

The Doors of Perception, and Heaven and Hell Study Guide

The Doors of Perception, and Heaven and Hell by Aldous Huxley

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Plot Summary

The Doors of Perception & Heaven and Hell by Aldous Huxley is a volume containing two essays on the subject of visionary experiences, transcendence, and truth. The work is philosophical in nature and presents many ideas that may seem controversial or difficult to understand. Huxley's experiences and opinions with the subject matter make him an informative author. The main themes of the book are transcendence, utility, thought, and self-awareness.

The first essay in this book, "The Doors of Perception," describes an experiment that the author enters into in 1953 to test the effects of mescaline (more commonly spelled mescaline, but mescaline is what Huxley uses throughout), the psychedelic ingredient in peyote. The essay explains how the author comes to be involved in the experiment and what happens while he is under the influence of the drug. Huxley also broadly explores why people take drugs, some of what they experience when they are under the influence of drugs, and the need for all people to have visionary experiences. Huxley describes the visions he has while under mescaline in very vivid terms. He relates many of them to the works of famous artists or authors both to better explain his visions to the reader and to prove the powerful visionary effects that art can produce. Huxley also makes reference to a variety of religious beliefs throughout this essay. Religion becomes especially important when he discusses his views on why people take drugs and how people try to achieve visionary experiences.

The second essay, "Heaven and Hell," provides a more general analysis of the ability of human beings to achieve transcendence and knowledge. Unlike "The Doors of Perception," "Heaven and Hell" does not recount any specific experience that the author had with mescaline. Instead, Huxley examines the reasons human beings explore their minds, the things that occur when someone is having a visionary experience, some of the techniques people have used throughout history to achieve a state of knowledge, and some of the pros and cons of different approaches. Again, Huxley relies on the work of artists, authors, and philosophers throughout history to demonstrate the power of these mediums to achieve visionary experiences. Also, these mediums are discussed in relation to religion and religious practices as well. Ultimately, Huxley discusses heaven and hell and a middle ground that he feels can be reached through the use of mescaline. In this discussion, Huxley also focuses on the importance of the state of mind of the person who is attempting to have a visionary experience. This includes individuals who have illnesses such as schizophrenia or people who are sinful. When these individuals attempt to reach heaven or hell, they will find themselves stuck in a dark middle ground from which they cannot escape.

Huxley's book concludes with eight appendices that attempt to clarify and expand on some of the points made in "Heaven and Hell." Each of these has a different topic, but all of them support Huxley's message about visionary experiences and heaven and hell.



The Doors of Perception

The Doors of Perception Summary and Analysis

The Doors of Perception by Aldous Huxley describes an experiment that the author enters into in 1953 to test the effects of mescaline, the psychedelic ingredient in peyote. The essay explains how the author comes to be involved in the experiment and what happens while he is under the influence of the drug. Huxley also broadly explores why people take drugs and some of what they experience when they are under the influence of drugs.

Peyote has been used in religious practices of Native Americans of the Southwest for hundreds of years, but has only limited scientific research on its properties and effects. However, what is known about peyote in 1953 is that it is able to alter the mental state of the user without any noticeable side effects. In the early-1950s, an English psychiatrist discovers that mescaline and adrenalin have similar chemical makeup. Along with this discovery comes the discovery that adrenochrome, which is created when adrenalin decomposes, produces the same symptoms as taking mescaline. The changes that occur in the body due to adrenochrome also mimic the symptoms of schizophrenia. Due to all of these discoveries, new research on mescaline is necessary, and Huxley becomes a subject in a study. The importance of new studies on mescaline is due in part to the chemical discoveries made in the 1950s and in part to mescaline's use as a drug. The lack of information on the long-term effects of mescaline makes it an important drug to understand. Up to this point, the effects of mescaline have only been studied in the short term and it has been seen to have few negative side effects. As a drug that is used in religious practices and recreation, mescaline's long and short term effects both need to be understood.

Huxley is excited to participate in the mescaline trial because he hopes it will give him the opportunity for introspection and to understand how others see him. It is his belief that all human beings are introspective and solitary. People see themselves in a certain way and think of their personal characteristics as positive or negative, but they rarely share this information with others or accept the opinions of others on these topics. In other words, people believe what they want to believe about themselves and are not generally capable of delving deeper into their consciousness to understand themselves more completely. This facet of human nature makes it difficult for anyone to completely communicate their feelings or thoughts to others because they are concerned about perception. Similarly, there is a divide between ordinary and exceptional minds. The exceptional people that Huxley feels he cannot understand include highly intelligent and gifted people, as well as insane people. These aspects of human nature are important for this essay as a whole. Huxley's attempts to understand himself and human nature represent the theme of self-awareness that is prevalent throughout the essay. Huxley's feelings also set up the point of view of the book. The essay is an attempt by Huxley to understand himself, and it is written from his perspective with little support from any other characters.



Prior to beginning the mescaline trial, Huxley thinks he will be able to experience the same thoughts and feelings as highly talented individuals. He expects to see beautiful pictures and thoughts in his own mind that will allow him a level of creativity that he has never experienced. He hopes that even if he is unable to become creative or ingenious like these individuals, he will be able to understand what they experience when they create works of art, poems, or novels. What Huxley does not realize before he takes mescaline is that his own thoughts, habits, and behaviors will affect his experience on mescaline. Additionally, though he does not fully understand the effects mescaline will have on his ability and desire to act, Huxley is optimistic that he will have a life-changing experience. Huxley's thoughts about what he will experience are important because they relate to the themes of this essay and the conclusions he will ultimately make about his experience. His expectations, though many are realistic, have a strong impact on how he feels and what he thinks during and after his experience.

After describing his expectations for the mescaline trial, Huxley begins explaining what actually happens during the experiment. The first sensations that he has are those of colors, expanding and contracting in varying shapes, when he closes his eyes. The image that Huxley describes evokes an idea of liquid structures, such as bubbles, moving and changing shapes and sizes. The images he describes then change to something similar to a kaleidoscope where the images are geometric and solid. He is immediately aware that his expectation of seeing landscapes, buildings, words, and ideas is not coming true. Huxley realizes that his thoughts, beliefs, and opinions will not change as a result of this experiment, but that the way he experiences the world within his own mind will change. The change that occurs to a mescaline user is not that he or she achieves a great understanding of the world; rather they understand their own mind and their own beliefs. Mescaline also allows the user an opportunity to achieve a type of transcendence or enlightenment that most individuals seek to obtain through religion or philosophy.

While Huxley contemplates what he will achieve through this experiment, the researcher in the room asks Huxley about his feelings towards the experiment thus far. Huxley's response is that the experience is not positive or negative, but that it "just is." Huxley's response to the researcher's question leads him to contemplate the concept of "is-ness." He attributes the idea to Plato and decides that Plato would not be able to truly appreciate the intricacies of nature because of his beliefs. Plato believed too strongly in ideas and was unable to separate what currently is (being) with what may happen (becoming). The intricacies of what happens to mescaline users would pressure Plato to think beyond fixed ideas and to realize that what one understands now does not necessarily reflect complete understanding. Huxley believes that Plato would not be able to appreciate the three flowers that are sitting in his study and that Huxley has been examining for several minutes. He sees the flowers as a miracle that he had not been able to appreciate prior to taking mescaline. Looking at them now, he notices each detail of each flower and is able to appreciate their unique features. The flowers to Huxley also help to clarify the idea of the Dharma-Body, a concept from Buddhism. The Dharma-Body can be described as truth, the mind, and nature. All of the objects that exist in Huxley's study become an obvious representation of the Dharma-Body to him. When someone is able to release him or herself from their conceptions, they are able to



experience the Dharma- Body. As Huxley was able to release himself from his fixed thoughts and opinions, he was able to see things in his study as they truly were. Specifically, he was able to see and understand specifics without focusing on the utilitarian value of them. This understanding introduces the reader to what will be Huxley's argument ultimately in the essay. Huxley believes that mescaline is the best choice for individuals seeking to have visionary experiences and that the other techniques used by human beings such as religion or alcohol are insufficient.

Huxley's contemplation of Dharma-Body is interrupted by the researcher questioning his perception of space while under the influence of mescaline. Mescaline leads him to lose interest in spatial relationships. He no longer cares where things are or how far they are from one another or from him. Huxley's explanation for his lack of interest in space and spatial relationships is that he was more interested in the meaning behind things and in his experience of them. Huxley's response is similar when he is asked about time. He simply states that there is plenty of time. Again, Huxley's answers to these questions reflect his revelation about the Dharma-Body and his ability to perceive truth while under the influence of mescaline. It becomes clear at this point in the essay that Huxley's experience is about introspection and understanding. His lack of interest in things such as space, time, and the purposes of objects shows that he is moving past what was once valuable to him. The interest in meaning, value, and the symbolic power of objects reflects Huxley's interest in understanding the world around him and the world within his own mind.

