

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

ATW-39

Summing Up

Eugene, Oregon

March 25, 1975

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
535 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10017

Dear Mr. Nolte:

For the past three-and-a-half years I have written you irregular newsletters on a wide range of topics as I have traveled about checking out my interests in psychoactive drugs, medicinal plants, and altered states of consciousness. This is the last newsletter I will be writing you, and I thought I would use it to summarize some of what I have seen.

I have encountered no lack of drug use in any country I have visited and continue to think that this behavior is a prominent and universal characteristic of our species that is with us to stay. In our own country I see as much drug taking as ever, with the usual hypocrisy about alcohol, coffee, and tobacco and continuing benighted policy from governmental agencies. The much-publicized hearings held last spring by Senator Eastland on the "Marihuana-Hashish Epidemic in the United States and Its Threat to U.S. Internal Security" were a ghastly re-enactment of scare tactics used in the 1930's to justify the original marihuana laws, complete with a parade of research scientists from eminent universities armed with evidence of the latest horrors attributable to the

Andrew T. Weil is an Institute Fellow exploring altered states of consciousness in our own society and elsewhere.

weed. None of those reported effects will hold up when well-controlled experiments are performed.

I do see a hopeful sign in the increasing numbers of people who have learned by their own experience to use drugs intelligently. More and more young Americans are discovering how to use naturally psychoactive plants, which are inherently less dangerous than synthetic or derived drugs. Many persons are learning how to cultivate these plants, a development I favor strongly because I have seen repeatedly in my travels that people who grow their own drugs are always in better relationships with them than people who buy them from others. Home-grown drugs inspire more respect; they are more special in the user's life and so are put to wiser use. A bill before the current session of the Oregon legislature would permit marihuana users to grow limited numbers of plants for home consumption. In a state where simple possession of marihuana has already been decriminalized, with nothing but good results, such a step would greatly improve the public health of a significant portion of the state population.

When I first went to Latin America in 1971 I had some excessively romantic notions about Indians and their uses of natural drugs. My travels have shown me that Indians, like anyone else, have problems in controlling the abusive potential of intoxicants. In many Indian communities I have seen terrible forms of alcoholism, debasement of once-sacred magic plants, and grossly unenlightened uses of medicines. I have not, however, abandoned the idea that primitive peoples under ideal circumstances are able to incorporate the use of psychoactive plants into the fabric of their society in ways that benefit them. The catch is in the phrase "ideal circumstances." It is very difficult to find Indians in the Americas who have not suffered disastrously upon contact with our civilization. Symbolic of that disaster is the introduction of distilled alcohol into Indian life -- something that often happens within minutes of first contact.

The ideal of right use of natural drugs for socially desirable ends remains for me a worthwhile goal. I have seen glimpses of that possibility here and there, particularly during my time among the coca-using tribes of Colombia, and I remain convinced that making that possibility a reality depends upon the employment of certain principles of interacting with drugs that are easily transportable to our own culture.

My investigations have also strongly reaffirmed my belief in the essential identity of states of consciousness triggered by drugs and those obtained in other ways. I stated that belief in The Natural Mind just before I started traveling and have had running arguments about it with some drug users and researchers who maintain that drug experience is unique and cannot be replicated exactly without the drug. My own experiences of total eclipses of the sun, Indian sweat lodges, and other diversions reported in these newsletters leave me sure that my original belief was correct. I still feel that experiences induced by drugs really arise from the human nervous system, where they are potentially available at all times, and that after seeing the reality of those experiences by means of drugs, people can learn to have them in other ways.

Research on altered states of consciousness inevitably leads to interest in psychic phenomena because so many people who explore unusual states report experiences of telepathy, precognition, and so forth. I have had a chance to look into some of these occurrences and have come to some conclusions. First, I do not believe in the value of psychic research. It is hopeless to try to convince people of the reality of psychokinesis, ESP, or whatever by laboratory demonstrations, affidavits, or movies. The phenomena have a curious way of disappearing or becoming unconvincing as one tries to document them. I also remain quite suspicious of individuals who advertise themselves to be psychics and make a living that way. At the same time I remain a firm believer in the extraordinary

nature of human consciousness. I continue to regard intuition as a genuinely extrasensory perception worth developing for use in daily life. It is much more interesting than the ability to guess a playing card in a laboratory test of telepathy. I have written frequently about how we can change external reality in dramatic ways by purely internal operations, even to the extent of rendering harmful things friendly. That art is much more important than the ability, claimed by some, to bend nails and spoons by psychic means.

Our truly extraordinary capacities manifest themselves when we integrate activities of the two spheres of the mind. In writing about mushrooms I came to call these two the solar and lunar minds. The lunar mind is as real as the solar, connected with the activity of actual parts of the brain, unconscious only because we live mostly in our solar minds and put most of our waking attention there.

I believe more than ever that the effort to integrate the two minds is the greatest challenge set before us, that apparent external problems are really projections of the one internal problem, and that individuals who succeed in making their minds whole are the hope of the world. We live in a time of great crisis, when the collapse of the structure of society may come about within our lifetimes as the result of social and economic disorder, environmental catastrophe, or global war. Apocalyptic visions claim many followers in our country today. It is vital that we learn to explore the potentials of human consciousness, to throw off conceptions of reality that no longer work to our advantage, and to begin to take conscious responsibility for the creation of the world about us.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Andrew T. Weil". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Andrew T. Weil