective in personal therapy and his ideas are suggestive and compelling. He maintains that psychological configurations of growing adolescents actually have a large role in shaping the body. For example, he thinks that a lot of sexual constriction tightens the thigh muscles and shortens the upper bonds of the legs.... What he does is to directly attack these particular physical characteristics. Through various physical manipulations he is able to release a tremendous amount of cathartic material to bring back memories and feelings. He has worked at our institute a number of times and I watched him do this. It really is quite remarkable the kinds of recall and the kinds of release people get through these various physical manipulations that he is able to do.

Now, this begins to sound a little funny when you get into these things. Aldous Huxley said that when you are moving in some of these areas you must not be afraid to go to the bottom of muddy wells. Some of this simply might seem distasteful or extremely odd. If you came outside one of our seminar rooms and you heard some of the groanings, giggling, tears, and laughter you might think you were in bedlam. But the process has to be experienced first-hand to get some sense of the power in it. And eventually, of course, all of this has to be researched in some way.

Another area in this kind of topography or mapping I am doing is what I would call simply sensory awareness. There are a number of people throughout Europe, especially, where a lot of this work started, who through various kinds of suggestive and meditative techniques are maintaining that they can enhance all sensory functioning. Charlotte Selver has brought one strain of these approaches over to America and now has a number of followers in the United States.... Most of these exercises are kind of self-hypnotic things where the person is simply instructed to pay attention to the simplest processes.

Sir John Eccles spoke here earlier this week and I understood that he said that at least 98% of the events occurring within the organism do not come to the surface of awareness.... Well, I think that in some of these processes we are beginning to penetrate into this 98% of the functioning going on within the body. Evidence that this is ready to surface is demonstrated by the fact that people have

remarkable results with such simple instructions. For half an hour, perhaps, a person will pay attention to the way he stands up and sits down again. And Miss Selver will work with the person, just having him stand up, attending to this, and then sitting down. And by continually paying attention to this simple act you discover the most amazing things. You discover, for example, that you stand up in different ways at different times, and you sit down in different ways. This is generally related to the way somebody is looking at you or to something you are feeling.

This simple awareness at first is a little disconcerting.... When you bring awareness into these involuntary processes it's confusing at first and you become clumsy. But if you attend to this long enough something does happen which, for lack of a better term, we call "extended awareness." Somehow, we feel a little more confident and a little more mastery about the way we hold ourselves physically, about our self-possession.

Dr. Frederick Perls, who is in residence at our Institute, is the father of something called Gestalt therapy--this is not Gestalt psychology but grew out of a combination of Gestalt therapy and psychoanalysis. (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951) Dr. Perls also is working with the extension of awareness into what he calls the blind spots in our functioning. He tries to lead people to what he calls the "impasse." Every person, he says, has a number of these impasses in the way they function. He gets people, for example, to attend to the way they gesture, to the way the left side balances against the right side in our gesturing, and in our facial expressions. He is currently using video-tapes and using video-tape playbacks in which the person watches himself, and sees himself front-on, which is a different experience from looking in a mirror. I just had that uneasy sensation watching myself on television before this talk tonight...

Now, a third area — if we call the first two inter-personal functioning and the sensory-kinesthetic—would be the region of our inner experiences, our psychic states. Again, there are a number of people in the United States, in Canada, and in Europe who are working in this area.... As an example I choose a psychologist in Los Angeles, Robert Gerard. All these people are attempting to educate phantasy directly. They are maintaining that certain people somehow have a more labile inner eye—a freer inner eye — and this phantasy life, this image-making ability, can be cultivated by simple disciplines and paying attention.

Dr. Gerard, in institutes at Esalen, for example, will start people with simple imagination exercises — holding or imagining a surface or square or a cross — something like that. Then we lead people into guided phantasies in which one image will fold or unfold another, and another—a kind of rapid almost psychedelic process of imagery. In some people it actually becomes as powerful as, I would say, a medium-dose LSD experience.