The researcher then asks Huxley about the furniture in the room. Again, Huxley does not look at the furniture as chairs or tables that have specific purposes; instead he describes being mesmerized by the details and intricacies of their design. The experience of examining his furniture, along with the researcher's questions about time and space lead Huxley to another important idea about the human mind. Huxley discusses the work of Dr. C.D. Broad who suggests that human beings are capable of remembering everything, but that the purpose of the brain is to eliminate unnecessary information. To Huxley, this function of the brain is designed to provide human beings with only the information they need to survive. Prior to taking mescaline, Huxley knew the purposes of his furniture and other objects in his study, but he had no need to learn about the carving on the leg of a chair or any other detail. In everyday life there are a great number of objects, ideas, and tasks that humans must take in and process. To keep from becoming overwhelmed, humans use only what they need to complete these tasks. Once the information that is considered essential is processed, it is expressed in the form of language.

From the idea of why human beings have created language, Huxley begins to think about the purpose of language. Huxley states that all humans benefit from and are hindered by language. Language allows people to communicate with each other, but it also prevents people from accessing complete memories and knowledge before the brain reduces them to what it expresses via language. The reductions that the brain makes have created the concepts of "this world" and "other worlds." According to Huxley, those who are only aware of what they experience after the brain has reduced their knowledge, live in this world. However, there are some people, he says, who are



able to avoid the reductions made by the brain and access other worlds. People may also access the "other worlds" through the means of drugs, hypnosis, or spirituality. Achieving access to another world, discovering truth, and transcendence are all critical aspects of the themes of Huxley's work. At this point in the essay, Huxley's opinions on mescaline and its uses and effectiveness begin to become clear. Huxley's point of view as an individual who has taken mescaline and wants to share his experience with others helps to establish his credibility on the subject. At the same time, though, it is difficult for the reader to know for sure whether there is any scientific basis for Huxley's opinions and also whether he truly remembers everything about his experience.

Huxley's interest in the brain is particularly important because of the effect that mescaline has on the brain. Mescaline affects several enzymes in the brain and, as a result, lowers the amount of glucose available to the brain. The reduction in the amount of glucose (sugar) in the brain has several important implications. Individuals under the influence of mescaline are still able to remember and think, they have an intensified visual experience, they have little interest in time and space, they become uninterested in activities and topics in which they would normally be interested, and they are interested in the world they experience while taking mescaline. Huxley concludes that these effects are to be expected because the drug limits the ability of the ego to act. The brain is unable to reduce the amount of information that is processing, and thus it cannot determine what is essential. The ego, according to psychologist Sigmund Freud, is the part of personality that controls decisions and thinks realistically about what has to be done. Without the function of this part of the personality, mescaline users are not interested in daily activities and are more interested in experiences and sensations. This explanation of how mescaline works is important for the essay as a whole because it foreshadows some of the key pros and cons that Huxley will later describe in regard to whether mescaline should be used when one wants to have a visionary experience.

From the discussion of the impact of mescaline, Huxley returns to his interest in the furniture in his study, specifically a chair. He compares his own vision of the chair to the painting entitled "The Chair" by Vincent Van Gogh that he sees in a book during an outing later that day while he still under the influence of mescaline. This comparison introduces art and artists as one of the most prevalent elements of Huxley's essay. The chairs that Huxley saw and Van Gogh painted were nothing out of the ordinary, but the perception of them by Huxley and Van Gogh is critical. Huxley believes that the way that an extraordinary mind perceives something leads it to be a symbol of truth. The subject of the extraordinary thinker's work is an emblem of the truth. Unfortunately, the symbols that are expressed through art cannot be seen as what they truly are, instead they are simply symbols that must be interpreted. Huxley wonders whether individuals who are aware of the truth have an appreciation for art. He is inclined to think that those who know about truth and "suchness" are not interested in art because they do not need symbols of truth to understand truth. Art, he concludes, is designed for people who do not understand the truth as a way to contemplate it without reaching any conclusions. This opinion is especially important to the tone that Huxley is setting in his essay. As he becomes more aware of the effects of mescaline and the power of the drug to provide transcendence to its users, Huxley becomes more cynical and critical of individuals who



are unable to find truth or who use other techniques such as religion or alcohol in their attempts to find truth.

The next book that Huxley studies is a collection of paintings by Sandro Botticelli, including "Judith," on which Huxley becomes fixated. The clothing worn by the woman in the painting reminds Huxley of his experience earlier that day in his study. At one point, he recalls, becoming fixated on the fabric of his pants. Huxley thinks of a great number of artists and their works and the use of clothing in these works. Clothing is something that sets the tone for a work of art because it can express the mood of the artist, the theme of the painting, and the setting of the painting. In this case, clothing is helping Huxley to establish his mood, themes, and ideas in his own essay as well. To artists and those under the influence of mescaline, the importance of clothing is that it represents the mystery of human beings. Huxley begins to believe that the way he is experiencing things under mescaline is the preferred way of experiencing all the time. However, he also sees the problems presented by the mescaline user's experience. Being unable to feel, to complete normal activities, and to relate to other people would all be lost if someone were permanently in the mescaline user's state of mind. As Huxley thinks about his experience under mescaline, he realizes he has been trying to avoid eye contact with the other individuals in the room, including the researcher and Huxley's wife. This is a critical realization because Huxley is gaining self-awareness and knowledge of truth while he is under mescaline, but he is losing his ability to relate to others.

The next piece of art is given to Huxley by the researcher. It is a portrait of a man painted by Paul Cezanne. Huxley begins to laugh at the painting because he finds it pretentious and it makes him wonder aloud about the audacity of human beings in general. Huxley's conclusion is that everyone overreacts and that Cezanne's painting and his own reaction to Cezanne's painting prove this. Huxley again turns back to his pants to examine the folds of them. Huxley concludes that the way he is seeing his pants is the way things should be seen. He lacks pretensions, he is observing the pants as they are and not as he wants them to be, and accepting their state of being as part of the Dharma-Body. He compares the way that he perceives his clothing to the work of Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer. Vermeer's portraits, according to Huxley were able to capture the essence of the subjects because he did not allow his subjects to laugh or talk while they posed. If the girls did these things while posing, Vermeer would lose the ability to capture their divine nature.

Huxley returns to his question of how to reconcile the lack of concern he feels will under the influence of mescaline and the duties he must fulfill in his life with his newfound state of awareness and transcendence. This dilemma, he says, is similar to the tension between thought and action. Under the influence of mescaline, the user is able to reach a new level of thought that cannot be achieved without mescaline. However, because mescaline inhabits the ability to act, the user can never reach the highest level of thought that is coupled with the ability to act on your thoughts. The type of thought that mescaline users experience allows them to think of problems and questions, but does not allow them to solve problems. This is one of the biggest problems with mescaline, and though Huxley discusses his inability to act throughout the remainder of the essay, he does not ultimately address this problem when he recommends mescaline for visionary



experiences. Despite the problems that face mescaline users, there is one positive aspect to this type of thought. Although mescaline users cannot act on their positive thoughts, they also cannot act on their negative thoughts. Huxley describes this as the ethical aspect of thought. This conclusion is important to Huxley's feelings towards mescaline as well.

The researcher turns Huxley's attention back to what he is experiencing. Now, upon closing his eyes, Huxley describes the colors and patterns he sees as cheap. To Huxley, the cheap items and visions he is seeing to what he has contributed throughout his life. Huxley also realizes that his experience on mescaline has not allowed him to understand his true essence, but rather it has given him a set of symbols for who he is. Unfortunately, the ability to understand one's own inner nature is what Huxley says human beings apply emphasis to. Huxley traces this idea through religion and art throughout history. Huxley must reconcile the experience he is having on mescaline with what he was expecting to have prior to beginning the experiment. As his visions and experiences on mescaline change, Huxley must reevaluate what has happened thus far and prepare for any other changes he may experience.

As Huxley is contemplating this, one of the individuals in the room begins playing a record. The music is pleasing to Huxley, but he does not think he can experience and feel the music the way someone with musical talent under the influence of mescaline would. The music being played sounds chaotic to Huxley, but it gives him the opportunity to think about chaos. He concludes that having chaos keeps an individual from becoming overly secure in his or her current situation. However, he is also concerned that it may be difficult to escape chaos. Again, Huxley's conclusions show the importance of mescaline in helping people. Though chaos is necessary, mescaline can help the user escape it for a period of time. Mescaline's inability to make people act will inhibit the user from fixing the chaos in his or her life.

