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The Psychedelic Dasein: Modelling the Effects of Psilocybin with Heidegger's Phenomenology

By

Eamon MacDougall

A Major Research Paper
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
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at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2023

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The Psychedelic Dasein: Modelling the Effects of Psilocybin with Heidegger's Phenomenology

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April 13, 2023

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the mystical experience induced by psilocybin (understood through the tradition of Heideggerian phenomenology) modulates the attuned understanding of oneself, the world, and how the individual relates to the world. This kind of particular experience is not accessible to the individual through ordinary consciousness, therefore psilocybin may give us access to a new kind of understanding. This understanding may offer a solution to the empirical deficiencies surrounding the short-term and long-term effects of psilocybin, such as how a meagre two to three high doses have yielded unprecedented results in the treatment of tobacco addiction, and in the treatment of depression and anxiety in terminally ill patients. The consensus in the literature suggests that it is not solely the molecular and physiological mechanisms responsible for the results. In addition to the physiological mechanisms, a mystical experience associated with it must be present, without which the long-term effects are not catalyzed. Scientific explanations are limited in explaining the relationship between attuned understanding, the individual, and the world, but conversely, phenomenology does, hence why it may be a better method of analysis. The argument made posits that the *mystical experience* enables one to reconstitute oneself at an ontological level shows that the work of Heidegger should be applied to ameliorate the empirical deficiency as a potential tentative framework for understanding its broader *phenomenal* mode of action. The primary reason for this is that Heidegger's work describes an analogous mechanism concerning modes of attunement which may shift our totality of relevance and the context of our understanding and the meaning of the contents of our lives. This paper concludes that Heidegger's phenomenology can offer a new explanation of how psilocybin works at the phenomenal level.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I develop an argument for why phenomenology is necessary to understand the psilocybin-induced mystical experience. Beginning with the current empirical research on psilocybin, I briefly summarize how psilocybin is being used to treat negative emotions associated with the diagnosis of a terminal illness, and its use in treating tobacco addiction. In the second chapter, I unpack Martin Heidegger's phenomenology and its relevant concepts, in particular, his work on moods and attunement, discourse and language, and understanding-interpretation; these are necessary for understanding his concept of *disclosure*. In addition to these concepts, I also borrow from his care structure to carefully lay out how disclosure or *disclosedness* impacts our ontological constitution. In the third chapter, I use them to tentatively reconstruct the mystical experience to explain how it shifts our modes of disclosure and alters the meaning of being, thus changing the relevance of addictive triggers, the meaning of traumas and the kinds of perceptions that keep us in a perpetual mode of fear towards death. I argue that its short-term effects, understood at a phenomenological level, prove to be a more effective methodology for understanding the long-term effects rather than one rooted in empirical science.

1.1 LONG-TERM EFFECTS

In 2000, John Hopkins received regulatory approval to resume “psychedelic research”. Before proceeding, it seems necessary to clarify what exactly that means. In the nineteen-fifties and sixties, experiments with the use of hallucinogenic drugs were conducted on alcoholics as a potential means for treatment¹. At the time, psychiatrists Osmond and Hoffer pitched the hypothesis that the LSD experience shared strange parallels with delirium tremens (DT) (an intense form of alcohol withdrawal that entails a series of mental and physical alterations)². From here, Osmond and Hoffer formulated, analogously, that a high dose of LSD might be sufficient to induce alcohol cessation, citing the reason that it would induce a similar experience to DT.

Osmond and Hoffer conducted their hypothesis first on two subjects: a male and a female who were administered 200 micrograms of LSD; the male stopped drinking immediately after the experience and the cessation remained for approximately six months; the female on the other hand, continued to drink, but stopped only after the follow-up³. Osmond and Hoffer concluded that those results demanded more testing. The pair administered a single large dose of LSD to nearly 700 patients garnering similar results to the initial trial: about a 50% cessation rate for approximately six months⁴. However, for the treatment of alcohol addiction, considering that it required only a *single* dose, the results were remarkable compared to other treatment programs; normally, 66% of people relapse within the first three months⁵.

¹ Dyck, Erika. “‘Hitting Highs at Rock Bottom’: LSD Treatment for Alcoholism, 1950 –1970.” *Social History of Medicine* 19, no. 2 (August 2006): 317-318.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Hunt, William A., and Wayne R. General. “Relapse rates after treatment for alcoholism.” *Journal of Community Psychology*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1973, 66-68.

Osmond and Hoffer were met with criticisms of reproducibility: many attempted to recreate their experiment, some were successful, others not so much⁶. Osmond and Hoffer responded to those who failed to reproduce their results by stating that there must be a strong emphasis on fostering a warm and comfortable environment in which the experiment is to be conducted⁷. The trials that ignored the subjective effects and the impact of the setting tended to place greater importance on the experiment being a biochemical reaction rather than a psychological experience⁸. Some of the experiments that failed to reproduce their methodologies included physically restraining participants in a laboratory or hospital setting. Osmond and Hoffer would claim that such methods omit any consideration for the participants' raw experience, and indeed many have argued that the treatment of the experiment as a mere biochemical reaction within the human physiological constitution was the reason for the experiment's somewhat failed reproducibility⁹.

Others have undertaken the task to reproduce it using a method of subjective consideration similar to Osmond and Hoffer's methodology and managed to demonstrate how LSD therapy was more successful than any other contemporaneous forms of treatment for alcoholism¹⁰. What this suggests is twofold: one, it indicates the ineffectiveness of a purely reductive methodology; two, that the actual subjective experience of a particular altered state of mind may be a necessary condition for the outcome. This latter claim has recently been substantiated and reaffirmed with greater veracity.

⁶ Ibid Pp. 318-324.

⁷ Dyck, Erika. "‘Hitting Highs at Rock Bottom’: LSD Treatment for Alcoholism, 1950–1970." *Social History of Medicine* 19, no. 2 (August 2006): 318-324.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

At John Hopkins, it has been found that the consumption of a particular hallucinogen and its subsequent reaction within the neurochemical constitution are not sufficient, but only one of a few necessary conditions; in addition to the inherent physiological and metabolic processes associated with it, there is another condition that must be present for sustaining long-term beneficial results, namely, a particular kind of experience: the mystical experience¹¹.

This experience will be the primary reason why Heidegger's existential phenomenology is a much better method for analyzing psilocybin's mechanism of action: it creates a context in which one's attuned understanding can be re-interpreted upon the individual's understanding of oneself in the world. Before providing an in-depth explanation of the subjective effects of the experience, the objective long-term effects of classical hallucinogens should be described in greater detail. In 2006, Roland Griffiths at John Hopkins conducted a double-blind study in which researchers administered two to three high doses of either psilocybin (the active ingredient in magic mushrooms) or methylphenidate (the placebo) to thirty participants¹². At the two month follow-up, 67% of the participants who received the psilocybin rated the experience to be within the top five most meaningful or significant events in their lives, while 15% rated it as the single most profound experience of their lives¹³.

Griffiths et al provided a questionnaire to rate how meaningful the experience was on a scale of 1-8; 1 is equal to an event that is no more meaningful than one that occurs every week, while 8 is equal to an event that is the most meaningful experience in one's lifetime¹⁴.

¹¹ Yaden, David B., and Roland R. Griffiths. "The Subjective Effects of Psychedelics Are Necessary for Their Enduring Therapeutic Effects." *ACS: Pharmacology and Translational Science* 4, no. 2 (2021): 568-72.

¹² Griffiths, R. R., W. A. Richards, U. McCann, and R. Jesse. "Psilocybin Can Occasion Mystical-Type Experiences Having Substantial and Sustained Personal Meaning and Spiritual Significance." *Psychopharmacology* 187, no. 3 (July 18, 2006): 276-279.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 268-75.

For reference, participants rated the degree of profound meaning or significance to be around the same level as the birth of one's firstborn child, marriage, the death of a family member, etc¹⁵. How they defined a meaningful experience was vague and not at all clear what it was beyond referring to other experiences of a similar quality along a numerical scale; the lack of a concrete definition of "meaning" requires further elucidation, but this is less of an empirical endeavour than a philosophical one. Griffiths and others at Hopkins proceeded to conduct other trials with the use of psilocybin, most notably psilocybin's permanent impact on trait openness, tobacco addiction, and depression & anxiety associated with the diagnosis of a terminal illness. The study which measured personality traits noticed no remarkable alterations except for one: openness, which they define as: "Aesthetic appreciation and sensitivity, imagination and fantasy, and broad-minded tolerance of others' viewpoints and values"¹⁶

Researchers have hitherto believed that personality traits remain inert after the age of thirty, with little or minimal change¹⁷. However, one particular study in 2011 found that after a high dose of psilocybin, one personality trait had changed; moreover, the changes were sustained at the one-year follow-up. Out of the big-five personality traits: openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism, it was found that trait openness was significantly higher after the psilocybin experience (this particular study conducted 2-5 sessions with each participant)¹⁸, and the results were sustained for at least one full year¹⁹. This is unheard of for any drug, let alone 2 to 5 doses of one drug. There is however, one additional condition that was necessary for sustained openness, chiefly, while under the influence, the participants had to have

¹⁵ Ibid., 278.

¹⁶ MacLean, K. A., Johnson, M. W., & Griffiths, R. R. "Mystical experiences occasioned by the hallucinogen psilocybin lead to increases in the personality domain of openness." *Journal of psychopharmacology (Oxford, England)*, 25, no. 12 (2011): 1454.

¹⁷ Ibid., 1453–1461.

¹⁸ Ibid., 1454–1455.

¹⁹ Ibid., 1453.

had a particular kind of experience, which researchers have hence dubbed the aforementioned “mystical experience” without which the results were not sustained²⁰. Before delving into the phenomenal characteristics of this experience, there are two other studies worth examining that underline the profound impact of psilocybin on human psychology.

Not long after the study on personality traits, the John Hopkins team conducted another trial. In 2014, the Hopkins team studied the impact of psilocybin on those who met the criteria for tobacco addiction. They managed to demonstrate an 80% cessation rate of tobacco use in cigarette addicts at the 6 month follow-up, however, it was again contingent upon the condition of the “mystical experience”²¹.