In the several articles he has written about this, he claims that this is quite a frequent occurrence in his therapy — to get people into these very intense and very spontaneous imagery processes which seem to carry a good deal of unconscious material in a very distinct, sometimes florid way. I think there's evidence that this — we call it "phantasy training" — would be valuable to artists. In an educational experiment we have going at Esalen now we have two painters who are actually working with this phantasy process. Both of them claim that their phantasy life has increased markedly and it can be reflected in their painting.

Finally, in this grouping of techniques, I would like to say a few words about the more classical form of meditation. In the United States now there are two very significant research projects going on.... One is being conducted at the Austen Riggs Center in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, under a National Institute and Mental Health Grant, by a psychiatrist, Arthur Deikman. And again Dr. Deikman has gotten impressive results with the simplest of techniques. Starting four years ago, he had a number of subjects given simple instructions to pay attention to a blue vase. And the first time they came in they looked at this blue vase for 15 minutes, the next day 20 minutes. He brought this up to an hour, and some of these people worked for three weeks, a few of them were as long as two years. Then he collected the reports of these people about their experience and he has published summaries of these reports, if anybody is interested, in the Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease (Deikman, 1966b) and in Psychiatry. (Deikman, 1966a) He tried to choose naive subjects, people who hadn't done a lot of reading of Huxley's Perennial Philosophy (Huxley, 1945) or on Vedantic mysticism. But the reports he got were amazingly similar to a lot of the literature in mystical experience. Experiences of leaving the body, experiences of merging, experiences of enhanced perceptiveness, were reported by most of the subjects. These experiments have lead Dr. Deikman into some interesting concept-

ualizations about what is going on. I think this research is significant, and the fact that this was supported by the National Institutes of Health is a pointer.

The other experiment is something you may have heard of by Dr. Joe Kamiya at the University of California Medical Center. Dr. Kamiya has finally done that terrible thing: he actually claims that he is conditioning brain behavior. He is actually able to let people or permit people to take control of their own brain waves. The experiment is a simple one. He has people hooked up to an EEG and every time an alpha wave occurs it rings a bell. The subject hears this bell ringing, and he is given instructions to keep the bell ringing. Most of his subjects are able to accomplish this 1984 feat in about five hours of this conditioning, about ten half-hour sessions. A few of his subjects are able to get control of this behavior in the first and second session.

When word of Dr. Kamiya's results got out, apparently every person who is interested in meditation in the San Francisco Bay area called him up. He got thereby the idea of working with these people who are interested in meditation, and he began running them through his laboratories. And sure enough, he found out that these people did significantly better than subjects chosen randomly. This kind of research is being done at the University of California at Irvine, by Dr. Joseph Hart who has advanced from Alpha waves to Theta waves. The hope of both these men is to begin to form some kind of objective record of this very subtle interior experience, and then to get some correlation between these very subtle shifts in consciousness and what their EEG records look like. Then they hope to enable people to travel, so to speak, from one state to another through this simple feed-back mechanism. We are working with this process now ourselves....at Esalen and I think we have already gotten on to some very interesting things. We think we found, for example, that in the meditation process you go through three stages. There is a very random chart of all sorts of the mixture waves when you begin, and then through attending to the Alpha wave you get a very even Alpha-wave performance. And then this thing happens which occurred in so many of these disciplines - you seem to go into second gear. Something, I think, close to what the traditional literature has called grace - divine grace. A kind of massive imagery or a change

of state occurs. Then suddenly the Alpha rhythm goes off and what comes in instead is mysterious Theta wave activity. I think.... it is a very promising approach because it does perhaps offer some rapprochement between an objective brain-control experimentation and the most introspective kind of meditative experience. And further it offers an opportunity to the people who are actually experiencing this to steer away, to become psychic navigators to some extent, in between these very fine changes of brain behavior that can make tremendous differences in experience.