After listening to several more pieces of music, the researcher suggests that they go for a walk. Upon walking outside, Huxley is overwhelmed by looking at the many things in his garden. The experience he has while walking through the garden seems to him what a schizophrenic feels. The aspects of schizophrenia that a mescaline user experiences include only the euphoric parts. At this point, Huxley realizes that he is afraid of what he realized during his mescaline experience. The power of the truth and understanding that he has been experiencing becomes clearer to him. However, he is reassured by the fact that many accounts of transcendence express the same feelings of being overwhelmed and afraid by newfound knowledge and understanding. From these conclusions, Huxley determines that he understands madness and that he would not be able to control it. Huxley's wife brings up the Tibetan Book of the Dead and the concept of "clear light" that is discussed in that book. After the experiment is over, when Huxley listens to the recording of the interview, he takes his copy of the book and opens to a random passage that talks about being focused and free of distraction. Huxley concludes that that is the problem for mescaline users because they cannot avoid thoughts of their past indiscretions or their fear. Huxley's realization once again helps establish him theme of the tension between thought and action.



After being outside, Huxley and his companions go for a drive. At this point, he admits that the mescaline is quickly losing its effects. Their first stop is a vantage point above the city. As Huxley looks out over the city, he realizes that the splendor with which he has been seeing in other things all day is not the same at a distance. The concept of distance is important in the context of Huxley's essay. His distance from the people around him has had an effect on his experience. Also, the distance between the experiment and when he is writing the essay can be seen as a problem for exactly how much he is actually able to remember. The next stop during the trip is the store where Huxley looks at the paintings that he had previously described.

At this point, the essay shifts to Huxley's impressions of drug use in general. His conclusion is that despite the use of religion and art to escape, mankind will always need the type of escape that is provided by drugs. The desire to escape from monotony and sadness is universal in all humans. Despite the knowledge that alcohol and tobacco, the only legal drugs, are dangerous, people still use them because they need some form of escape. Huxley suggests that because we know the dangers of alcohol and tobacco and we still need an escape, a better drug should be used. This drug he suggests should be able to be taken in small amounts, powerful enough to have an effect, not toxic to the body, and should not produce many undesirable side effects. Mescaline is such a drug because it has almost no negative side effects on most users, it allows users the opportunity to escape, and users do not have any interest in starting any trouble. Of course, the problem is that the long term effects are still unknown. Another problem, according to Huxley is that the effects last too long.

Humans become interested in using drugs because of their desire for transcendence. Religion and spirituality are also a common way that people attempt to find transcendence. When religion does not help one achieve transcendence, drugs become the most viable alternative. In fact, drugs are often taken as a means to achieve religious enlightenment. The relationship between religion and drugs is a complex one. Many religions engage in the use of the drugs as a means of enlightenment, such as the Indians of the Southwest and their use of peyote. Many other religions do not forbid alcohol or other drugs, but also do not incorporate them as part of the religion. Most religions cannot incorporate drinking or other drugs into their rituals because it would remove the sense of decorum and reverence present in religious practices. Drinking becomes an alternative for enlightenment when people cannot find it through church or religious practices. Huxley's conclusions on religion are important because he has very strong views towards the ability of religion to help people transcend. At the same time, he sees the value in many religious philosophies and practices that he describes throughout both essays.

Again, Huxley concludes that the solution to the tension between alcohol and religion is to replace alcohol with mescaline. The religions of Indians who use peyote regard it as a gift from God, and observers say that their form of worship is calmer and more courteous than would be that of a drunken person. Due to the use of peyote, worshipers are able to achieve a greater sense of enlightenment. Huxley concludes that the religion of the Indians has avoided some of the problems facing Christian religions. Indians have preserved their religions despite the influence of white, European settlers. They have



made their religion a form of independence and also a means for transcendence. By using only theology, Christianity is denying its participants the ability to think more clearly and understand more completely the ideas of the church. Though Huxley is quick to point out that mescaline will not lead to complete enlightenment, it will allow users a greater understanding of the teaching of the church, of God, and of their own abilities and shortcomings as followers.

Another problem that Huxley sees is the use of language. Though we need language, people often rely on it too heavily. Language gives us theories and concepts which we are supposed to understand and explore more deeply, but we should also be willing and able to look at the world without these concepts hindering our insights. Human beings learn in a classroom and, thus, do not experience what they are learning. This type of learning is so ingrained in our culture that it is difficult for anyone to accept a different type of understanding. Huxley believes that if we lived in a less verbal culture we would be permitted to engage in transcendence through some means, including mescaline. Individuals who are able to participate in such activities will always be different after their experience.

"The Doors of Perception" presents an interesting analysis of the effects and uses of mescaline. Huxley believes that mescaline is an effective and safe way to achieve transcendence. Although mescaline makes users unable to act and its long term effects are not well-known, it is a good way to achieve a great understanding of the truth. Huxley's main themes in this essay are transcendence, self-awareness, solitude, and thought. His point of view provides the reader with a great deal of insight on the mescaline experience, but it may also cloud his ability to recall every aspect of the experience. Overall, the views expressed in his essay may be somewhat controversial, but they provide a thorough account of and significant insights into the mescaline user's experience.



Heaven and Hell

Heaven and Hell Summary and Analysis

"Heaven and Hell" is the second essay in this work. It provides a more general analysis of the ability of human beings to achieve transcendence and knowledge. Unlike "The Doors of Perception," "Heaven and Hell" does not recount any specific experience that the author had with mescaline. Instead, Huxley examines the reasons human beings explore their minds, the things that occur when someone is having a visionary experience, some of the techniques people have used throughout history to achieve a state of knowledge, and some of the pros and cons of different approaches. Ultimately, Huxley discusses heaven and hell and a middle ground that he feels can be reached through the use of mescaline.

"Heaven and Hell" begins with a comparison of the human mind to zoology. Like the study of animals around the world, there are regions of the human brain that have not yet been reached and studied. The limits of our knowledge of the human mind prevent us from completely understanding the world around us and the world within us. Despite this, it is necessary for us to go through the process of discovering the facets of the human mind in order to be able to analyze them. Some people never advance past collecting facts about their mind, others do it occasionally, and still others are able to do it consistently. There are two ways to achieve a level of consciousness that will allow one to explore the undiscovered areas of their mind. The first way is through drugs, specifically Huxley recommends lysergic acid or mescaline. The second way is through hypnosis. Though both methods are capable of elevating the user's mind to the level of consciousness needed to explore the mind, the drugs last longer and are able to take the person further into the depths of the human mind.

The two methods that Huxley recommends for this type of exploration are both relatively mysterious to scientists. It is not clear how or why hypnosis works, and the effects of mescaline are still being studied. The proposed method through which mescaline operates is by affecting enzymes in the brain and lowering the ability of the brain to filter out information that is not essential for survival. Two other techniques that seem to have similar effects are fasting and confinement to an environment without stimulus. These methods are similar to religious practices that allow worshipers to atone for their sins. However, Huxley believes that in atoning for sins, the devout also hope to achieve a level of consciousness that will give them a greater understanding of their mind and the teachings of their religion. Huxley is using religion again in this essay as he did in "The Doors of Perception." Once again, religion has pros and cons that Huxley relates to the pros and cons of mescaline use. Religion is important to this essay because as Huxley begins to describe some of the things that mankind has used in the past to help achieve, he will examine both the power of religious experience and problems with relying on religion for transcendence.



The experiences that occur under the influence of drugs, hypnosis, or religious practices, though seemingly odd, follow distinct patterns. The first such pattern is light that illuminates all visions and brightens the colors of visions. Visions experienced under the influence of drugs or hypnosis are different from dreams in this way. Color is rare in dreams, but always present in visions. However, the fact that some people dream in color and all people see visions in color seems to provide little insight to the individual's mind and visions. The explanation given by Huxley for the difference between dreams and visions in this regard is that dreams are symbols and, therefore, not an expression of reality. In contrast, visions are a reflection of reality and include the colors that make up that reality. Another reason dreams do not have color is because they are representations of aspects of the world that are typically represented through language. Humans spend so much time trying to explain and describe these things that when they are part of a dream, the ability to visualize them is clouded by the knowledge of what they are. Visions are not within the same realm of thought as dreams because they are free from the conceptions and notions that our thoughts typically contain. The visions people experience under the influence of drugs are free of any preconceived notions and are able to experience things at their basic level. Huxley gives examples of the intrinsic importance of light and color to visions by giving two accounts of the experiences of mescaline users. The distinction between dreams and visions is important for Huxley's essay. Symbols are something he discusses extensively in both essays of this work. Symbols are important because when they are interpreted they can give insight into a variety of topics.