Not long thereafter, another study was designed – this time it was aimed at patients suffering from anxiety and depression associated with the diagnosis of a terminal illness. Again, similar results were obtained. This trial consisted of administering one high-dose and one low dose, 5 weeks apart; afterwards, 80% percent of participants demonstrated “clinically significant decreases in depressed mood and anxiety... Participants attributed improvements in attitudes about life/self, mood, relationships, and spirituality to the high-dose experience, with >80% endorsing moderately or greater increased well-being/life satisfaction”²². What is important to note about this research is two things in particular: one, that the astounding results only require approximately one to three high doses and two, the particular experience necessitates the long-term effects. It is possible that the people who elected to participate in these trials already

²⁰Ibid. Pp. 1457-1458.

²¹ Remeu, Albert G., Roland R. Griffiths, and Mathew W. Johnson. "Psilocybin-occasioned Mystical Experiences in the Treatment of Tobacco Addiction." *Current Drug Abuse Reviews* 7, no. 3 (2014): 157-64.

²² Griffiths, Roland R et al. “Psilocybin produces substantial and sustained decreases in depression and anxiety in patients with life-threatening cancer: A randomized double-blind trial.” *Journal of psychopharmacology (Oxford, England)* vol. 30,12 (2016): 1181-1197.

had some preconceived notion about the long-term effects, thus it may have made them more likely to have positive reactions; however, the study was conducted with a placebo control group and there was a statistically significant difference between those who received the active psilocybin and those who received the placebo. Even if all participants believed that it would help them prior to participating in the study, it was, for the most part, only those who received the active dose that benefitted the most²³.

Compared to other contemporary forms of treatment, one to three dose sessions is remarkable if one were to consider how most forms of depression and anxiety are treated; a daily regimen of pills²⁴, numerous sessions of cognitive-behavioural therapy or a combination of the two over the span of a year²⁵. The following section takes an in-depth examination of the short-term effects based on clinically devised self-reports.

1.2 SHORT-TERM EFFECTS

Various effects can be (and have been) measured using psychometric instruments; founded on the work of William James, Walter Stace, Walter Pahnke and various others whose work would later be used to develop criteria that would characterize the mystical experience required to necessitate its long-term effects with the use of a questionnaire coined “the mystical experience questionnaire” (MEQ henceforth)²⁶.

The constituents of the MEQ scale consist of four divisions: “1, an authoritative sense of unity or connectedness accompanied by feelings of reverence; 2, positively valenced feelings

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ "Mental Health Conditions: Depression and Anxiety." Centre for Disease Control. Last modified May, 2022.

²⁵ Youn, Soo J., and Luanna Marques. "Intensive CBT: How fast can I get better?." Harvard Health Publishing . Last modified October 23, 2018.

²⁶ Yaden, David B., and Roland R. Griffiths. "The Subjective Effects of Psychedelics Are Necessary for Their Enduring Therapeutic Effects." *ACS Pharmacology & Translational Science* 4, no. 2 (2021): 568-72.

such as love or peace; 3, alterations to the sense of both time and space; and 4, difficulty with putting the experience into words”²⁷. The aforementioned criteria are a very broadly defined categorization of the experience, yet another study probed the subjective effects a bit deeper by pooling data from a variety of different trials; they devised their own qualitative criteria for characterizing the experience: “Altered States of Consciousness Rating Scale (5D-ASC)”²⁸. This questionnaire described the primary qualitative items as: “(1) Oceanic boundlessness (OB)..., (2) Anxious Ego Dissolution (AED)... (3) Visionary Restructuralization (VR)... (4) Auditory Alterations (AA)... (5) Reduction of Vigilance (RV)”²⁹.

Studerus et al also goes into greater detail in an attempt to characterize each one of those states: OB entails derealization, depersonalization, elevated mood, euphoria, and altered sense of time; AED attempts to measure ego disintegration (loss of sense of self and self-control) often accompanied by arousal or anxiety; while VR and AA attempt to characterize particular forms of hallucinations; lastly, RV characterizes the degree to which normal cognitive functioning is impaired – measuring states associated with drowsiness, reduced alertness, etc³⁰.

Due to the emerging emphasis placed on the experience rather than the mere ingestion of a compound, descriptions of the subjective phenomena are necessary to understand the mechanism of actions and, in turn, to provide a reconciled comprehension of the relationship between the self and the world. One researcher at Oxford, Raphael Milliere, notes the potential philosophical significance of AED or, as he calls it, “drug-induced ego dissolution” (DIED),

²⁷ Ibid., 569.

²⁸ Studerus, Erich, Michael Kometer, Felix Hasler, and Franz X. Vollenweider. "Acute, subacute and long-term subjective effects of psilocybin in healthy humans: a pooled analysis of experimental studies." *Journal of Psychopharmacology* 24, no. 11 (November 2011): 1437.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

often measured by a similar scale to AED – “dread of ego dissolution” (DED)³¹. Possibly analogous to the anticipation of one’s own death as mentioned in the works of Heidegger, but this may only be part of the picture.

Furthermore, an additional questionnaire initially developed to measure disturbances in those suffering from schizophrenia, has proven to be effective in characterizing the subjective effects of psilocybin: the “ego-pathology inventory”³². It should be noted that the use of a questionnaire in this context only documents a limited amount of experience which, when conveyed to researchers who have not had such an experience, may not capture its existential structure of it due to the experimental designs being constrained to quantitative methodologies rather than one that gives epistemic privilege to a qualitative methodology.

There is a repeating theme throughout the current literature of an absence of a sense of self, after the experience many are reluctant to use first-person pronouns to describe the experience³³.

It is worth distinguishing between the mystical experience and the phenomenon of ego-dissolution. The mystical experience does not necessarily entail full-blown ego-dissolution, the literature suggests that there may be varying degrees of this, however, it does appear that all mystical experiences do have some reduction of the emphasis on one’s “I” or “ego” and its role in control over the individual.

Understanding the relationship between the long-term effects of psilocybin and the inner workings of its short-term mechanism is imperative for understanding the aforementioned

³¹ Milliere, Raphael. "Looking for the Self: Phenomenology, Neurophysiology and Philosophical Significance of Drug-induced Ego Dissolution." *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* (May 23, 2017).

³² Ibid.

³³ Letheby, Chris, and Jaipreet Mattu. "Philosophy and classic psychedelics: A review of some emerging themes". *Journal of Psychedelic Studies* 5.3 (2022): 166-175.

remarkable results; that said, little empirical research has been conducted to explain why the experience is required to necessitate the long-term effects.

It, therefore, seems that the factor of selfhood, and its relation to experience, plays an integral role in the treatment process. The following sections examine the works of Heidegger and argue that his existential phenomenology can be used to understand the relationship between the subjective effects of psilocybin, the empirically documented long-term effects, and the *phenomenal* constitution of the self.

2. Heidegger's Phenomenology

Before any attempt at modelling the experience can be offered, it is necessary to provide some relevant background information on the works of Heidegger. In his *Being and Time* (BT henceforth), he attempts to articulate the meaning of being from the perspective of a being that is capable of understanding *being*, and any being with this capacity he regards as a *Dasein* – roughly defined³⁴. The function of the word *Dasein* is at least to denote our capacity for considering ontological questions (questions about being) about the kind of being one might be within a particular mode of being (existential questions); however, it is important to note that Heidegger does not necessarily mean the world in any sort of scientific, humanistic, or theological sense. Before we can inquire into our existentiality and the relationship to the mystical experience, we should note that we are fundamentally ontological in the sense that we are the kinds of beings (*Daseins*) that can inquire into what *being* means and that when we do so we gain a particular kind of understanding of *being* that is necessary for our existentiality. The aim of this is to focus on the particular context or horizon in which the contents of the world are uncovered and made true, useful or relevant to us within it; this context which gives meaning to the contents of our world is ultimately determined and structured by human experience – to be more comprehensible to the reader, it should be noted that I use *experience* and *attuned understanding* interchangeably in relation to Heidegger's phenomenology, particularly on his excerpt on language and disclosedness of the world.

What he is attempting to do, is to show us the ways by which our conceptualizations of the world, of being, and the kind of being that we are within a context, may alter depending upon one's ontological vantage point – the standpoint of one's context for understanding being in the

³⁴ Heidegger, Martin. "Being and Time." Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010, 5-7.

world. After which there is a critique of one's own being and the context that substantiates it. Perhaps one of the most important details worth bearing in mind is that he avoids any reduction of "being" to any one specific mode of being, such as attempting to reduce being to a biological being. He underscores the issue as the inclination of the biological sciences to reducing the understanding of being to that of a mechanical one, "In *biology* the tendency has awakened to get behind the definitions that mechanism and vitalism have given to organism and life and to define anew the kind of being of living beings as such"³⁵.

The ontology of the biological sciences is to reduce being to mechanisms and life, more broadly, the sciences, if understood ontologically, are at best *scientism* – the notion that science is the only way of understanding being. This is precisely what Heidegger is criticizing; this would be reducing *being* to one particular kind of being, yet not many would use the scientific method to understand art or cooking – neither can be rendered intelligible with science alone, which is why it's imperative to emphasize a broader critique of different systems of being, rather than employing one for them all. Not to say that scientists understand being in its entirety or at all for that matter, many would likely claim that they don't know all the answers and that science is merely a tool for one kind of answer; the scope of this project is only to indicate the empirical limitations and provide an alternative with a qualitative and experiential emphasis, at the subjective level, to give an additional account to the one-sided reductionism for a deeper level of understanding.

From this perspective, any attempt at defining the meaning of being is devoid of any ontological status save for the ontology of science that secures the meaning of being as something reducible to biological mechanisms. The problem with this kind of thinking, according to Heidegger, is that it omits the possibility of any other ontology or mode of being in

³⁵ Ibid., 9

the world. For instance, relying on science as the one true guiding methodology for understanding music is not going to be successful.

