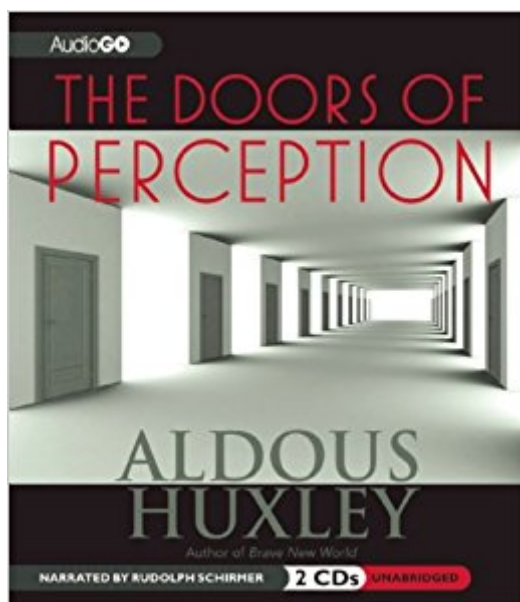


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The Doors Of Perception



Synopsis

The critically acclaimed novelist and social critic Aldous Huxley describes his personal experimentation with the drug mescaline and explores the nature of visionary experience. The title of this classic comes from William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things through narrow chinks of his cavern.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Huxley's 'experiment' in *The Doors of Perception* was a right of passage for many in my generation, and it's interesting to have such an intelligent analysis of the experience. He does waste a lot of words on something that is indescribable, but it seems to have been written in the first blush of excitement. And Huxley makes some very sound observations, as well, that have probably helped many people reconcile their own indescribable experiences. His conclusion that Mescaline and Lysergic Acid are relatively harmless for people in good health with an untroubled mind is probably objectionable today, especially among people who have never tried them. Looked at objectively, however, I wonder how this conclusion has stood the test of time. For myself, I believe he underestimated the long-term psychological challenges that cleansing those doors poses. I remember something I read long ago from Philip K. Dick saying how difficult life is after you've seen God's face. The realization afterwards that you'd been forced back to a colorless, banal existence - a prison, if I recall the sense of what Dick wrote - must surely be considered one of the long-term

psychological challenges that Huxley could not have fully appreciated when he wrote this book. The feeling of being a prisoner in the normal world of perceptions might conceivably result in a hunger to return often to that 'Antipodes of the mind' which, if felt too keenly, could cause permanent damage to be done to the mind's function as a 'limiting valve'.

"The Doors of Perception" is probably the most popular non-fiction work on the subject of psychedelic experiences; it is based on first account records of the author's decision to experiment the consequences of intake of small amounts of mescaline, in an attempt to reach enlightenment and escape world's boredom. Being who he was, the result is a very interesting narrative in which the author expands on his not only scientific but also philosophical, religious, and artistic ideas. The philosopher C.D. Broad suggested that our brains are genetically programmed to screen perceptions, selecting only those that are necessary for survival. By doing so, humans close the doors to what Huxley calls "Mind-at-Large," thereby losing access to the world of unconsciousness and wonder. Only through the use of chemical substances can a human being free himself from his inherited limitations, experience the realms of supernaturally brilliant visionary experiences, and obtain total freedom from the ego. In this new stage of consciousness, spatial and time relationships cease to exist, whilst intensity, profundity of significance are augmented. Our everyday reliance on language petrifies perception because "however expressive, symbols can never be the things they stand for." There is a need for a less exclusively verbal system of education and "an occasional trip through some chemical Door in the Wall!" Huxley's work is highly controversial and paradoxical. How are we to develop a science of perception if our language is not equipped to express that same perception? How are we to explain the differences in reaction to mescaline intake, ranging from peaceful and mystical to schizophrenic behavior?

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