Light and color exist in visions in the form of objects. Typically, the objects are in geometric patterns or figures. These can include buildings, mosaics, and landscapes. Again, Huxley gives the reader an account of the visual experience of a mescaline user. The shapes seen while under the influence of mescaline are unique to each person, but are critical to the experience. The objects and colors that are seen with mescaline are not able to be seen without the drug and are a critical aspect of the experience as a whole. Light and color are critical aspects of many religions and cultures of the past. Huxley sites many examples of the importance of these elements in cultures from the Greeks and Romans to Hinduism and the Japanese. One common aspect of light and color seen in the teachings, writings, and art of these cultures is that of gemstones.

Gemstones and glass are other aspects of visions that represent light and color. In many religions, gems are used to describe heaven and gods. In culture, they are used in art and architecture. The importance of gems is that they are rare and precious. Further, gems are naturally colored and glowing with light. They represent aspects of visions that are attainable and accessible on earth, even if they are difficult to find. There are, however, people who never have access to gems, who do not even know what they look like in person. For these individuals, flowers serve the same purpose. Gems and flowers are both thought to be given from heaven and when people make offerings of flowers or decorate an altar with gems, they are giving these gifts back to heaven. Not only do gems have importance in religion, but it has also been argued that they are capable of hypnotizing people. The ability of gems to hypnotize is important because it shows the power that art can have over the human mind. At the same time, the human mind appreciates and sees gems during visionary experiences.



In addition to gems, works of art may also have the power to transport people to a visionary state of mind. Huxley argues that the artists most capable of doing this are those who have visionary experiences themselves. One of the best ways to achieve this, according to Huxley, is through jewelry. Of course, in making jewelry gemstones are commonly used. Another art form that commonly has this power is religious art, which, again, uses gems and gold in many of its pieces. Huxley discusses how, throughout history, many different types of art have been popularized using combinations of glass, gems, color, and light. It seems, at this point in the essay, that Huxley has turned his focus to art and its ability to transport people, to show them "other worlds," and to help them explore the areas of their mind that they could not previously access.

After these types of materials, he turns his focus to marble and stone. These materials are particularly impressive in art because the pieces of art are often large. The work that was done to create and transport stone works was strenuous and difficult. The utility of such a practice is questionable, according to Huxley, but the value of the art matters more than the work that was needed to create it. Huxley finds the question of utility particularly important when it comes to art. Many people believe that, from a utilitarian perspective, art does not have much value. Huxley states that perhaps the most useful form of art is ceramics, but that people who collect ceramics do not put them to any use but decoration. Ceramics is an art form that has an obvious purpose. However, ceramics can also be found in religious art and in the construction of churches and temples. This form of art is less expensive than marble or other stones, but it is versatile and can still possess the ability to transport individuals if it is stained and glazed.

Glazing ceramics to give them color is an important part of the artistic process. Huxley notes that some philosophers think that bright colors are what make art beautiful. Of course, there are many artists who do not represent colorful worlds or beings and they are still considered to be great artists. The value of this philosophy of bright colors is that color is one of the ways in which people can be transported to "other worlds." The importance of color in the experience of a mescaline user shows that transcendence often involves bright colors in the visions of the user. Bright colors, however, are not as important to modern cultures. Huxley speculates that perhaps this is because we have become so used to bright colors being all around us. In the past, people only had access to earth tones in dyes, paints, and furnishings, yet many people argue that the past was a time of great color and life. Our familiarity with bright colors has led us to ignore their value and importance. One example Huxley uses is that of neon signs. The first neon signs were a great feat, but now they are everywhere and almost make people wish that they were able to experience the night sky without glowing lights. The same lack of interest is seen in metals such as steel and aluminum. All of these observations on the importance of color help point to Huxley's idea that the visionary experience helps to elevate people beyond their normal ways of thinking and allows them to appreciate new things.

In general, color becomes more brilliant and significant when it is seen on a black background. Huxley mentions several famous artists and their works that are set on dark backgrounds. At the time that these were made, they seemed like powerful works



of art. To the modern person, they are no more impressive than a neon sign in the night sky. It is difficult for people to understand the power that these works of art truly have because they are so used to what is being portrayed. The power of art is that its subjects are able to transport individuals and help them to reach the recesses of their minds and other worlds. When art ceases to be impressive to people, it loses this power and ability. The inability of art to transport the modern vision seeker shows that people have lost their interest in things that were known for creating visions in the past. The current attitude of mankind is that if something is not new and different, it cannot be impressive.

Huxley begins to discuss the cherubims seen in religious art. These individuals are those who act as intermediaries between men and a higher power or understanding. The different representations of these figures in art are what Huxley finds important. At times they are seen in action and at other times they are still. Huxley believes that action is not a natural state for these beings because their role in religion is not an active one. The creatures that rest are a more realistic representation, and thus have a greater ability to transport someone and help them achieve clarity. Cherubims have been important in religious art, but are not seen in landscapes. Cherubims help Huxley show the need for someone or something to act as an intermediary between mankind and a higher power. In this case, he is making the comparison that cherubims are known to help religious individuals find enlightenment, while mescaline is a modern method that acts as an intermediary in this process.

Huxley turns to landscape art and its importance. Landscape painting is rare in many cultures and not as refined as other types of painting in others. There are many possible explanations for why landscapes are not painted as often as other scenes. Artists may choose not to paint them, they may attempt it but find it insufficient, or they may choose to express what they have seen in another form. Perhaps another reason is that they have found something else to substitute for painting landscapes. Huxley states that the landscapes that have the most visionary power are those that are painted at either close range or distant range. These two ranges make it possible to transport to the visions that occur under the influence of mescaline or hypnosis. In order to paint scenes such as this, artists have to be able to remove themselves from the human frame of reference. Instead of seeing utility, pattern, symmetry, and other such things that humans look for, the artist must paint the natural setting as it was meant to be. The perspective seen at a medium range is what humans see on a daily basis. To look at something very close up allows a person to see only that, and to look at something from far away removes the details that prevent the person from seeing the entire image. Huxley examines many examples of landscape painting throughout history and how those paintings have served as ways to transport to a visionary place. The ability to see landscapes close up and at a distance is important in comparison to the mescaline user's experience. Close up and far away are the only vantage points from which someone experiences mescaline. The user is either under the influence of the drug and thus close to the experience, or not under the influence and far away from the visionary experience. There is no in between with mescaline because of the power of the visions.



Huxley then turns his attention back to the subject of visionary experiences. Thus far, his descriptions have been of the pleasant experiences that occur when someone has a visionary experience, and of their translations into art and religion. However, visionary experiences can also be negative. Negative experiences still have light and significance like the positive experiences do, but the light is very dark. Huxley uses the example of a girl with schizophrenia to describe the way a negative visionary experience portrays light. The light is harsh and unavoidable in the negative vision. Huxley's analogy with schizophrenia shows the power of the negative visionary experience, but he is quick to note that not everyone who has negative visions is susceptible to schizophrenia or any other problems. People who experience less severe levels of visions often see the world as disgusting or sinister. This type of vision is also prevalent in the works of several different artists and authors, though overall it is much less common. Another aspect of the negative visionary experience is in the bodily sensations that a person experiences. In a positive visionary state, one feels like they are having an out of body experience. In a negative state, one feels like their body is becoming more and more tight and confined. This is important because in many literary accounts of hell, the form of punishment used on sinners constricts them in some way.

The reason that negative experiences occur, according to Huxley has to do with the way that mescaline is broken down by the body. Mescaline stays in the liver after it is ingested, so those with any sort of liver problem will be more susceptible to negative visions. Negative visions can also come from psychological ailments such as anger or fear. It is also important to note that those who are able to achieve positive visions are not always the most obvious candidates. For example, individuals who are moral and ethical, but who concern themselves with material possessions and wealth will not be able to achieve positive visions. In contrast, a person who has sinned greatly, but who repents wholeheartedly will be able to have positive visions. This distinction helps to explain the weight that religions place on the state of mind of individuals before death. This observation also supports Huxley's ideas that religion is not necessarily the most important and valuable way to achieve a visionary experience.

Huxley begins to examine the role of heaven and hell in the visionary process. Heaven, he says, serves as a vantage point for viewing divinity. Huxley believes that if, after death, consciousness is still intact it is still able to understand visionary experiences. For individuals who have negative experiences, hell is the only experience. After death, souls are able to move between heaven and hell and use their desires and wishes to create the world in which they want to live. Huxley believes that few people end up in heaven or hell, but that most end up in a world where they can achieve a visionary state. Huxley thinks that all of these are possible. He believes people can go to heaven, hell, or to a different state where they can see clearly and experience transcendence. This message shows the importance of achieving a visionary experience during one's life. It also shows that Huxley believes that most people are capable of visionary experiences in the right circumstances.

