

Psychotherapy

Personal and Transpersonal

In the history of the collective as in the history of the individual, everything depends on the development of consciousness.

—Carl Jung¹

Probably the greatest challenge facing each of us individually and all of us collectively is how to change painful and pathological behavior. How well we answer this challenge may determine our individual and collective fate, as well as the fate of our species and our planet. Historically, there have been three kinds of answers, but their success and the speed of their success have been modest.

The first approach has been moral exhortation. From time immemorial we have been urged to “fight the good fight” against our self, or at least against our baser self. But as we all know, our baser self turns out to be a worthy adversary, and as the Christian Saint Paul lamented, “I can know what is right, but I cannot do it.”²

The second approach has been spiritual practice. Fasting, prayer, contemplation, and yoga are some of the time honored methods. These can certainly be transformative, but progress is usually measured in years or even decades.

The newest addition has been psychotherapy, which can clearly help some people and some conditions. However, once again the process can be painfully slow. Freud wrung his hands over “therapy terminable and interminable,” and therapists speak of breakthroughs and regressions, and lament the “false hope syndrome,” whereby people underestimate the difficulty of changing ingrained habits.³

Because of this, the quest in psychotherapy has always been for faster and more effective methods, and the dream has been of finding ways to induce “quantum change”—long-lasting transformation following a powerful but relatively brief experience.⁴ Consequently, reports that

psychedelics could dramatically accelerate therapy were startling. Extraordinary claims poured from clinics and consulting rooms: claims of profound openings, deep insights, dramatic catharses of long buried traumas, and rapid healings of chronic intractable problems. Over the next few years therapists worked to assess such claims and find optimal ways to work with these powerful new tools, experimenting with different drugs, doses, settings, and techniques.

Numerous case histories and personal reports document dramatic breakthroughs and benefits. However, the careful long-term research needed to assess these claims was cut short by the government's clamp-down. Therefore, we still do not know the full range of possibilities and limitations of psychotherapy with psychedelics, and we are still trying to grasp the profound implications of these chemicals for our understanding of mind, pathology, therapy, and human potential.

NOTES

1. C. G. Jung, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, 2nd ed., vol. 4, pt. 1, *Four archetypes*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969).
2. Saint Paul, *Romans* 7:18-19 (Revised Standard Version).
3. J. Polivy and C. Herman, "If at first you don't succeed: False hopes of self-change," *American Psychologist* 57 (2002): 677-89.
4. W. Miller and J. C  e Baca, *Quantum Change: When Epiphanies and Sudden Insights Transform Ordinary Lives*. (New York: Guilford, 2001).