One can of course utilize scientific inquiry to understand why music produces pleasurable acoustics, and why certain tones and sequences are more preferable to the listener, but scientific inquiry will not tell us the subjective reaction of different listeners to the same song. The emotional resonance that music has for different listeners cannot be inferred from the sound waves. Music theory itself can only ever give us the method of producing harmonious sounds, and any attempt at explaining why a G chord sounds better than the sound of one's head dropping on the keyboard is always going to be internally referential; by claiming that a G chord sounds good because it is ordered in a particular way says nothing about how someone interprets a particular song that uses the G chord. When examining the notes, one can only ever point and say that they are not these other pitches or frequencies and that is why they sound pleasurable, but in doing so we're creating a referential circle.

Take two separate explanations of music, there is music theory, and then there may be a biological theory which would claim that certain sounds release specific neurotransmitters in particular brain areas in the right sequence, producing a pleasurable auditory experience. Whether this is true or not matters little for this example. What's important here is that the scientific explanation admits no reason for why the G chord sounds better than my dog's attempt at Chopin other than that it does not cause the release of the right brain chemicals in the right order.

On the other hand, music theory can explain that a G chord sounds better than a paw-playing pianist because it lacks a certain kind of internal order, but that internal order (the combination of notes that produce the G-chord) says nothing about how it will make a listener

feel. For music theory, music is a system of temporally ordered pitches, but for subjective listeners, including music theorists when they are listening rather than theorizing, music is an enviroing experience that produces unmappable emotional states.

Both explanations offer a limited ontology into what it means to be a musical being. In the same sense, Heidegger is criticizing any inquiry that attempts to reduce *being* to one specific kind of being, as any such approach tends to omit other aspects of being that often fail to be unified into one ontological theory, such as why certain sounds are pleasurable and other sounds are not. Both accounts, in their attempt to reduce music to theory, would be omitting what the experience of music is actually like. Everyone knows there is a difference between a G-chord and a C-chord, and both sound pleasurable to hear, but what makes them meaningful depends upon the listener and their interpretation. Indeed, the reason why this is true could be because the wrongly played chord falls outside of the harmonious and coherent order of notes and chords, but this doesn't tell us why it sounds bad either; it tells us that it's different from the rest, but G-chords are different than C-chords and they can still be played together and not sound bad. Music theory can explain harmony by giving a set of rules that enable us to reproduce harmonious sounds and explains them within a coherent system, but it doesn't tell us anything about the actual experience of why they sound good or bad, nor does it provide an account of why some songs sound worse or happier or more melancholic than others. This would require an experiential or qualitative explanation based on the individual's context. Music may be understood on the basis of theory, but the way that the majority of us understand it is not through theory, rather it is through the level of the subject where it gets its individual quality (at the level of experience) instead of the object at hand (such as the physical or theoretical basis for music). Take a broader example: some people loathe country music and some people listen to it

exclusively like it is a lifestyle. More often than not, it's the people in rural areas who appreciate country music while those who loathe it may often but not always come from a more urban background. It is the context and history of the individual that enables country music to be rendered meaningful.

Regarding music theory, it is quite possible that the individual notes are harmonious partially due to the tradition of music. This is why it makes little sense for high-strung composers to critique something like rap, country or jazz – possibly due to some bourgeois sentiment, but such a vapid critique would be ignoring a crucial part of how music becomes meaningful at all: through the developing historical context. Music theory only describes music and the rules produced by the tradition of music, but if you ask a deaf person well versed in music theory to look at two sheets of music, one is country music and the other is Mozart – they're not going to tell you which one they hate on the basis of rhythm and measure, but if they did, it would not be the same reason why those who are auditorily privileged would usually provide, it would likely be closer to some mathematician telling you that an equation is wrong than your friend who absolutely cannot tolerate country music. Most who hate country music would tell you that it *sounds* like garbage rather than their distaste being related to any sort of principle of measure or the notation of written rhythm.

This is why music theory is not sufficient for understanding what music actually is. It can be physically reduced into its objective constituents to be understood by all, but this is not where music garners its meaningful quality. Studying the object of music will not yield results about why we find music meaningful, but what will tell us about the meaning of music is the experience of it and what it means at the level of the individual. Similarly, a biological explanation is not going to tell you why the rural folk have neurons wired to appreciate country

music. There's no gene that encodes for the appreciation of country music; the brains of those who live in urban settings versus rural settings are more or less the same. The problem here is that both theories would be neglecting that which cannot be put into theory: experience itself as attuned understanding that is expressed through language or symbolic means.

As we shall see, attuned understanding for Heidegger, constitutes the core of his phenomenology, it aids in rendering all truths circumspect in the sense that he regards them as belonging to one mode of being or another, rather than the truth of being itself. To make sense of attuned understanding we must understand its relationship to Heidegger's conception of phenomenological truth.

2.1 ALETHEIA

Truth, for Heidegger, is a twofold process. It begins with the disclosedness of the world: the world is opened or cleared for us in a particular way; secondly, we discover beings within the way that the world is opened or cleared for us³⁶. Compared to the Aristotelian tradition, which assumes truth is composed of ideas that correspond in agreement to an object in the world and presupposes a subject-object distinction (that we are somehow standing outside of the world looking in³⁷ like someone walking through an aquarium). Heidegger thinks this way of thinking about the world is somewhat ignorant in the sense that it presupposes only one way of being-in-the-world and ignores everything that constitutes our own interpretation of it by assuming one standpoint to subsume all of being, but what is actually going on is a kind of discovering prior to any deliberation about the beings that are discovered³⁸. This aspect of discoveredness which he calls *aletheia* is enabled, in part, due to how things let themselves be

³⁶ Ibid., 198-202.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 200-202.

seen, he calls this: *apophansis*³⁹. Heidegger thinks that the process of aletheia as truth is fundamental to Dasein in the capacity that we are vehicles for illuminating the world, yet it is not simply that we are illuminating it, but that we are also that which is illuminated, “it [Dasein] is itself the clearing”⁴⁰. Only when Dasein has been illuminated in an existential way can beings show themselves in one way or another⁴¹. A rough example of this might be one who is disclosed in the mode of driving, how they find relevance in the traffic signs and turn signals differently than one in the mode of walking: a stop sign becomes relevant insofar as it serves for a safe place to cross, while to the driver it signifies a kind of necessary alert and caution required of them⁴². To give a bit more specificity about aletheia, there are three ways in which disclosedness may be made possible within the world – each enables the process of discovery.

2.2 THREE MODES OF DISCLOSURE

Disclosedness, for Heidegger, is phenomenological truth. He attempts to define disclosedness as something akin to a clearing in which being may appear; all Dasein’s contain within them the possibility for this disclosedness⁴³. There are three modes of disclosure or disclosedness that will be examined and of which psilocybin affects. The first is attunement, the second is understanding-interpretation, and the third is the relationship between language and discourse. In general, disclosure shows us how Dasein the world is shown to us in a particular way, as a context. It is this context that constitutes the different ways that we engage in different acts of discovery.

The first constitutive condition for disclosedness is *attunement*. Before giving an account of this, it should be considered why relational and discursive understanding is alone not

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 129.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 77.

⁴³ Ibid., 129

sufficient for disclosedness; a hammer finds its meaning within its relation to the ontology of the workshop, within its “serviceability” towards something else⁴⁴. Most things garner their meaning from a referential totality; the relationship between objects serves partly as a constituent for their meaning – how they disclose themselves to us as being relevant or meaningful in a particular way, but this is only part of the story; the other half is presented to us by *attunement*: the factor responsible for directing us towards one kind of ontological disclosedness, while *mood* serves to guide us towards one mode of attunement or another⁴⁵.

What attunement prepares us for, or rather what it means for us, is that it enables phenomenological truth to be directed in a specific way; a way that is always already directed toward us as something that is relevant to us⁴⁶. Seldom do we encounter something that we truly do not understand, if we do not understand it, then we understand it in a way that is still a type of understanding, for instance, when we hear a foreign language, it is composed of sounds that are incomprehensible to us, but we still understand it as a foreign language⁴⁷. The reason why these sounds are not totally alien is that they still fall into the context of our understanding that circumscribes the limitations of what can and cannot be disclosed.

Blattner gives an example of an excellent example of this: imagine that within the span of a single second, you see a man out of the corner of your eye, but the next second he is gone; we all know that there never was a man there to begin with, most people do not suspect that he teleported elsewhere because something like teleportation is not included in our everyday understanding of the possibilities regarding physical beings⁴⁸. What this means is that our

⁴⁴ Ibid., 82.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 134.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 133.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 157-159.

⁴⁸ Blattner, William. *Heidegger's Being and Time*. New York, Continuum International Publishing Press, 2006, 17.

understanding already presupposes a set of ontological expectations⁴⁹; our expectations about being lead us to the conclusion that something like a teleporting man is not possible, at least not within our present context. The referential totality of our context can only refer us back to where we started. Within the workshop, the hammer is only ever relevant for hammering, but in another context, as mentioned earlier, it may be relevant in some other way, such as a door stopper.

The particular points of relevance do not shift; rarely does the hammer in the workshop disclose itself as anything other than a tool for hammering; instead, if the hammer changes its relevance, it is usually because the context in which we find it happens to change.

In the next chapter, mood will be examined in relation to addiction and the totality of relevant triggers. Of course, it is only contingent, but there must be something deeper going on for the context to have a lasting impact and prevent relapse, such as providing a context regarding the harms of tobacco use and addiction. Anyone involved in the psilocybin trials already knows that tobacco causes harm, otherwise, they would not have been able to consent to the trials without a detailed explanation of the study's purpose. The involvement of each participant presupposes an understanding of the harms of tobacco – this can be regarded as the condition for their context of understanding, albeit, what requires further explanation, is why psilocybin also appears to be a catalyzing condition for long-term cessation. This is where Heidegger's discussion on mood becomes imperative.

For it to be disclosed to us, our attunement must be directed toward it, "Mood does not disclose in the mode of looking at thrownness⁵⁰, but as turning toward and away from it"⁵¹.

Returning to the example of the hammer, the relevant serviceability of that hammer is only

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ **Thrownness* defined in this paper as the context in which we can care about things. See section 2.3 "Modes of Care" for more detail.