Ultimately, Huxley's conclusions on the topic of heaven and hell show that he firmly believes in the importance of a visionary experience. However, he goes beyond the ideas he presented in "The Doors of Perception" to show that he does not think it is



important to just have the experience. A person must have a positive experience in order to achieve transcendence and to ultimately be able to make it to either heaven or the middle ground. In order to have the positive experience, the person must also be moral and in the proper state of mind for a visionary experience. Huxley takes the theory that mescaline is necessary for visionary experiences further in this essay by creating conditions in which it can best be used. He also further explores some of the ways in which transcendence has tried to be achieved in the past and the importance of art in the process of visionary experiences.



Heaven and Hell: Appendix 1

Heaven and Hell: Appendix 1 Summary and Analysis

Huxley discusses two other ways to achieve visionary experiences. These include carbon dioxide and a stroboscopic lamp. He is quick to mention that neither of these is as effective as the other methods he has discussed. Inhalation of carbon dioxide has been shown to help people to see images that can be considered part of a visionary experience. There is a lack of consistency across individuals on what they see when they are under the influence of carbon dioxide which makes it a somewhat less understood technique than mescaline. The power of carbon dioxide is similar to the experiences of breathing exercises, yoga, or shouting. The amount of carbon dioxide that is permitted to reach the brain during these activities affects the ability of the person to have visionary experiences. Shouting and singing, Huxley claims, have become part of religious practices in order to help produce visionary experiences.

The stroboscopic lamp does not affect the chemistry of the human body, but is instead a product of physics. The light flashes rhythmically and is able to put those who sit in front of it with their eyes closed into a trance like state. The lamp affects the brain and has been shown to cause seizures in some people who stare into it. The types of colors and patterns described by a mescaline user are also present to those who sit in front of stroboscopic lamps. The effects of mescaline or lysergic acid can be enhanced if one sits in front of a stroboscopic lamp while under the influence of one of the drugs.

The relationship between mescaline, lysergic acid, and the stroboscopic lamp leads Huxley to examine the larger question in all of these experiences. The relationship between the chemical, cellular, and electrical reactions of the body and their role in visionary experiences is one of the central questions that has yet to be answered. Huxley examines some experiments that have been done on the brain to try to answer this question, but there remain many unanswered questions. Huxley poses some of these questions at the end of this appendix. The questions he poses leave the opportunity for him to further explore these topics at a later date.

Overall, the purpose of this appendix is to inform the reader of other methods that warrant discussion and to pose some of the important questions that have yet to be answered in regard to the visionary experience.



Heaven and Hell: Appendix 2

Heaven and Hell: Appendix 2 Summary and Analysis

Huxley explores the role of visionaries and mystics in the modern, Western world. He states that they are not as common and that there are two reasons for this. These reasons are chemical and philosophical. The philosophical reason is that people do not believe in transcendence and so anyone who thinks they have had a visionary experience is considered to be crazy. The chemical reason is modern individuals modify the chemistry of their bodies through their diet.

The chemical reason that people are skeptical of visionaries is important. In the past, people subsisted on a limited amount fruits, vegetables, meats, and eggs for the majority of the year. Many suffered from vitamin deficiencies, diseases, and psychological problems as a result of the lack of nutrients. When these problems occur, the brain often stops functioning correctly and visions happen more frequently.

The types of visions that were experienced in the past were not generally positive visions. Huxley attributes this to the problems of vitamin deficiency and disease. Although many religious individuals often saw negative visions such as hell and punishment, their belief in a higher power and heaven also helped them to have positive visions. Huxley points to Lent in the Christian tradition which occurs at the end of winter. After having minimal nutrition available all winter, the faithful voluntarily fasted for another forty days, and were at the end prepared to have visionary experiences about the death and resurrection of Christ. Other religious faithful participated in fasts throughout the year, thus making them capable of visionary experiences at all times.

Another way in which the religious faithful of the past produced visionary experiences was through physical pain. Many whipped themselves or participated in other self-mutilation and torture. While participating in these practices, Huxley claims that adrenalin and histamine were produced which can lead to visions. Also, because there was not always soap or bandages available, wounds began to fester and became toxic. The effects of the chemicals and toxins on the body could also produce visions.

The conclusion that Huxley makes is that people will consider these explanations for why people had visions in the past as proof that their visions were not valid. He also considers the argument that using any sort of means to worship God removes the spirituality from the worship and invalidates it. Huxley argues that all human experiences are a result of chemicals in some way. Also, he notes that most visionaries work to achieve a proper chemical balance for experiencing visions. Modern individuals are able to pass the practices of starvation, shouting and singing, and mutilation through means of chemicals. Anyone who in the modern world chooses to use the methods of the past is a fool in Huxley's opinion. He suggests that those interested in having a visionary experience turn to doctors and psychologists who can help with the chemistry and that they turn to artists and philosophers to explain the experience.



This appendix is particularly important because it addresses questions that may have come to the reader's mind as they read Huxley's essays. The ways in which people achieved visions in the past are important to address in order to understand Huxley's devotion to the convenience of modern methods. The lack of visionary experiences that people have today is important here too. Huxley addresses the stigma attached to the use of mescaline and other drugs to help in the process.



Heaven and Hell: Appendix 3

Heaven and Hell: Appendix 3 Summary and Analysis

Huxley turns to modern forms of art such as fireworks and theatrical spectacles. All of these modern art forms depend on technology. Huxley begins by discussing pyrotechnics as part of history where it was used in the military first and then for fireworks later. As the art of fireworks became more developed, it also became more capable of transporting people to visionary states. In regard to pageantry as a visionary art, Huxley notes that it has been used as a political tool for centuries. The message was that royalty and political officials were heroes and should be worshiped and praised. Just like fireworks, pageantry has progressed over the years and with technological advances. In theater, there is both human drama and visionary spectacles as art forms. In the past, costumes and jewelry helped to develop the visionary experience of theater. Scenery is also an important part of the spectacle of theater.

Huxley discusses the invention of a light machine that made it possible for people to relive their visionary experiences through the colors the machine could produce. He talks about the different ways in which lanterns have been used over the years and how they have impacted artists and authors. Lights of the past have evolved into the modern movie. Through movies, people can see light, colors, landscapes, and visions manifested on the screen. Documentary films help to show the world we are accustomed to in a different way.

Light in artwork can also have an impact of art that has existed for hundreds of years. By casting a light on a sculpture, one can see different details and effects than before. Advancements such as this allow people to reevaluate the works of art around them. New knowledge and appreciation can be obtained when one is able to look at something from a different angle. This technique can alter the artist's vision though. Sometimes light is used to make a sculpture look its best, when the artist's intent was not for it to look "good" in a traditional sense. The reinterpretation of art is part of the process of art appreciation, but can cloud the perceptions of the observers.

This appendix helps to show the importance of light that Huxley has discussed throughout both essays in the book. However, Huxley is now approaching light by pointing out some of its flaws and inabilities. Despite these, it is clear that Huxley still finds light to be one of the most important aspects of the visionary experience.

Heaven and Hell: Appendix 4

Heaven and Hell: Appendix 4 Summary and Analysis

In this appendix, Huxley briefly discusses the work of Georges de Latour whom Huxley mentioned in "Heaven and Hell." Latour used light and created many interesting works of art that Huxley believes are important in the visionary experience. King Louis XIV changed the artistic interests of the nation such that Latour's work became unknown. His works were rediscovered in 1915 and came back into popularity. Huxley believes that Latour has the power to represent aspects of the world as manifestations of the truth. Latour's paintings had no theatrical aspects to them and the individuals represented in them are static. His works are both religious and not religious at the same time, and Huxley describes him as greedy and proud. Despite his negative characteristics, he is one of the greatest painters of his time according to Huxley. This proves that the artist's character and his work are not always completely complementary.

Huxley sees it as necessary to include this passage for several reasons. There are many artists whom he discusses more in depth during the essays, but he writes this appendix on Latour to clarify some of the ideas about art in his essays. Latour's use of light is important, but his lack of theatricality is also critical. Huxley is interested in the understated aspects of Latour's works. These aspects help to show that it is not necessary that art have clear visionary power to be a powerful part of the visionary experience.

Heaven and Hell: Appendix 5

Heaven and Hell: Appendix 5 Summary and Analysis

Huxley discusses landscape paintings and the distance at which it is perceived. He begins by discussing a Vuillard painting he had referenced in "Heaven and Hell." From there, Huxley discusses landscape painting in general. There are few Europeans who painted landscapes, and the majority of landscapes are by Chinese or Japanese artists. Huxley considers that paintings of nature can make people believe that they understand the art because they are so familiar with nature. Landscape paintings help people to see divinity and truth in nature. Another powerful aspect of these paintings is that they often show one thing set against a plain background, thus highlighting the object.

