

Summary of a Source

The Doors of Perception is Aldous Huxley's first-hand account of his experience of mescaline, a hallucinogen that comes from button shaped seeds found in the peyote cactus (1). On the topic of altering one's consciousness with psychedelics, this essay has long-been a foundational pillar. Written in 1953, it coincides with a point of genesis in the psychiatric community wherein psychedelic substances were beginning to gain status as 'miracle drugs' that could treat alcoholism, depression and anxiety (2).

The author forensically chronicles the experience, even the precise amount of mescaline he ingested ('four-tenths of a gramme'). While under the influence of mescaline, Huxley describes the colours of a bouquet of flowers and references The Bible ('I was seeing what Adam had seen on the morning of his creation'), promoting the experience to Religious heights. During the event, he was asked by an observer 'Is it agreeable?' to which he replied 'Neither agreeable or disagreeable... it just *is*'.

This sense of 'is-ness' is a prevailing aspect of his experience. He notes a shift in his spatial awareness ('the walls of the room no longer seemed to meet in right angles') but finds that 'place and distance cease to be of much interest'. Instead, he feels at one with the objects in the room, like the leg of a chair ('...not merely gazing at those bamboo legs, but actually *being* them...'). Even as a piece of prose, this work has a far-reaching influence on the topic of psychedelia and is still widely quoted to this day.

Bibliography:

Huxley, A. *The Doors of Perception*. (1954) UK, Chatto & Windus

¹ talktofrank.com

² Pollan, M. *How to Change Your Mind: The New Science of Psychedelics* (2018) USA, Penguin Press - Prologue