⁵¹ Heidegger, Martin. "Being and Time." Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010, 132.

possible not simply due to the relation between hammering, nails, boards, and the art of construction, but because mood itself enables us to be attuned toward serviceability in a particular way – it is the particular kind of quality that one experiences in disclosedness that allows our understanding to be meaningful⁵². Like the deaf man who can read sheet music but cannot hear the difference between Mozart and country music, no mood is disclosed through musical syntax (except the deaf man’s own mood derived from appreciation of the syntax), ergo omitting any possibility for the deaf man to make any claims about the overall *quality* of either piece. He will say that one is trash, but only based on music theory, rather than the reasons why most non-composers would find it to be trash, chiefly, on the basis of the auditory quality of music and the kinds of moods or ambience that each composition evokes through the qualitative experience. Musical signification alone is meaningful in a different way than the musical quality that one experiences. The signification may indicate complexity, but to someone who’s never heard music, it is mostly devoid of the colloquial or individual understanding of good or bad music. Once again, there may be physical or theoretical explanations of music at the level of the object, but this object, if grasped as an object, tells us nothing about the quality of the experience at the level of the subject – why one person loathes country music while someone else relishes it. An account of the object alone is insufficient for explaining its qualitative meaning.

Conversely, without mood, attuned disclosedness would not be possible, since without mood nothing would matter since mattering itself is fundamentally predicated on mood, and without mood all referential relations would cease to matter and our attunement toward them would cease with it, “Being affected by the unserviceability, resistant, and threatening character of things at hand is ontologically possible only because being-in as such is existentially

⁵² Ibid., 133.

determined beforehand in such a way that what it encounters in the world can matter to it in this way”⁵³.

From here, there must be a departure from referential understanding alone, toward the importance of mood, without which there could be no way of being attuned to the world, and without attunement, there could be no understanding. If, for instance, one mood attunes us toward the disclosure of one mode of being in the world, while another mood turns us away from it, then it should follow that one’s ontological outlook will change depending on the mood which discloses one understanding rather than another. The next section examines how changing moods can shift the totality of relevance, thereby shifting the ontology and the way things are disclosed.

Being attuned to a certain discursive context that uses omissions, rather than what is said, messages can be conveyed by a lack thereof, in that which is left unsaid. By not saying something, one can communicate their intent. Additionally, the kind of attunement required for discourse may shift, and the meaning of language acts or their omissions, intonations, tempo, alluding, insinuating, etc, all constitute a shifting from one kind of discursive attunement to another. What is conveyed discursively within the classroom does not deploy the same kind of attunement as it would if one were engaging with a Cormac McCarthy novel. In a classroom setting, the goal, more often than not, is for information to be made as explicit and as clear as possible; the classroom mood is fundamentally sober for the purpose of learning. On the other hand, a McCarthy novel is intoxicated with vivid dreamlike intensity; the mood in his prose is used to shift the reader toward an understanding of the written words. Without conveying mood, we would be reading a McCarthy novel in a similar way to how the deaf person would be reading sheet music – our understanding would be deficient in some capacity.

⁵³ Ibid.

Heidegger does not spend too much time developing this notion in BT, but in his other works, he attempts to develop a deeper understanding of the role of poetry and their relationship to disclosedness, particularly in his *Poetry, Language, Thought*⁵⁴ (PLT Henceforth). Regarding truth as disclosedness, Heidegger extends this notion to poetry, not merely how truth through poetic thought is disclosed, but that the disclosedness of anything at all is fundamentally poetic “Truth, as the clearing and concealing of what is, happens in being composed, as a poet composes a poem”⁵⁵. Even though not all language is poetic since much of the function of language is to describe beings as they are within any given clearing, Heidegger asserts that language itself has the capacity to create such a clearing in which beings may disclose themselves, namely, through poetic thought⁵⁶.

The difference between the everyday use of language and the poetic function of language is that the everyday use usually only serves to navigate within particular ontologies, while the poetic function of language is to open us up to the possibility of different ontologies. Considering his work on mood and attunement, it is worth investigating its relationship to poetic thought as a vehicle for shifting one’s ontological vantage point.

To give a demonstration of how poetry may shift the mood, it’s worth looking at fragments of poetic language. Consider the following excerpt from Cormac McCarthy’s *Suttree*, “What deity in the realms of dementia, what rabid god decocted out of the smoking lobes of hydrophobia could have devised a keeping place so poor as this flesh. This mawky worm-bent tabernacle”⁵⁷.

⁵⁴ Heidegger, Martin. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York, Harper Perennial, 2001.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁵⁷ McCarthy, Cormac. *Suttree*. Random House Vintage International, 1992, 152.

McCarthy is conveying the suggestion that if there is a god, then whatever god created human beings must be somewhat incompetent, but the words he uses to describe what he means are quite unusual in everyday discourse. To describe a god as being “rabid” at first denotes a connotation of extreme belief, which could describe a particular religious attitude appropriate for articulating a kind of piety, but on the other hand “rabid” conjures up some entity that is foaming at the mouth. The dual meaning of the word “rabid” in this excerpt serves to place any creator of humanity within the atmosphere of incompetent and insane, but rather than coming out and saying that any god responsible for the creation of human flesh is incompetent and insane he suggests that it is within the “realms of dementia”. Moreover, instead of saying something like: *the human body is pretty fragile and poorly designed*, he calls it a “mawky worm-bent tabernacle”.

“Worm-bent” conjures up thoughts of decay, possibly the image of a rotting corpse, while “tabernacle” raises thoughts of something holy or churchlike; together the atmosphere he generates conveys a hopeless world in which all faith relies upon an incompetent maker – apparently one with rabies no less.

From this atmosphere, other things can be disclosed that could not be if the mood were otherwise, the meaning of the novel, the contents and events that unfold in it – the overall story is disclosed within a world devoid of hope in which a man of privilege leaves everything behind to live on the Tennessee River, but if it were disclosed through the atmosphere of everyday descriptors rather than the aforementioned dark poetic prose, then it would merely be a series of events with, for the most part, our own context/atmosphere for interpretation that we brought to the novel. By producing a certain mood in which the events unfold, McCarthy can disclose to us

those events in one particular way rather than another or it allows us to draw out the meaning and push it in a new direction.

In another mood, the same meaning could be taken to mean something quite different depending on the way it was written, it could also be read as meaning nothing more than a worm-bent tabernacle/ rotting church if we were to take it purely at face value, but the mood serves to disclose it to us as a reference to a god's incompetent efforts in creating human beings. If poetry shifts mood; shifting moods also shift the totality of relevance; the totality of relevance shifts how things are disclosed to us; then poetry shifts how things are disclosed to us by changing the mood and atmosphere in which we understand them.

There is of course much more to Heidegger's work on poetry than merely how it affects mood, but for the purposes of this paper that is all that is necessary to solidify the groundwork for the following section; however, before proceeding, it is well worth considering how moods may shift in other domains other than poetry.

Before we can make sense of *understanding-interpretation*, a brief comment must be made about how Heidegger structures the world through a referential totality, this is how beings are discovered⁵⁸ since "intelligibility is also always already articulated before its appropriative interpretation"⁵⁹ – only then can interpretation-understanding be made possible. What Heidegger means by *referential totality*, is a series of points of relevance that can be found in any given context in which one is always in the objective presence⁶⁰.

Within the referential totality, things may show themselves as being relevant in one particular way or another. The relevance of one thing is usually relevant because of its relation to other things that are all bound within a particular context. The referential totality provides beings

⁵⁸ Ibid., 82.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 155.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

with their meaning by referring to other things to explain how they are relevant. Back to Heidegger's workshop in which we find the hammer and its handiness, it refers itself as being relevant to the "toward-what of serviceability; for example, the thing at hand which we call a hammer has to do with hammering, the hammering has to do with fastening something, fastening something has to do with protection against bad weather"⁶¹. The relevance of something garners its relevance from the referential chain of any particular context, but removing one link in the chain may still retain its relevance. For instance, if we removed the hammer, the relevance of the nail would still find its meaning in some other tool (a golf club) or its function towards fastening boards, conversely, we could use a hammer for something other than hammering; you could use it to prop open a door, in which case it finds itself in a different relational context, it is effectively placed in a different ontology, (the ontology of the office, or the mode of being towards doors, etc). This is one way that we can change the totality of relevance, by changing the constitution of the referential totality we change what we understand to be relevant; however, for the purposes of this investigation, it is necessary to examine other ways that ontologies can lose or gain their relevance outside of that which is purely based on a referential chain or circle. Understanding, as the relationality between reference points, is only one condition that grants meaning, the other condition necessary for relevance at all pertains to the role of mood and attunement in disclosedness.

Additionally, there is the *totality of significance* which is distinct from the totality of relevance and the referential totality; it is imperative for characterizing the change between familiarity and relevance toward the foreign mystical experience. The totality of significance is the relation between referential points that "constitutes the structure of the world"⁶². This

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 85.

significance, in a sense, determines what matters, and what matters is that which is “mine”⁶³. This element of “mineness” should not be thought of as legal ownership, but instead should be conceived as a basic sense of familiarity that structures our experience of the world. One can conceive it as the appropriation of experiencing aspects of the world as our “own”⁶⁴. When we lose this sense of everyday familiarity, the world signifies a kind of alienness or difference in which we are moving from one kind of disclosure to another.

Now that there is a bit more information regarding the structuring of the world we can return to the concept of understanding-interpretation. Heidegger claims that “Interpretation is not the acknowledgement of what has been understood, but rather the development of possibilities projected in understanding”⁶⁵; while the referential totality acts as the background for understanding-interpretation – he calls this aspect of it *fore-having* which is the first part of the *fore-structure*⁶⁶. Fore-having is not so much interpretation inasmuch as it is something that is always already given; *fore-sight*, on the other hand, occurs when something appears conspicuous, it is precisely here that understanding-interpretation begins⁶⁷. Fore-sight takes what is objectively present or ready at hand and subjects it to a deeper level of consideration, for instance, when the tool in the workshop breaks, we now consider what it actually is: a hammer and not merely something that is disclosed as something ready-at-hand within the pre-conceptual totality of relevant things⁶⁸.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Blattner, William. *Heidegger's Being and Time*. New York, Continuum International Publishing Press, 2006, 42-24.

⁶⁵ Heidegger, Martin. "Being and Time." Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010., 144.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 145-147.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 145-146.