This discussion helps to show Huxley's interest in the idea of solitude. Landscape paintings are discussed at length in "Heaven and Hell," but here he attempts to explain some of the particulars of why they are so important. The isolation of objects in landscapes is what Huxley considers to be most powerful. Isolation shows the power of being and existing, which Huxley considers to be the most important aspects of our existence.

Heaven and Hell: Appendix 6

Heaven and Hell: Appendix 6 Summary and Analysis

Huxley tells the reader about schizophrenics and neurotics. These individuals are unable to live in heaven or hell, but instead remain in a dark world. The state that they live in can be achieved by using adrenalin on a normal person. The world in which they live resembles a world in which they have lost touch with matter and other people. The new discoveries about adrenalin and schizophrenia help to show the importance of the ability to pass between visionary states. Huxley discusses the world of schizophrenics more in depth here to give the reader a better sense of the world in which they live. He is also attempting to explain where people who are unable to achieve positive visionary experiences will remain for eternity.

Heaven and Hell: Appendix 7

Heaven and Hell: Appendix 7 Summary and Analysis

Huxley discusses the art of Gericault who was a negative visionary. Gericault perceived the world around him and represented it in his art in a negative visionary state. Gericault supposedly perceived the world as a series of apocalypses. He painted all of his visions with any outlining or planning. Each work began with one idea or vision and that idea manifested itself on the canvas. Huxley finds this important to discuss because it once again shows the power of negative visions and where they can transport those who see them. The images of Gericault paintings that Huxley describes and what the artist experienced while painting them show that negative visionary experiences can be just as powerful as positive ones.

Heaven and Hell: Appendix 8

Heaven and Hell: Appendix 8 Summary and Analysis

Huxley reproduces here the account of Carlyle's description of his own psychotic mind. This account shows the negative visionary state once again, as Huxley has done through the past several appendices. The state described in this account finds people as grotesque and objects as unreal. To a psychotic person, everything has meaning, but all the meanings are negative and pointless. Huxley includes this account because it helps to show the power of negative visions and how they can affect those who experience them. "Heaven and Hell" places significant emphasis on the fact that positive visionary experiences are essential and Huxley furthers that idea with his appendices.



Characters

Aldous Huxley

Huxley is the author of the book and the subject of the research study in "The Doors of Perception." Huxley is best known for his novel *Brave New World*, but presents two essays here that challenge the reader and propose many important ideas and topics. These essays reflect Huxley's experiences and views, and he is the most important person in both.

"The Doors of Perception" tells of the experiences Huxley has while under the influence of mescaline. His participation in the study is what led to the writing of the essay. The essay is written based on his memories of the experience and the recording of the session by the researcher. The combination of his memories with what he is hearing on tape is important for the reader's experience. The reader is able to get not just the experience of someone who is using mescaline, but also the thoughts of someone who has had time to reflect on the significance of the experience. The images and ideas that Huxley portrays present many philosophical dilemmas including thought versus action, the importance and significance of transcendence, and the ability of human beings to achieve a true and complete understanding of the world around them.

In "Heaven and Hell," there are no participants or characters as those seen in "The Doors of Perception." Huxley presents his theories on the topics of heaven and hell, mescaline use, and visionary experiences. This essay concerns itself with a variety of art forms, religions, and philosophies presented by others throughout history. These topics are important in the essay because they give Huxley the opportunity to explain the ways in which art or religion can influence a visionary experience. Though he believes that mescaline and other drugs are capable of producing the most realistic and complete visionary experiences, he gives credit to the other ways that have been important throughout history. This essay is meant to be a philosophical work to explain heaven and hell and how visionary experiences relate to heaven and hell. Huxley's opinions of the subject once again present many opportunities for thought and discussion by readers of this book.

The researcher

The researcher is the individual who conducts the mescaline experiment on Huxley in "The Doors of Perception." The researcher is never described as male or female, nor does he or she have a name. The role of the researcher in the experiment and essay is to ask questions of Huxley, propose activities, and record his thoughts. Though he or she is the person who brings Huxley to the experiment and allows him to participate, he or she is relatively unimportant to Huxley. As Huxley notes at one point in the experiment, he is indifferent to the researcher and has been avoiding making account with him or her. Though the researcher may seem relatively inconsequential in the book



because he or she asks only a few questions and is mentioned only a few times, he or she is very important to the overall message Huxley is trying to send. The mescaline experience has rendered Huxley indifferent to action and the people around him, he is aware of what is going on within his own mind, but is frequently unaware of the world around him. The researcher helps to bring Huxley back to the reality of the experiment and focuses him on some of the more interesting aspects of the mescaline experience. Huxley's experience takes place in his own inner world. The researcher brings Huxley back to the outer world and helps him to examine and understand the importance of the outer world during the mescaline experiment.

Huxley's wife

Similar to the researcher, Huxley's wife is never given a name during the essay. She is present along with the researcher in "The Doors of Perception." She asks only one question throughout the entire experiment, but is present at all times. Huxley is indifferent to her presence during the experiment as well. The question she asks is in regard to Huxley's discussion of madness and whether madness can be controlled. She asks "Would you be able to fix your attention on what The Tibetan Book of the Dead calls the clear light? Would it keep evil away if you could hold it? Or would you not be able to hold it?" The question is significant because Huxley's answer to the question is that he cannot do it alone.

This revelation is critical to both the essay and the relationship between Huxley and his wife. Huxley realizes here that he is unable to do this alone and that he needs someone with him. The person who he has chosen to spend the rest of his life with is there, but he has been indifferent to her throughout the experiment. The realization, under the influence of mescaline, that even he cannot complete everything in his life alone is crucial. This shows that although mescaline has the power to give him insight into himself and to ignore those around him, he still needs others for some things.

God/A Higher Power

The significance of a higher power in both essays is important. The common theme of transcendence and visionary experiences is central to the essays. Huxley describes a wide range of religions and religious experiences in reference to transcendence. He compares what one achieves on mescaline with religious awakenings and enlightenment. At times, though, he almost balks at the concept of a higher power.

Mescaline has the power to give someone a greater understanding of the world around them, the world within their mind, and the religious and/or spiritual experiences that they are capable of achieving. On the other hand, mescaline is an efficient provider of such experiences. Huxley believes that mescaline is more effective for most people who wish to achieve any form of enlightenment. His thoughts in "The Doors of Perception" after his mescaline experience about the use of drugs in general give the reader an understanding of the importance of the higher power to Huxley. He discusses at length



how people use religion to help them achieve understanding, but also how they are almost always disappointed and turn to alcohol or smoking. Huxley sees these vices as an escape from the reality of religion's inability to help achieve transcendence. Mescaline is the best and most effective way to achieve a visionary experience.

In "Heaven and Hell" the importance of the higher power is somewhat different. Huxley is more willing to acknowledge that it is possible for people to have religious experiences that parallel what people achieve on mescaline. Though these experiences still seem rare to him, he is at least more accepting that there are other ways to commune with a higher power. His opinions on heaven and hell, expressed at the end of the essay, are important as well. Huxley believes that people may remain in heaven or hell or somewhere in between. The in between is what he considers most common and what he says you can achieve on mescaline. Heaven and hell are not nearly as common as final resting places for the soul. This distinction shows again that though Huxley appreciates and accepts the importance and ability of religion as a transcendent experience inducer, he sees mescaline as a much more powerful one.

Art/Artists

Throughout both essays, Huxley describes a variety of different art forms and artists. Though they are significant to the essays, no one artist takes precedence over the others. It is critical to note that there are a great number mentioned in the work, but that none can be identified as the most important. Some are discussed in more detail than others, but all of them are ultimately used to help Huxley get across his ideas.

Art is another way in which people may achieve transcendence. It is also something that becomes particularly interesting to the mescaline user. Artists themselves are often thought to be able to achieve transcendence and to have extraordinary minds. Many artists are also considered to be mad and thus the world that they saw and painted becomes clearer to mescaline users. In "The Doors of Perception," Huxley uses artists and their works as a way to express what he is seeing and experiencing under the influence of mescaline. For example, the way that he perceives the fabric of his pants is best explained through a discussion of the way artists paint fabric on the human body in their works. In "Heaven and Hell," Huxley ventures on a lengthy discussion of the many different art forms in terms of their use of color and light. Color and light have been used in a great number of ways throughout the course of art history. Mescaline users perceive color and light in all cases. Others who achieve visionary experiences through other means also report the importance of color and light. Art, in this case, shows the ways in which people can perceive visionary experiences.

