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To Whom it May Concern:

It has been said that the first casualty in any war is the truth. Perhaps truth is at even greater risk in metaphorical "wars" than in combat. Truth and its ally science, never wholeheartedly on any side, frequently get caught in the cross-fire.

One sad example of that dynamic is the distortion and suppression of science in the service of the "war on drugs." I have been working on and thinking about drug abuse control policy for more than a quarter of a century, as a Justice Department policy analyst, a university teacher, and a consultant. Most of my own research focuses on illicit markets and how law enforcement shapes them, but I try to pay attention to all aspects of drug problems and policies.

There is little doubt that one class of substances - 5HT-2A receptor agonists (known variously as hallucinogens, psychedelics, or, in some applications, entheogens) - has considerable potential for encouraging psychological growth and enhancing spiritual awareness. This group includes the tryptamines such as psilocybin and LSD, as well as the phenethylamines such as mescaline.

These chemicals are demonstrably safe when used under controlled conditions: in the laboratory, in the clinic, or in a ritual setting. Yet public agencies, including research agencies, systematically deny or ignore these realities, and reject studies designed to explore the relevant phenomena without regard to scientific merit.

Recently, one study in particular has generated great interest. A team at Johns Hopkins gave psilocybin to healthy volunteers, and reported the results in *Psychopharmacology*, the leading journal in the field. In that study a single dose of psilocybin, given to someone without prior hallucinogen experience but with some established spiritual interest, had a three-in-five chance of sparking a major mystical experience and a two-in-three chance of being rated among the five most meaningful experiences of a lifetime when subjects were asked about it two months later.

The journal's editorial, along with invited commentaries from a former Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, a former deputy "drug czar" under William Bennett, and a likely future Nobel laureate, were uniformly enthusiastic. All urged vigorous pursuit of the line of work just opened. Scientists reviewing the application to NIDA for follow-up research agreed, placing the proposal in the top 7% of all proposals submitted that year. And yet the NIDA Director issued a chilly press release about the study when it was released and just last month declined to approve follow-up funding.

As a result, the Hopkins team, carefully built over eight years and representing a substantial commitment of research capital, may not be able to continue their collaboration.

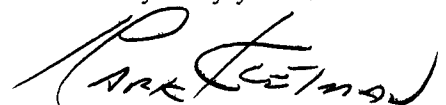
That, it seems to me, would be a great loss. The results of that first study raise profound questions of policy and law, especially in light of the recent unanimous Supreme Court decision affirming that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act extends to the ritual use of hallucinogens, which must therefore be permitted unless there is a particularized showing of danger. We need to know much more than we do now about the phenomenology and consequences of hallucinogen-induced mystical experience, and how those consequences vary with the social and ritual surround.

In a world torn by religious strife, the potential spread of personal mystical experience holds out hope for creating bridges between cultures. In stark contrast to the discord and violence that sometimes erupts between believers and ministers of differing faiths when they focus on doctrine rather than direct religious experience, psychologists and sociologists of religion report that mystics from different traditions are rarely hostile to one another.

Under the circumstances, it seems to me that support of further work by the Hopkins team is among the highest value-per-dollar uses of charitable funds. The Council on Spiritual Practices, under the able and patient leadership of Robert Jesse, was the driving force in getting the Hopkins project started, and CSP supported it through completion. Now, government dollars having been denied, Bob (with a selflessness entirely typical of him) has set up a "CSP Fund" at the San Francisco Foundation with which to continue the Hopkins research. This fund may also serve other efforts which, it is to be hoped, will spring up in response to the vast range of new research questions which have emerged from work just completed. But it will not pay for any of the expenses of CSP itself, and Bob will continue to draw no salary for his efforts.

Accordingly, I have committed 5% of my pre-tax gross income to the CSP Fund, for as long as it continues to operate. That sum, unfortunately, is not very large relative to the needs or opportunities at hand, so I hope that those who can write larger checks without undue financial strain will consider doing so.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Kleiman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and "K".

Mark Kleiman