Fore-sight becomes intelligible within the process of interpretation, “The interpretation can draw the conceptuality belonging to the being to be interpreted from these themselves, or else the interpretation can force those beings into concepts to which they are opposed in accordance with their kind of being”⁶⁹; when we bring the interpretative process into a definitive idea it is called the *fore-conception*⁷⁰. For example, imagine that you try to conceptualize what a hammer is, one can point to what it is understood as “something as something”⁷¹, it is not quite like an axe or a mallet, but it is within the fore-having that it is given to us within the context of the workshop; then the fore-conception enables us to recognize it as a hammer in advance⁷². These three facets constitute understanding-interpretation, and in the third chapter it will be used to characterize the way the mystical experience bears on ourselves in regards to it, in particular, how, when the mood radically shifts, our fore-sight is aimed in a different direction thereby causing us to radically accept new ways of being in the world. Once we determine the significance of something through interpretation, we can begin to work out existential possibilities which constitute understanding.

The third mode of disclosure necessary for unpacking the mystical experience is discourse-language; Rather than simply destroying an ontology, Heidegger offers a few methods by which one understanding of being can shift to another, namely, that of art, poetry and music. In BT, he already intimates this during his explication of discourse, “Being-in and its attunement are made known in discourse and indicated in language by intonation, modulation, in the tempo of talk, ‘in the way of speaking’”⁷³.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 145.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 157.

As touched upon earlier, acts of language are arranged by their particular atmosphere by means of “What is said as such, communication, and making known”⁷⁴. By changing the kind of atmosphere that a message is conveyed with, we can change what it is that we are more or less attuned to; moreover, discourse, not merely language, “Is the structuring of attuned intelligibility of being-in-the-world”⁷⁵. When the atmosphere of a particular language act is changed, we change what it is that we are attuned to, therefore altering what is ultimately disclosed to us. Moreover, this is an example of a phenomenon that cannot be reduced exclusively to an empirical explanation due to the fact that it enables language and presupposes it in the act of empiricism, when it is only ever being attuned to one particular avenue of thought rather than another, “These are not properties which can be just empirically snatched from language, but are existential characteristics rooted in the constitution of being of Dasein which first make something like language ontologically possible”⁷⁶. If discourse articulates the intelligibility of the world, then it does so only because it is already bound up in a totality of significations; every discursive utterance (which could be linguistic or symbolic) is an act of signification within the totality, without which there could be no interpretation at all⁷⁷. Discourse enables intelligibility to be articulated in the first place since it is attuned to and employs a totality of significations: in this capacity, discourse depends on a particular kind of attunement to those significations, “the attuned intelligibility of being-in-the-world *expresses itself as discourse*”⁷⁸. Discourse makes interpretation of the world possible and yet it depends upon attunement for the direction of its intelligibility.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 155-156.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 156

2.3 MODES OF CARE

The previous section discussed how things may acquire their meaning by means of their relevance within any given referential totality. The purpose of this section is to provide a bit more background information on his modes of care so that we can understand how the shifting totality of relevance impacts Dasein during and after a mystical experience.

In BT, he gives an account of how Dasein finds itself concerned with certain elements of its world, and there are three aspects that he considers as constituting how a Dasein may find itself in a mode of care. Firstly, it should be clarified that what he means by *care* is much broader than its everyday use; *care*, for Heidegger, is approximately something that is of interest that may be acted upon⁷⁹. Even when we care about nothing, in states of absolute despair, we still care about that despair, otherwise there would not be any despair, it would instead be a state of indifference, “The expression has nothing to do with ‘distress,’ ‘melancholy’ or ‘the cares of life’ which can be found ontically in every Dasein. These—like their opposites, ‘carefreeness’ and ‘gaiety’ —are ontically possible only because Dasein, *ontologically* understood, is care”⁸⁰. Moreover, many people advocate for the importance of set and setting for the use of these substances because of how the set or setting may contribute to the particular quality of the experience. Care, as interest (or disinterest), is a fundamental characteristic of what it means to be a Dasein. It is fundamentally tied to his concept of significance since things appear to us as being significant; ultimately, interest and disinterest are subsumed under the concept of significance.

It should be noted here that there are exceptions, in particular, his concept of anxiety, which today is much closer to the definition of depression rather than the contemporary

⁷⁹ Ibid., 57.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

understanding of anxiety⁸¹. One of the structures that determine what it is that a Dasein cares about in the world is its facticity, or its *thrownness*, roughly understood as the world that we find ourselves in, it could possibly be a particular culture, time, place, etc; the facticity determines the range of possible things that we *can* care about, we are thrown into one corner of the world and what we can possibly care about is determined by where or when we're thrown⁸².

To provide a bit more detail about thrownness or “facticity”, one only has to imagine what it is that they “care” about in the world, perhaps determining what career to choose, or participating in a political revolution, or deciding what one’s favourite restaurant is – all of these constitute the facticity in which we find ourselves in. If we lived five hundred years ago, the idea of the career would likely seem nonsensical – the odds are that one would probably care about something very different; labouring in a 16th-century field one likely does not have the opportunity to care about restaurants, careers or literacy – likely what a 16th-century peasant is going to care about is whether the crops are going to grow this year or whether your family will starve. Care or the set of things that matter to us can be broken down further into care for specific things/beings, care for others, and care for oneself. Caring for oneself, apropos BT is important for understanding psilocybin since it changes the way we care about ourselves; for Heidegger, care of oneself is being concerned with our lives and our being⁸³. It is closely connected to care for others; care for others cannot be untangled from the care of oneself since the role of others is partly constitutive of care for oneself⁸⁴. The roles of others and their relevance in one’s own life is open-ended; for instance, a teacher may care whether their students

⁸¹ Blattner, William. *Heidegger's Being and Time*. New York, Continuum International Publishing Press, 2006, 13.

⁸² Heidegger, Martin. "Being and Time." Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010, 56-57.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 186-187.

⁸⁴ Blattner, William. *Heidegger's Being and Time*. New York, Continuum International Publishing Press, 2006, 38-39.

are learning and at the same time that teacher may also be a parent and care about whether their children think they are doing a good job parenting – in both instances, we care about who we are toward others and we are concerned about who others are toward us⁸⁵. Care for other beings that are not Daseins is still a form of care – these things are not disclosed as irrelevant to us, but we are concerned with them in such and such a way – this aspect of care is fundamentally the opposite of indifference toward the world⁸⁶.

In the case of existentiality, we care about how we are inclined toward the world and the choices we make. Existentiality pertains to the aspect of Dasein's own experience; the experience of something as being one's own and of which it has possibilities to choose from⁸⁷. William

Blattner provides a more practical definition, "Dasein's existentiality is the 'fact' that it always understands itself one way or another. We are always answering the question of identity by being (or living) some possibility of human life"⁸⁸. That which is ontological becomes existential the moment Dasein considers its relationship to being as something that it is a part of – it can make choices about the kind of being that it may become. This question of answering how we decide to live brings us to the third component of the care structure, *fallenness*.

Fallenness refers to that which we do on an everyday basis or that which we feel that we must do, pressures from a force without a name, one in which we find ourselves falling into tasks without much thought – often confining us to the present moment without regard for ontological questions; one falls into day to day tasks that consume most of our lives, one stands around looking for something to do because there is often an obligation or a feeling that one must do

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 44.

⁸⁷ Heidegger, Martin. "Being and Time." Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010, 42.

⁸⁸ Blattner, William. *Heidegger's Being and Time*. New York, Continuum International Publishing Press, 2006, 38.

something: chores, news, talking to the neighbours about nothing, filling the time – although Heidegger does name it, the name he attributes to it, is the *they-self*⁸⁹. The purpose of elucidating this is to merely provide a bit of background information for how the relationship between the individual and the world is restructured during the mystical experience.

2.4 SHIFTING THE TOTALITY OF RELEVANCE: ANXIETY

In BT, Heidegger claims that reflecting on one's death as one's own, may temporarily liberate Dasein from the-they/they-self and enable one to make a decision about one's life that is one's own, this phenomenon, otherwise known as *anticipatory resoluteness*, is often preceded by a certain kind of anxiety⁹⁰.

This anxiety, according to Heidegger, causes everything to fall into *the nothing*, "Anxiety robs us of speech. Because beings as a whole slip away, so that just the nothing crowds round, in the face of anxiety all utterance of the "is" falls silent"⁹¹. Heidegger's conception of anxiety, as mentioned before by Blattner, is much more akin to something like clinical depression rather than contemporary notions of anxiety; nevertheless, most would also agree that the experience of contemporary anxiety robs us of our speech.

The role that anxiety plays in the anticipation of one's own death is that everything that is disclosed to Dasein suddenly loses its relevance; in the absence of relevance and interest in the world, the they-self slips away with everything else. Again, this could pertain to the Blattner interpretation of anxiety being more like clinical depression, or it could also be anxiety in the sense of impending doom – a sense of terror that removes the relevance of the everydayness, in which one confronts the fact that death is absolutely certain. In this deeper understanding of what

⁸⁹ Heidegger, Martin. "Being and Time." Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010, 175-180.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 153-154.

⁹¹ Heidegger, Martin. "What is Metaphysics?." Stephen Hicks. Last modified, 1929, 4-6.

it means to digest the fact that one is going to die, it is not something that anyone can take away, it is something that is entirely one's own and from this one can make a decision that is one's own due to its temporary liberation from the they-self. One can digest this on a superficial level in purely linguistic terms, but upon glimpsing what it really means to die, consider the fact that there will come a day when *everything* comes clanking to a stop. According to Heidegger, this generates a moment of liberation. He claims that there is a call of the conscience from a place of uncanniness; a place that is alien to us in our everyday mode of being immersed in the they-self⁹². In the moment of liberation "Anticipation [of our own death] discloses to existence that its extreme possibility lies in giving itself up, and thus it shatters all one's clinging to whatever existence one has reached"⁹³. This is a primary building block for this argument: that moods can change how the world is disclosed to us. In the anticipation of our own death, everything inauthentic falls away and it is precisely in that moment that we have a chance to make our own decision as something that is "mine" or that "matters" to oneself, rather than for the sake of the-they. In these moments we become attuned to what actually matters to us because there is an act of recognition of the things that do not matter to us. Our understanding of the world becomes disclosed as something more or less relevant.