Philosophers

Similar to the artists mentioned in both essays, a number of philosophers are mentioned as well. Again, none of them plays a significant role on its own in the work, but the use



of their ideas throughout helps Huxley to explain his ideas and make points about mescaline use.

The purpose of a visionary experience is to help bring the individual experiencing it to a better understanding of the world around them. The purpose of philosophy is to attempt to explain the world around us, the higher powers that may exist, our reasons for existing, and the behaviors and thoughts of mankind. Philosophy and mescaline fit together in these purposes. Thus, Huxley uses the many different philosophies and philosophers that he mentions in the essays to help explain his newfound understanding of himself and the world around him.

Authors

Authors also provide Huxley with a means for explaining his opinions. Unlike philosophers and artists, they are less important to him during the mescaline experience. One of the most important things prior to entering into the experience for Huxley was the potential to be able to express himself creatively while under the influence of mescaline. He hopes that he will be able to understand the world that authors are able to create through their writings. Later, Huxley uses authors as a way of expressing his experience of nature, mostly. The way that Huxley experiences the outside world is best expressed through the works of authors and poets.

Psychologists/Doctors

The importance of medical professionals in this work is two-fold. First, like the groups previously described, they help Huxley to understand some of what occurs to him under the mescaline experience. Gaining a better knowledge of how his body and mind are reacting to the drugs helps Huxley separate what is truly visionary and what is simply a side effect. Second, they allow him to explain mescaline's physical and psychological effects and some of the theories on drug use that exist in the medical community. This is important because Huxley has many opinions on what is happening to him in the sense of visions, but without the knowledge provided by doctors to help him explain the physical effects, his work could be taken as little more than ramblings of someone on drugs.



Objects/Places

Mescaline

The hallucinogenic ingredient in peyote.

Peyote

A cactus plant used in many religious practices of Southwestern Native Americans.

Mind At Large

The theory that each individual has the ability to remember everything, but that the brain reduces what we need to know and remember for survival. The Mind At Large is the idea that we can remember everything.

World's Biggest Drug Store

Where Huxley and his companions go during their outing; where Huxley views the art books containing the works of Van Gogh and Botticelli.

Tibetan Book of the Dead

Book that describes many religious practices of the Buddhist religion.

Antipodes

The unexplored, distant areas of the human mind.

Old World of the mind

Huxley's term for the areas of the mind that are unexplored.

Hypnosis

Another way of achieving visionary experiences besides mescaline.



Other world

Where individuals are transported under the influence of mescaline or during another type of visionary experience.

Heaven

A place from which one is able to see "Divine Ground."

Door in the Wall

A phrase borrowed from H.G. Wells that Huxley uses to mean ways of achieving a visionary experience; passing through a door in the wall gives an individual the ability to have visions.



Themes

Transcendence

For Huxley's purposes, transcendence means achieving knowledge and truth through a visionary experience. Finding knowledge and truth is considered by Huxley to be an essential part of the human experience. All individuals desire to find truth and to understand themselves and the world around them.

The problem, it seems, is the ability of people to achieve transcendence. Huxley finds many of the techniques people use in their attempts to find truth insufficient. To him, religion is rarely a consistently effective means of finding the truth. When religion fails, people resort to alcohol and smoking as a way to change their state of mind and hopefully better understand the truth. Huxley finds these methods ineffective. The physical effects of alcohol and cigarettes are known to be negative. In contrast, mescaline has few known negative effects and it is effective for almost everyone at helping them to understand truth. Huxley's opinion is that mescaline is the best way for achieving transcendence.

The overall message about transcendence in both essays is that it is critical for every individual to achieve transcendence if they can hope to understand themselves and the world around them. The ideas that Huxley presents are highly controversial though. Many would argue that a visionary experience can be achieved through any number of ways that do not involve any form of drugs or alcohol. The visionary experience is in the eye of whoever is experiencing it. Truth and knowledge are perceived by the individual who seeks them. What Huxley wishes for all people is that they achieve transcendence, but his technique for doing it may not be one that many people agree with. However, he seeks in both essays to disprove any other technique that has been used to achieve transcendence from religion to art to alcohol to hypnosis. Huxley's view on the issue is clear, but he is also trying to show that everyone who thinks there are other ways to transcendence is wrong. His essay is designed to cause people to debate the many ways to achieve transcendence.

Self-Awareness

Similar to transcendence, self-awareness is about knowledge and understanding. The ability to understand one's self is different though from simply having a visionary experience. Under the influence of mescaline, someone may begin to understand himself or herself better than they understand the world around them.

Self-awareness is both a positive and negative effect of mescaline. Individuals can become so self-aware that they are no longer concerned with the world around them and they do not care about things that are important to them. Self-awareness could also lead to great revelations and understanding of one's self, one's thoughts and emotions,



and one's abilities and skills. Despite the potential for negative effects of self-awareness, Huxley believes that self-awareness is critical to all human beings. Huxley points out that most, if not all, people are unable to truly understand their own nature and habits because they choose to view themselves as they want to. That is, if we are told by others about a negative characteristic of our personality, we will not necessarily believe it unless we have had some experience in our life that has led us to believe it. The type of self-awareness that can be provided by mescaline or other visionary experiences can help people to see some of their flaws.

Another problem with the self-awareness that can be provided by mescaline is the inability to act on any knowledge that the visionary gains about him or herself while under the influence of mescaline. This problem is further exacerbated by the fact that mescaline users may not be able to remember everything that was revealed during their visionary episodes. The type of self-awareness that Huxley feels people need to achieve is one that will allow them to glimpse some of the realities of their personality. He does not necessarily believe that people must act on what they learn while under the influence of mescaline. Mescaline is not designed, in his opinion, as a way to find your problems and correct them. Its main purpose is to provide you with insights and knowledge that can help you better understand the world around you and your own being.

Solitude

The theme of solitude is especially important in the mescaline experience. Early in "The Doors of Perception," Huxley points out that human beings are solitary creatures. It is impossible for individuals to share every aspect of their nature, thoughts, or feelings with others. There are always things that people will experience on their own, whether they choose to or not, but the fact that solitary experiences are still prevalent in the human experience is critical.

During the mescaline experiment that Huxley undergoes, he finds it difficult to relate to those around him. His experience on mescaline is so powerful to him that he does not feel he is able to relate to others. He also has strong visions and realizations while under mescaline that he feels are specific to his own mind. The difficulty with visionary experiences of any sort is that despite the similarities of light, color, fear at newfound knowledge, and anxiety, the differences are significantly greater. People do not experience any type of drug in the same way, so this is to be expected with drug-induced visions. Other visionary experiences that result from other means will likely be different because they do not involve a drug. These differences mean that individuals are having their visionary experiences alone.

Outside of the mescaline experience, Huxley's discussion of human nature and desire also points to the theme of solitude. Humans, he believes, are interested in having some sort of experience that will allow them to leave the drudgery of their everyday lives. Solitude is a component of the everyday lives of people that makes them wish for an escape. Thus, solitude is both a reason for seeking visionary experiences and a side



effect of visionary experiences. It seems that solitude is something that Huxley believes we cannot escape no matter method we try.

Utility

Utility is another important theme in both essays. Many of the things discussed are not considered to be very useful, including art. The message that Huxley attempts to send about utility is that it is not always important that something have an explicit purpose. The views Huxley expresses on utility change based on the topic being discussed, but his main aim of achieving a visionary experience remains the basis for his views on utility.

The mescaline experiment that Huxley enters into introduces him to many new ideas and thoughts about himself, others, and the world around him. Much of what he learns he compares to art, religion, literature, and philosophy. Throughout these comparisons he makes note of the fact that many people do not believe these to be useful to mankind. Religion is one area where Huxley seems to take a dissenting opinion to the majority opinion. Most people find religion to be helpful in some way to their overall wellness and spirituality. Huxley believes that religion may help people with spirituality, but that it is insufficient to produce visionary experiences and that it often drives people to drinking and smoking.

Despite Huxley's beliefs that religion is not entirely useful for the purposes people intend it, his overall message about utility is that too much emphasis is placed on it. The art and literature that he discusses does not provide any survival value to mankind. Part of achieving a visionary experience involves appreciating the world around you and releasing the inhibitions that prevent the experience. Utility is something that prevents people from gaining enlightenment and finding truth. In the quest to achieve a greater understanding of the world around us, we must accept the fact that not everything has a purpose that we can utilize for our own gain. Ultimately, the desire to find truth is the most important thing to Huxley and any aspects of utility that interfere with that search are considered a hindrance.