Finally in the last section of this kind of map I am trying to draw there are a number of people who are trying to put these approaches together. Dr. William Schutz of the Albert Einstein Medical School, who next year is joining our Institute, has just written a book that will be published in the fall with the marvellous title Joy. This book is an attempt to put down descriptions of a number of these approaches as if they were members of one family. And with them are descriptions by people who have actually been through the process describing what's going on. So you might look for this book.

Another book is in the works at our Institute, another survey of these various approaches. And finally, there are some interesting signs on the national front — the United States Office of Education is going to set up two national centers. It is very much in the thinking of the people in the Bureau of Research in the Office of Education to extrapolate on the possible future for education — what would happen if we move significantly into these kinds of areas I have been describing.

One of the proposals that has been sent in from the Stanford Research Institute has described in beautiful detail—I just read the proposal—a possible world-wide inventory of all the known methods for extending consciousness in these non-chemical, and we might say non-cognitive ways.

What's going on? What makes me say that these things are all of one family? All this experiencing — whether it's with LSD or in encounter-groups or with some of this inner imagery or meditation thing, there are many elements of the experience that people derive

which are quite similar and quite interesting. There are a lot that are different. But let me say something about the similarities.

First of all, in every case, we have a two-fold process. We have a process which might be described as the breaking-down process, the breaking down of our perceptual habits and constancies of the orderly ways in which we have learned to move and gesture, the orderly ways in which we feel and think about each other, the orderly ways in which we talk about each other. In an encounter group, for example, for two hours or for 48 hours you make a gentleman's agreement that the normal laws of social etiquette are going to be put aside for a while and we are going to tell truths to one another. But telling truths rapidly becomes psychedelic if this is a good group. Somehow we become childlike, silly, angry, highly emotional, full of feeling and all shook up. The same can be said for an LSD experience. As a person is taking off on an LSD trip, as you probably know, this is a quite common thing There's something painful that has to be gotten through. Dr. Carl Rogers, in describing the process of an encounter-group's enfoldment, has described this whole period of milling around and then a lot of anger, a lot of emotion, a lot of lashing out in all directions.

After this breaking-down period happens, a second period comes which might be called the "period of grace," when suddenly you are functioning in a way that surprises you. I've been in a number of these groups and I'm continually impressed. I get back in them and my gosh it's happened again...The same kind of thing happens when you meditate long enough to get past this Alpha wave into the Theta wave state, so to speak. Something happens, something spontaneous. It's as if something was there waiting to happen all the time and given the right occasion it does in fact happen. It's not something that is achieved by force of will alone.

Now this is why a number of people in conceptualizing about this have been led to the idea that there is some intrinsic kind of human nature, that we are not a tabula rasa, that there is a core of human nature that has a kind of dynamic. The seminal thinker along these lines is Abraham Maslow who was just elected president of the American Psychological Association - Dr. Maslow has studied healthy people for 25 years and has found that these people have more what he calls

"peak experiences." This led him to the studies of peak experiences - full moments of human functioning. (Maslow, 1962, 1964) And his theories fit the kind of experiencing that occurs in these encounter-groups, and in meditation experiments, and in a lot of LSD work. Consequently, his theories, his conceptualizations have been adopted by many of the people working in these areas. Similarly with the conceptualizations of Carl Rogers and of Gardner Murphy — Murphy's book Human Potentialities (Murphy, 1958) and Rogers' book On Becoming a Person (Rogers, 1961) would be good books to read in this respect. All three of these men are maintaining that there is some kind of human nature which, when given the opportunity, will emerge in a kind of well-functioning way. In a very rough way this fits with this whole phenomenon of what I call the second stage in the development of the encounter group or the LSD process or the meditative process.

When people go through this process there is a paradoxical thing they will say: at the same time they have a greater hold on their consciousness yet it's easier for them to go with the flux of events. I've heard the phrase "I've been vaccinated against the tumult of the world, against the ups and downs of the world, I can go with it." But at the same time, there is a greater hold on consciousness.