One particular area worth considering is the role music plays in movies. Think about what it means to play a certain song during a certain scene rather than some other scene. Imagine watching a scene in which two people are getting married, but the director's music choice was something dark, sad or menacing. As a viewer, most would expect something terrible to follow,

⁹² Heidegger, Martin. "Being and Time." Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010, 292-293.

⁹³ Heidegger, Martin. "Being and Time." Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010, 253.

but if the music choice was something elating, joyful or calming, then a sinister event would be the last thing most would expect.

This is because music, sets the mood, and since the mood attunes us toward one particular kind of disclosure rather than another. Music, therefore, lays out the expectations of what can possibly be disclosed, like the man in the yard who is not really there, when the music is dark (thus setting the mood as dark) this circumscribes our expectations for what may possibly happen (nothing good; only the opposite). Finally, this raises the question of what *other kinds* of experiences can alter what is disclosed, in particular, the mystical experience.

3. PHENOMENOLOGY OF PSYCHEDELICS AND PSILOCYBIN EFFICACY

This chapter argues that, by shifting the mood through certain experiences, we can change our ontological vantage points; shifting ontologies will shift how we perceive and interpret the world around us, it follows that psychedelics, such as psilocybin, can induce the kinds of experience that are necessary to shift our attuned understanding of the world and its disclosure to us. Beginning by looking at how profound the short-term effects are and how this is effectively the same thing as radically shifting the totality of relevance through intense mood, it considers how varying grades of “ego-dissolution” may provide a kind of anticipatory resoluteness in which one is able to sample death. This experience may reconstitute the individual’s relationship with the world and with oneself as being-in-the-world.

I argue that this experience may induce a dissolution of Heideggerian *inauthenticity* in which one falls prey to the they-self or the mode of everydayness. Such inauthenticity is part of Dasein’s constitution, but it may alienate and become pathological if the individual does not see one’s choices as one’s own; instead, Dasein may get caught up in some aspect of fallenness of the-they without ever having a voice of one’s own or a say in one’s life⁹⁴. Psilocybin may not be able to directly provoke Dasein to decide what is authentic or inauthentic, yet it may be able to incite this indirectly by means of making the everydayness irrelevant through the profundity of the mystical experience. After arguing that this experience induces the kind of attuned understanding required for anticipatory resoluteness, I conclude that this is possibly why psilocybin is effective at treating tobacco addiction and negative emotions surrounding death.

Before diving into some of the phenomenological aspects of psilocybin, a bit more on the mystical experience needs clarification, starting with the study that recorded self-ratings of

⁹⁴ Heidegger, Martin. "Being and Time." Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010, 293-295.

profoundness and long-term increases in trait openness. As mentioned in the first chapter, at the two month follow up, 67% of participants rated it one of their top five most profound experiences of all time. Moreover, as cited in the first chapter, the study that measured differences in personality traits recorded a significant increase in trait openness which was sustained at the one-year follow-up.

What these two studies reveal, along with the study that treated tobacco addiction with the use of psilocybin, is that it is not merely a neurometabolic phenomenon, but a phenomenon that requires a particular kind of experience for the long-term effects to be sustained. If it were merely neurometabolic, then *all* of the participants would reap the benefits. As mentioned earlier, there is a possible counterargument to be made here.

One might claim that it was only those who believed in the power of a mystical experience who reaped the benefits, although according to the Hopkins group, they anticipated the possibility of an expectancy effect⁹⁵. To counter such an effect, they performed 2-3 double-blind sessions for each participant, some of which were placebos, while others contained active psilocybin at varying doses. Although this only eliminated internal bias, such as the participants' and monitors' knowledge of placebo versus active psilocybin doses. This indeed does not exclude the possibility that it was only those who believed in the benefits of the experience before participation who garnered the long-term effects, but it is pertinent to note that all of the participants prior to participation were documented to have held some spiritual or religious belief; possibly by virtue of the advertised experiment “Study of states of consciousness brought about by a naturally occurring psychoactive substance used sacramentally in some

⁹⁵ MacLean, K. A., Johnson, M. W., & Griffiths, R. R. “Mystical experiences occasioned by the hallucinogen psilocybin lead to increases in the personality domain of openness.” *Journal of psychopharmacology (Oxford, England)*, 25, no. 12 (2011): 1454.

cultures” which is what possibly attracted religious or spiritually inclined individuals⁹⁶. Even if each participant already believed in the spirituality or religion, this at least corrects for bias since all participants would have shared the necessary bias of expecting a particular kind of experience, yet this would imply that some of those participants who believed in it did not necessarily experience it. Moreover, the increase in trait openness was not documented until this particular study so there could not have been (or at least minimally known or hypothesized) much public speculation about the effects. At the very least, there are effects of psilocybin that are not merely the results of placebo-induced expectancy. Therefore, even if there is a degree of an expectancy effect with the Tobacco and Terminal illness studies, there is good evidence to suggest that psilocybin is significantly more beneficial than any placebo.

The necessity of the mystical experience in catalyzing the treatment of tobacco addiction is something that requires an investigation of empirical science which, at the present moment, cannot answer. This brings us to the reason why phenomenology is perfectly suited to exploring this brave new realm; phenomenology is rooted in the exploration of the structure of the experience rather than the investigation of a particular object within that experience. By studying the close link between how things are disclosed to us and how this disclosedness may shift, there is an answer within phenomenology which explains why the mystical experience produces the aforementioned long-term effects without referring to neurophysiology, which, as disclaimed in chapter two, cannot always offer a fruitful explanation of that which is qualitative. In the thought experiment “Mary’s Room”, Frank Jackson seems to make the claim that physicalism is false; Mary (a hypothetical neuroscientist), knows everything there is to know about the physical mechanisms behind colour, yet there’s a caveat⁹⁷. Mary, has lived in a monochrome room her

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Jackson, Frank. “Epiphenomenal Qualia.” *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 127, 1982, 127–132.

entire life, she has never actually seen colour, but one day a red apple appears in her room and for the first time she sees the colour red. Jackson asks the question: does she learn anything new?⁹⁸. If she does, then physicalism and the notion that science *can* know everything rapidly falls apart.

Similarly, in Nagel's 1974 article "What Is It Like To Be A Bat?", he argues that we can know the physical mechanisms behind the bat's experience, we can know how the brain of a bat operates differently from our own – how it produces the experience of echolocation, but studying its neurophysiology will never reveal what it's like to *experience* echolocation⁹⁹. Both of these issues point toward a deficiency between scientific understanding as physical reductionism and qualitative experience – that qualitative experience sits beyond any physicalist account of understanding. This is precisely the issue that researchers face when encountering the mystical experience since both it and its relationship to its long-term effects cannot be explained away through reductionist thought. Indeed, it can be explained by a neurophysiological mechanism, but the mechanism (or series of mechanisms) are just that: mechanisms. They offer no account as to why the experience itself is necessary, even though it is neurometabolic and affects the physiological in some way or another – the observer perspective of the researcher is phenomenologically limited since it is not the first-person perspective. The observer standpoint of the researcher is similar to the deaf man studying music theory, or neurophysiologists studying the brain of a bat – if there is an assumed standpoint of objectivity, it is merely a bias in favour of scientific reductionism while ignoring the actual qualitative evidence which would imply that a

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Nagel, Thomas. "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (1974): 435–50.

multiplicity of experience beyond the scope of science is necessary for understanding, and not simply scientific methodologies alone.

The physicalist accounts tell us nothing about why it is necessary to experience oceanic boundlessness, varying degrees of DIED, extreme feelings of love, peace or connectedness; it could explain the physiological mechanisms of what is happening when we do have a mystical experience and how our brains are altered afterwards, but it doesn't tell us why this experience always accompanies the long-term changes. A possible objection might be that this physiological mechanism just so happens to create these short-term side-effects and that sometimes one particular neurometabolic reaction occurs that leads to long-term changes and sometimes it doesn't, but this doesn't really explain why the mystical experience always correlates with the long-term effects, nor does it explain the relationship between the qualitative sense of self and the things that we feel attached to – these are things that constitute us at an existential level, the world in relation to the individual transforms us into something that is not merely a neurological mechanism, but a mechanism that is tangled up in something that goes beyond the mechanism of action: experience or attuned understanding.

By claiming that it is just an incidental side-effect would be making the same mistake as the characters in H.G. Wells' *The Country of the Blind*, in which there is only one person who is not blind in a community of blind people, the sighted person tries to convince the blind people that he has an extra perception that allows him to win fights and not trip into ditches¹⁰⁰. The people of the community all claim that he's just good at not stumbling into ditches and highly skilled at winning fighting, rather than possessing some extra sense called sight¹⁰¹.

¹⁰⁰ Jackson, Frank. "Epiphenomenal Qualia." *The Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 127, 1982, 129.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Frank Jackson uses this to buttress his argument for the case of qualia. He gives an example of a man named Fred who can distinguish between two different shades of red that no one else can see: Red₁ and Red₂, both colours are exclusively available only to his perception and no one else's; when asked to arrange tomatoes into the two separate colours he can do it perfectly each time, but no one else can¹⁰². According to Jackson, we can study everything there is to know about Fred's personal history and physiology, but our physicalist account of Fred would still limit our understanding of the two different shades of red¹⁰³. Here it should be noted that I do not wish to make a case for qualia, rather its use is only to be considered somewhat analogically.

Things like colour, music, and other sensory phenomena, all have neurological mechanisms, but we don't use the mechanisms to understand how to compose a good song. Indeed, one could say that we don't have a full understanding of the mechanisms of action, to ignore that claim would be somewhat fallacious. It would appear true that all the neuroscientists would have to do would be to understand every pathway in the brain and give it a label, but what a good song is does not depend entirely on neurochemistry.

Indeed, one could possibly manipulate the pathways of neurotransmitters to produce the sensation of good music when bad music is played, but under normal circumstances, we rely on the long-standing tradition of music to give it meaning, the words sung are often related to some aspect of our lives – country music is often about how someone's wife left them or how their dog ran away, etc. Studying the neural pathways involved would not say anything about the lyrical expressions of country music. A deaf person could study the brains of those listening to it, but until neuroscience finds a way to synthetically create the experience for the deaf person, they

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

will share a similar standpoint that everyone shares toward the understanding of what it means to be a bat.