Thought

The theme of thought in both essays has to do mainly with the idea of thought versus action. The tension between these two is present in our everyday lives. People often think that they need to do things, should do things, or want to do things, but the motivation to act is often a problem. The mescaline user or person undergoing a visionary experience has similar problems with acting, but the true problem is that the power of thought during these experiences becomes even greater.

During a visionary experience, thoughts can become overwhelming and powerful. There can be a large number of thoughts, but the thoughts may also be powerful. In either case, the person experiencing the vision will have to sort through the thoughts and determine their meanings. This process is part of what makes the visionary experience



so powerful. As an individual is exploring the thoughts and ideas that they have discovered, they are learning about themselves and the world around them. However, the ability to act is severely inhibited in the mescaline user, so the thoughts are of no value other than the knowledge they provide to the individual experiencing them. This value is of course incredibly important and valuable on its own, but the power of the thoughts that occur during visions could be even greater if individuals could use it to affect their own lives and the lives of others after their visions.

The tension between thought and action is difficult for any person experiencing a vision. Huxley is quick to point out that despite the tension, thought is what matters during the visionary experience. The entire reason a person enters into a mescaline experiment or any other vision inducing experiment is to gain knowledge, truth, and insight. While the power to act is what can affect change in the world around us, it is not good for someone entering into an experiment to expect they will want to act on what they learn. Huxley's message is that gaining truth is what is most important.



Style

Perspective

Perspective

Aldous Huxley is a British author who wrote novels, non-fiction, and essays. The reason for writing *The Doors of Perception & Heaven and Hell* is to inform the reader about the power of visionary experiences and the ability of mescaline to aid in these experiences. Huxley also wrote these essays to provide some philosophical thoughts on transcendence and spirituality.

Huxley entered into the mescaline experiment for several reasons. He wanted to help with the new areas of research about mescaline that were being discovered, he was interested in learning more about and experiencing its effects, and he wanted to have an experience that would help him gain understanding and knowledge. "The Doors of Perception" recounts his experiences during the trial. It is difficult for the reader to determine whether he remembered everything that happened or relied primarily on the recordings of the experiment. Despite this, Huxley's account provides strong arguments and powerful descriptions that help the reader understand the mescaline experience.

The audience for this work is essentially anybody. However, Huxley's language and style are not accessible to all people. His work is also more likely to be interesting to individuals who are interested in philosophy, religion, drugs, transcendence, and enlightenment as topics of writing. The number of artists, authors, philosophers, and other famous people and places can make the work difficult to understand at times. People with a great knowledge of these topics may find the book more accessible, but the references he makes can generally be cleared up with minimal research such as finding the work of art he is talking about to understand his explanation of it. The impact that he wants to make on this audience is to help them understand some of the effects and powers that mescaline has and to help them realize the importance of visionary experiences. He seems to also be interested in dispelling some of the myths about people who use drugs and the reasons they have for using them. Huxley also wants to discuss some broader topics such as self-awareness, transcendence, and spirituality.

Tone

Description

Structure

Structure



The Doors of Perception & Heaven and Hell contains two essays. "Heaven and Hell" also has eight appendices that Huxley uses to clarify some of his ideas and further explain some of the references he makes to other topics. The first essay in the book is "The Doors of Perception" which primarily recounts Huxley's mescaline experience. "Heaven and Hell" comes next and provides a more broad description of the ways in which an individual can achieve a visionary experience. The order in which Huxley places these essays is important because he provides the reader with a very compelling account of mescaline use first. The second essay, as a result, is less compelling because the reader already knows that Huxley will conclude that mescaline is the best technique for visionary experiences. Despite the placement of the essays, it is important that Huxley broke the book down this way. Including both in the same volume helps the reader learn more about the experiences and further support Huxley's points. Also, separating his thoughts on the subject into two essays helps to make the overall work more accessible.

Like any work that is philosophical in nature, Huxley's writing and style can be difficult to follow at times. The structure that he uses helps to eliminate some confusion on the part of the reader. He is generally clear about what topic he is discussing and moves fluidly between topics. There are only a few exceptions to this rule, but in those instances he makes it clear that is diverting from his previous topic.

Quotes

"We live together, we act on, and react to, one another; but always and in all circumstances we are by ourselves." p.12

"Half an hour after swallowing the drug I became aware of a slow dance of golden lights. A little later there were sumptuous red surfaces swelling and expanding from bright nodes of energy that vibrated with a continuously changing, patterned life." p.16

"For persons are selves and, in one respect at least, I was now a Not-self, simultaneously perceiving and being the Not-self of the things around me. To this new-born Not-self, the behavior, the appearance, the very thought of the self it had momentarily ceased to be, and of other selves, its one-time fellows, seemed not indeed distasteful...but enormously irrelevant" p.35

"Mescaline had endowed me temporarily with the power to see things with my eyes shut; but it could not, or at least on this occasion did not, reveal an inscape remotely comparable to my flowers or chair or flannels 'out there.' What it had allowed me to perceive inside was not the Dharma-Body, in images, but my own mind; not Suchness, but a set of symbols- in other words, a homemade substitute for Suchness." p.45

"Most men and woman lead lives at the worst so painful, at the best so monotonous, poor and limited that the urge to escape, the longing to transcend themselves if only for a few moments, is and has always been one of the principal appetites of the soul." p.62

"In spite of the growing army of hopeless alcoholics, in spite of the hundreds of thousands of persons annually maimed or killed by drunken drivers, popular comedians still crack jokes about alcohol and its addicts. And in spite of the evidence linking cigarettes with lung cancer, practically everybody regards tobacco smoking as being hardly less normal and natural than eating" p.63

"I am not so foolish as to equate what happens under the influence of mescaline or of any other drug, prepared or in the future preparable, with the realization of the end and ultimate purpose of human life: Enlightenment, the Beatific Vision. All I am suggesting is that the mescaline experience is what Catholic theologians call 'a gratuitous grace,' not necessary to salvation but potentially helpful and to be accepted thankfully, if made available." p.73

"But the man who comes back through the Door in the Wall will never be quite the same as the man who went out. He will be wiser but less cocksure, happier but less self-satisfied, humbler in acknowledging his ignorance yet better equipped to understand the relationship of words to things, of systematic reasoning to the unfathomable Mystery which it tries, forever vainly, to comprehend" p.79

"Like the earth of a hundred years ago, our mind still has its darkest Africas, its unmapped Borneos and Amazonian basins. In relation to the fauna of these regions we



are not yet zoologists, we are mere naturalists and collectors of specimens. The fact is unfortunate; but we have to accept it, we have to make the best of it." p.83

"Indeed, we may risk a generalization and say that whatever, in nature or in a work of art, resembles one of those intensely significant, inwardly glowing objects encountered at the mind's antipodes is capable of inducing, if only in a partial and attenuated form, the visionary experience." p.105

"Familiarity breeds indifference. We have seen too much pure, bright color at Woolworth's to find it intrinsically transporting. And here we may note that, by its amazing capacity to give us too much of the best things, modern technology has tended to devalue the traditional vision-inducing materials" p.115

"But visionary experience is not always blissful. It is sometimes terrible. There is hell as well as heaven." p.133

"Negative emotions- the fear which is the absence of confidence, the hatred, anger or malice which exclude love- are the guarantee that visionary experience, if and when it comes, shall be appalling." p.137-138

"After having had a glimpse of the unbearable splendor of ultimate Reality, and after having shuttled back and forth between heaven and hell, most souls find it possible to retreat into that more reassuring region of the mind, where they can use their own and other people's wishes, memories and fancies to construct a world very like that in which they lived on earth" p.139



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the idea of truth. Can human beings ever know the truth about life? Are transcendental experiences like those described by Huxley necessary to understand truth?

Discuss the importance of color and light. Compare the use of color and light in works of art to the color and light experienced by a mescaline user.

Discuss the idea of thought versus action. Explain the conflict between the two for both mescaline users and non-mescaline users. How can it be overcome?

What is the importance of the point of view of the author in each essay?

Explain how the structure of the essays both helps Huxley to make his point and hinders him from making his point.

Discuss the importance of art in both essays. Why does Huxley make so many references to art and artists?

Comment on the time period in which the work was written and its significance at that time.

What are the similarities and differences between the two essays and what significance do they have for the work as a whole?

Discuss symbols. Huxley feels that symbols and emblems are a critical aspect of the world in which we live. Do you agree with his feelings? Why or why not? What importance do symbols have in our everyday lives?

Discuss the different ways that Huxley says visionary experiences can be achieved. Explain why or why not each way will help an individual to achieve a visionary experience.

Explain the importance of religion in each essay. In what ways can religion provide a visionary experience? What is the overall religious message of the work as a whole?

Discuss language. How has language inhibited our ability to find the truth? How does language help us?