A person I know had dream which, I think, points to this kind of thing that is happening. He dreamt—he is a tall very strong looking fellow, an Irishman born in Boston and a Harvard graduate—that he was in New England and he was walking along a lane with a stone wall, and in back of the stone wall suddenly there was a great stone face, almost something that could have been carved on Easter Island, with a great and noble character. And he looked up at this face and somehow he felt that he was looking at himself. And suddenly the stone image began to disintegrate and part fell off and another part fell off and, suddenly, as the face kind of crumpled, there was this enormous radiation in the background as if of a great sunset—and he woke up. He felt that this somehow typified the breaking down of him—his fine character—and the moving in of some deeper part of himself. I thought that this was a vivid example of something I have heard described by a number of people in our institute: of this paradox of the kind of giving way, this ease in giving way to the flow of life and at the same time, in some mysterious way,

a gaining of a greater hold on consciousness at some more fundamental level.

Now, what conceptual scheme can we think of to handle this? A friend of mine has proposed to the National Science Foundation — at the invitation of the National Science Foundation — that a study be made of which conceptual model in existence now explains all these phenomena the best, and offers the chance of getting some kind of understanding. And he has characterized five basic conceptual schemes that every thinking person could, in some way, loosely be related to. From the behavioristic-positivistic on the one hand to Huxley's Perennial Philosophy on the other. (Huxley, 1945) I think that his proposal points to a task at hand. And that task is to really look at the way we think about these processes at the same time that we are exploring the process itself. And I think this is going to be very much in the works.

All right then, we have this movement in the culture, we have these many experiments which can be grouped together in this way. I think there is a role in all of this for anybody who is interested. I think that the success of our institute ... points to a kind of expansion of this layman's movement, I think just as the young people are pulling away from many of the cultural values — there is this more middle-classed, middle-aged movement, that is also pulling away, and is, in time, going to give fuel and energy to this kind of research, and, eventually, will pull universities, research institutes, and government institutes in this direction.

And I think a few things that may sound far-out are in the works. I think that eventually we are going to...want to try some experiments. I think we are going to begin setting up model communities in which the whole culture will pour its resources into setting up a community in which the highest level of functioning can be achieved. Now at Esalen we are attempting this in a very small preliminary way. We had 15 resident fellows for nine months intensively experimenting with these approaches in combination and we are beginning the second experiment next year. I think there will be more of these small model communities being formed to test these high-level human possibilities. In a way, this might be likened to the whole astronaut program

in which an enormous amount of resource is being allocated to this crazy thing of going to the moon. And really, what it boils down to, I think, after all the political arguments are said and done, is that we are doing it simply because the moon is there and it is possible. The same thing, I think, is going to happen with this kind of extended human functioning. The culture is going to begin to pour more and more resources into getting a few astronauts of inner space to some inner moon. And we are going to do it perhaps for national prestige, but I think, eventually, just because it's there.

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Un grand nombre d'individus et de groupes divers dans des lieux également variés sont entrain d'étudier la façon d'employer les sens, le corps, et les états intérieurs de conscience. M. Michael Murphy décrit les plus récents développements à propos de ce qu'Aldous Huxley appelle "les humanités non-verbales." Il indique trois sujets de recherche principaux: l'étude de l'action réciproque dans les groupes dont les membres s'adonnent à un dialogue direct et franc; les recherches fondées sur l'effet des cinq sens et des mouvements musculaires sur la personnalité; et finalement la question de la connaissance sensorielle. Il a trouvé des exemples de personnes qui peuvent maîtriser leurs méditations pour émettre certaines ondes télépathiques. L'auteur trouve beaucoup de ressemblances parmi les résultats de ces recherches, et il croit aux grands progrès vers la pleine utilisation du potentiel humain dont Gardner Murphy, Carl Rogers et Abraham Maslow ont parlé. Comme les astronautes qui essaient d'atteindre la lune, les hommes des sciences sociales et les psychologues enverront peut-être des astronautes dans l'espace de la connaissance humaine pour arriver à une lune intérieure.