Similarly, we shouldn't rely entirely on neuro-mechanisms to dismiss the mystical experience as a mere side-effect or by-product since A.) it doesn't explain why mystical experience always accompanies the long-term effects, rather than some other experience, and B.) because taking a purely reductionist method would be dismissing other treatment domains like psychotherapy, which, although somewhat reducible to the brain, requires seeking out repressed emotions, traumatic experiences, and childhood memories concealed by the mind. Granted, all experience is reducible to the brain, but that reduction does not explain why the quality of an experience is one incredibly profound quality and not some other more mundane quality or no quality at all.

Neuroscience does not provide a qualitative understanding of the difference in emotions or the roles they play in our lives within different ontological contexts. There is no neurophysiological explanation for why we need to release bottled-up emotions – there can only be molecular or physiological descriptions of it, but the most fruitful explanations of why we cry during grief do not come from neuroscience, but from studying how the human mind deals with emotions on an experiential level (rather than the brain). Studying the brain will give us access to the underlying mechanisms, but when it comes to treating something like childhood trauma, we treat the individual through means of psychotherapy¹⁰⁴.

This is likely because studying the brain (at least within the current technological paradigm of neuroscience) is not going to give us access to understanding the meaning of an event in our lives. Only by inquiring into the life of an individual, the relevance of specific life events, and how things present themselves to the subject, can we then begin to develop a context

¹⁰⁴ Lindberg, Sara. "How Therapy for Childhood Trauma Can Help." *Healthline*, 2021.

for understanding that person and what sorts of therapy might work best, but again it is quite often at the level of subjective experience. We should treat psilocybin and other psychedelics similarly, rather than separating the mystical experience as a mere side-effect within the ontology of neuroscientific dogma which is insufficient for explaining why it's rated as one of the most profound/ personally meaningful experiences. Since experience pertains more to phenomenology than it does to neuroscience, that itself is ample justification for studying the effects of psilocybin from a phenomenological basis.

The mystical experience creates profound emotions, perceptions, and a specific kind of subjective reaction, all of which confer a special kind of salience to the events in one's life, possibly why it has such transformative potential – this seems to be the consensus at Hopkins. We should treat this experience not through the purely reductive analysis of brain states, but instead by examining what is actually going on at the level of the subjective, beginning with a phenomenological account of the treatment of tobacco addiction by means of the mystical experience and the structure of that particular experience, as well as the meaning of how things are disclosed with that particular experiential structure. Compared to the reductive standpoint, this can be considered “emergent” in the sense that it seeks a subjective explanation in contrast to the reductive standpoint which is currently harbouring empirical deficiencies.

3.1 PHENOMENOLOGY OF ADDICTION AND THE MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

The profoundness with which participants rate the mystical experience should not be overlooked; its documented status as one of the top five most profound experiences deserves a bit more examination as to *why* it's so profound. Researchers measured the mystical experience based on “Unity; transcendence of time and space; ineffability and paradoxicality; sacredness; noetic quality; and positive mood”¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰⁵ MacLean, K. A., Johnson, M. W., & Griffiths, R. R. “Mystical experiences

It would be futile to attempt to describe something that is *ineffable*; the task here is to merely provide a rough sketch of what makes the experience profound. The mystical experience is “defined as having a score of 60% or higher on each subscale”¹⁰⁶, but whether we can know what the aforementioned criteria mean or not, we do, however, know that it is rated as an extremely profound experience. The impact of something profound is, more often than not, considered on the basis of some deeply felt quality.

In our everyday lives, such quality is flattened out of existence by a kind of everyday averageness, “The often persistent, smooth, and pallid lack of a mood, which must not be confused with a bad mood, is far from being nothing. Rather in this Dasein becomes tired of itself”¹⁰⁷. Most of the time we do not experience the kinds of moods which the Hopkins researchers have documented; our range of emotions and attuned understanding are greatly limited to a particular kind of everydayness. In his *Doors of Perception*, Aldous Huxley claims that the immense range of all possible quality which the mind has the capacity to produce is reduced to a narrow band of experience, “To make biological survival possible, mind at Large has to be funnelled through the reducing valve of the brain and nervous system”¹⁰⁸. This is further substantiated with the concept of a “Default Mode Network” – a hypothesized neural network which mitigates and filters certain kinds of stimuli that are apprehended and organized in the mind; researchers have suggested that under certain circumstances this network may be disrupted to allow in more stimuli¹⁰⁹.

occasioned by the hallucinogen psilocybin lead to increases in the personality domain of openness.” *Journal of psychopharmacology (Oxford, England)*, 25, no. 12 (2011): 1453–1461.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Heidegger, Martin. "Being and Time." Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010, 131.

¹⁰⁸ Huxley, Aldous. *Doors of Perception*. 1954. Pp. 6.

¹⁰⁹ Gattuso, James J et al. “Default Mode Network Modulation by Psychedelics: A Systematic Review.” *The international journal of neuropsychopharmacology*, 2022, 3.

Compared to the mystical experience, our minds are flattened or reduced into an everyday mood that we are accustomed to feeling, including the basic everyday emotions that we're all familiar with (at least within the western facticity): happiness, sadness, love, anger, etc. Seldom do we ever experience something like "oceanic boundlessness", the loss of sense of self and the anxiety that it brings, the connectedness/ coterminosity with everything that is often correlated with the loss of sense of self – similarly described in Jacques Lacan's *Formative Function of the I*¹¹⁰. Lacan describes a state prior to the mirror phase in which the infant has not yet encountered itself in the world, and it is in a state of complete unity with the world: best described as the world as a subject rather than the post-mirror phase which describes a subject in the world¹¹¹. Not to digress into psychoanalysis, although if Lacan's theory is somewhat correct, then we usually only experience this unity with the world as infants.

The return to such an experience may itself be what constitutes the profoundness combined with the dissolution of the ego which, without attaching too much psychoanalytic baggage to the term, tends to be associated with attachment. If Dasein's tendency toward attachment understood fundamentally as a mood, disposes of it in the direction of one mood rather than another mood, then the particular ontology associated with that mood becomes dominant, e.g., someone who is a workaholic and lives for the rush of completing tasks or achievement – such a person knows no other way of being in the world and they become lost in the ontology of the workplace.

The mystical experience appears to assimilate different moods into the contexts of our lives rather than new content. Since moods have the capacity to shift meaning by shifting relevance, and profound experiences generally tend to shake up our moods, it stands to follow

¹¹⁰ Lacan, Jacques. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function." International Congress of Psychoanalysis, 17 July 1949, 1-5.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

that the profound impact of the mystical experience, whether it be the extremely positive emotions, feeling like one is tossed beyond space and time, the loss of sense of self, or the conviction in something sacred, any of which could certainly shift the totality of relevance, especially if something much milder like poetry or music has a similar capacity.

It stands to reason that an experience far beyond the limited range of everyday emotions could result in a shift in the significance of certain aspects of one's life.

3.2 SHIFTING RELEVANCE IN TOBACCO ADDICTION

The mood of addiction is one that is not easily understood. It would be extremely difficult to examine every single detail of it and that is not the purpose of this paper. Instead, what is important to consider, is one particular phenomenological feature of addiction, namely, “triggers”.

A trigger is a stimulus that elicits a particular kind of response within the individual, often leading the user back toward relapse¹¹². A stimulus for a recovering alcoholic might be the sound of two bottles clinking together or the sight of an old drinking buddy; the recovering tobacco addict might relish the smell of cigarettes as they step outside or see the flick of a lighter. These are all referential markers that indicate a particular kind of relevance. The sight of a lighter may be a signifier to the ontology of smoking – it shows the user a particular kind of relevance (that it can be used to light cigarettes), likewise, the smell of cigarettes signifies to the user the entire ontology of smoking, but for non-users it often smells unpleasant or neutral.

Ultimately, the signs and referential cues do not contain the same kind of relevance for non-users as they do for users. What follows from this, is that if triggers constitute part of the referential totality of addiction and the mystical experience has the capacity to shift the totality of

¹¹² Asensio, Samuel et al. “What Is the "Trigger" of Addiction?.” *Frontiers in behavioral neuroscience* vol. 14 54. 21 Apr. 2020.

relevance within that referential totality, then by means of radially shifting the mood, it seems to follow that the mystical experience should have the capacity to shift the meaning of individual triggers. By changing the attuned understanding of the addiction, the addiction itself may become meaningless or gain a new meaning due to how any given trigger sustains itself – through the mood of addiction. Hence, by changing the mood we can see how the addictive features of an addiction are disclosed to us. The triggers may no longer appear to be meaningful in the same way they were prior to the experience. The fore-having is not altered here, rather it would seem that the fore-sight or fore-seeing aspect redirects how we consider triggers, thus they would lose their relevance if directed elsewhere or directed as something irrelevant or, in the case of cigarettes, the user may turn the fore-having knowledge of the consequences of smoking and then fore-see the consequences with a new salience after the experience, but more on that in a moment. The second facet of addiction that is worth considering in its relationship to the mystical experience and phenomenology is the role of trauma. According to the addiction specialist, Gabor Mate, addiction often stems from some kind of traumatic root¹¹³.

Considering that traumatic experiences can block out or repress our understanding-interpretation of the traumatic experience¹¹⁴ and on the basis of the previous conclusion (that the mystical experience can shift our totality of relevance), it should follow that by shifting the meaning of certain points of relevance it may disclose a different way of being in the world. It may be worthwhile for researchers to ask participants the different ways in which the world A.) became alien or foreign, and B.) how older aspects of their lives were signified to them, whether they were signified in new ways and how this new kind of signification changed

¹¹³ Maté, Gabor. *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts : Close Encounters with Addiction*. Vintage Canada, 2009.

¹¹⁴ Habermas, Jürgen. "On Hermeneutics' Claim to Universality." *The Hermeneutics Reader*, edited by Kurt M. Vollmer, The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc, 2006, 304.

throughout the experience. For instance, perhaps the meaning of a phobia or fear may shift returning one to the painful mood that was closed off or concealed due to a traumatic event.

Here something must be said for the way our discourse-language may shift us towards one mood or another. The mystical experience accelerates the process of integrating the aspects of the world (possibly a deeper level of care toward the ontology of health) into oneself. Narrowing down what participants report as changes in signification could be crucial to understanding its long-term effects. Although ordinary language and discourse are hardly present in the mystical experience, there is still a particular kind of dreamlike structure to the experience in which, as mentioned earlier, the contents may be organized in a way that is radically different from one's usual experience of the world. It is possible that the experience symbolically reveals different aspects of our lives that may be concealed from our ordinary use of discourse. In this sense, the dream-like states often associated with the mystical experience may symbolically disclose certain aspects of ourselves that correspond to a different kind of attuned understanding, thus pushing us out of a totality of significance associated with that trauma which would allow us to reinterpret our lives in a way that is temporarily liberated from the burden of the particular trauma. If it changes the fore-structure at all, it likely changes our fore-sight or the direction of our interpretation while either bringing to the surface prior traumatic experience to be integrated, or it attunes us toward a deeper understanding of what most people know – that smoking is bad and that it only temporarily relieves stress – which was always part of our fore-having, but the mystical experience may be acting at the level of fore-sight and fore-conception which would allow for a new interpretation or at least a new direction or salience for something that was already understood. Regarding interpretation, psilocybin is not a direct influence, rather it can only impact that which we find significant and the ability to change the direction of significance.

Triggers surrounding smoking may become insignificant or the consequences of smoking may be disclosed as more harmful after the experience. If contemporary psychotherapy is correct that understanding one's own trauma is somewhat necessary for the treatment of addiction, then the psilocybin-induced mystical experience can assist in overcoming addiction via shifting the totality of relevance, by changing the ontological context in which things gain or lose meaning depending on the context. One may be able to drop a previous meaning (the relevance of a particular trigger) or unconceal an older meaning and allow for an accelerated reinterpretation (hidden traumas that lead to addiction), but the reason for this, as Heidegger would likely claim, is because mood and understanding are equiprimordial with one another – they cannot be separated. Empirical attempts to understand psilocybin should not ignore the fact that, without studying the mood of the mystical experience and its capacity to attune us away from our familiar forms of disclosedness, there can be no fruitful understanding of its effects.

3.3 PSILOCYBIN AND BEING-TOWARD-DEATH

As mentioned earlier, psilocybin can often elicit the sensation of impending doom – possibly due to the loss of sense of self (as if one is dying; a kind of synthetic experience of death). This sense of doom sits right in the middle of Heideggerian phenomenology.

If we return to the notion of the anticipation of death, we get a process that is oddly similar to certain characteristics of the mystical experience. Here it is worth drawing a parallel between the sense of doom or loss of sense of self elicited in the mystical experience and Heidegger's notion of anticipating one's own death. Both the mystical experience and the anticipation of one's own death appear to end in a kind of resoluteness in which one sees matters more clearly.

In the former case, it pertained to tobacco addicts, although whether they experienced a kind of resoluteness (Heidegger seems to imply that a call from a place of uncanniness is necessary)¹¹⁵ or simply a new kind of disclosedness it is difficult to say. What is important is that the experience shows the addict a new kind of disclosedness and that this in itself generates something similar to a call from a place of uncanniness: seeing the world from a different or unusual perspective, in particular, a novel kind of relevance that may appear foreign or alien – Heidegger thinks that the uncanny call is from one’s conscience¹¹⁶. With tobacco addiction, the mystical experience seems to produce something similar; if it attunes the addict toward their conscience (in this case, possibly the ontology of good health), then they may accept what they’ve always already known on a deeper level: that they are an addict and that they need to reconcile their actions in accordance with the values of their conscience. It is precisely this deeper level of profound experience that may be the catalyst for change. Psilocybin does not actually contain any knowledge in and of itself which would substantiate a “conscience” (at least not that we know of), but similar to how Heidegger’s anxiety works, particularly by making everything irrelevant, when the world falls into a meaningless state, the call of conscience can be heard, since it is in the mood of anxiety that everything else falls away. In this capacity, psilocybin may enable the user to access what they’ve always already known.

In regard to the negative emotions that one might feel after the diagnosis of a terminal illness, a similar argument can be made; however, not before considering the reasons why negative emotions associated with terminal illness exist in the first place. Facing a terminal illness is no doubt a very negative experience for most – quite possibly one of the most negative experiences there is. Most people live their whole lives without ever seeing their expiration dates

¹¹⁵ Heidegger, Martin. "Being and Time." Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010, 292-295.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

branded to them, but what happens when we learn that the end is near? Let's take a closer look at the overall psilocybin experience to contrast it with what happens when we're faced with our own deaths.

In the case of psilocybin, the effects begin within the first hour of consumption. Subjects reported a range of perceptual distortions, but the ones that cohere with Heideggerian theory are (in addition to the ones mentioned earlier) increased anxiety, the feeling of impending doom, and the loss of sense of self. The terror and anxiety that one might face do not appear to be necessary conditions so it is not the ostensibly negative parts of the experience. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, most experiences appear to be very profound in many positive ways. It would be best understood not simply through the anticipation of one's death in which we liberate ourselves from the they-self or that which is inauthentic. For Heidegger it is the reflection on one's own death and the sense of death induced anxiety that liberates the individual from the they-self and enables the possibility to make one's choice as *one's own*, rather than making choices and decisions by having the they-self of societal and contextual norms imposed upon one's will. Here it seems that there is something similar going on.

Now if we return to the case of the terminally ill participants, it would not be uncharitable to claim that the source of their depression and anxiety is, at the very least, in part due to the recognition that the end is near. Here there is an assumption that is worth examining: the origins of the fear of death itself. There are perhaps a wide variety of reasons why we're afraid to die, but the one reason which I will offer is that it is partially due to the sense of self that keeps us trapped living in the past and that a specific kind of mood will enable us to attune our understanding toward accepting our circumstance. How the self is constituted can be the amalgamation of our own individual histories and the way we project ourselves into the future –

Heidegger alludes to this in his description of historicity (the existential aspect of Dasein as being connected to a past in which it is making futural decisions on the basis of the future, present or past). For instance, there are some people who are constantly living in the past¹¹⁷. To some degree or another everyone suffers from this, but beyond a certain threshold it may become pathological; e.g., people may not be able to move on with their lives and not be so open to the future. By not accepting the future we may be pathologically living in the past. In this regard, the sense of self can be a force of domination that may preclude one from letting go of the past and accepting their fate.

Most would agree that someone who lives each day reflecting on what happened ten or twenty years ago is not content. There seems to be a way that we assimilate these events into our minds that prevent us from accepting present or futural circumstances; many would also likely agree that people often do this because they don't want to accept the past, present, or future. One may immerse themselves in the ontology of a particular time and ignore some other time. If this were to happen, a particular time in a person's life and the memories and sentiments of that time would harbour certain signs and signals which disclose the totality of relevance of one time rather than the relevance of another, e.g., constantly looking back to the good old days rather than considering what happens tomorrow. In this regard, the sense of self can be a dominating mood (the mood of ego) that does not permit us from accepting our own-most reality. Some suggest (like Huxley) that the very existence of the sense of self exists as a survival mechanism, serving as the most convenient apparatus to ensure genetic success, but in more colloquial terms – the will to self-preservation.

¹¹⁷ Heidegger, Martin. "Being and Time." Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010, 366-371.

But if the possibility of survival were to vanish (as is the case with those who are terminally ill), then the function of the sense of self becomes nothing more than a burdensome force of domination that may manifest as anxiety and depression.

As mentioned earlier, after the experience many participants reported a significant reduction in anxiety and depression. Before going any further there may be a possible counterargument to make here, one might claim that there is a contradiction between how the experience induces anxiety and also somehow an ecstatic feeling of connection or bliss. It appears that the anxiety and negative emotions arise prior to the more positive ones, unless some event occurs which changes the direction of the experience, it is normally due to the participant's inability to let go of negative emotions that lead to this anxiety; however, upon letting go, many report feeling a sense of deep peace and acceptance¹¹⁸. What happens here may be something similar to a re-interpretation of the meaning of one's life in the grand scheme of things, or one may come to re-interpret life and death through a lens that is not pathologized by dominating modes of being or through a kind of mood or fore-sight that regards death as something negative. It may push us toward a different understanding of death that we may be ignoring for the sake of the-they or an inauthentic mode of self-preservation that we fall into by default.

Unfortunately, there is not much empirical research on the qualitative analysis of the chronology of the experience, but similarly, those who enter into anticipatory resoluteness often find themselves in a different ontological position than they were before. After which, they appear to return having accepted their new circumstances; there is a strong possibility that the mystical experience takes the individual out of the dominating mood of self-preservation and enables them to enjoy the remainder of life in a way that, in the very least, appears to be unperturbed by their fate. Having life and death interpreted in a meaningful new or old light: that

¹¹⁸ *The Third Wave*, 2023.

this is just the circle of life, that we are all part of something bigger than individuals, etc. The experience may attune participants to what they've always already understood about life.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has argued for three distinct conclusions. One, that Heideggerian phenomenology can explain that which empirical science cannot: the relationship between the long-term effects of the psilocybin-induced mystical experience and the subjective short-term effects. Two, that the mystical experience can induce a shift in the totality of relevance, and that it can also create the possibility of a call from a place of uncanniness in which the relevance of all things is temporarily suspended. Three, it argued that due to its profound effects, it can ontologically disclose new ways of being-in-the-world to tobacco addicts and to those suffering from negative emotions associated with the diagnosis of a terminal illness by means of reframing our context of interpretation.

Currently, there are very few models of understanding this experience beyond the empirical lens. What I have laid out is a very rough model of understanding the mystical experience; at best it should be treated pragmatically in the sense that some features of phenomenology may work better than others. The important part is that we apply it through the study of experience since it proves to be a more fruitful analysis than reductionist empiricism which may yield little value for understanding the role of the mystical experience in one's life. The objective of this project can ultimately be captured through the discourse of Heidegger himself, "To be a poet in a destitute time means: to attend, singing, to the trace of the fugitive gods"¹¹⁹.

¹¹⁹ Heidegger, Martin. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York, Harper Perennial, 2001, 92.

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