

"A FASCINATING OVERVIEW (AND) A VALUABLE STUDY OF A DIFFICULT
INTERACTION BETWEEN HUMANS AND ALTERED STATES."
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S T U A R T W A L T O N

Out of It: A Cultural History of Intoxication

Stuart Walton

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“Like any good cocktail, this book brings together tasty ingredients in a delicious mix.” —*Boston Herald*

“Walton is hilariously well-versed in wine terminology, and his wit is deliciously dry.” —*Seattle Weekly*

Out of It is a thoroughly addictive examination of intoxicants, from the everyday substances of alcohol, caffeine, and tobacco to the illicit realm of opiates, amphetamines, and hallucinogens. More than a mere (if heady) catalog of intoxicants, however, Stuart Walton’s book is a smart, wry look at why intoxication has always been a part of the human experience—from our earliest Stone Age rituals to the practices of the ancient Greeks and Romans, right on up through the Victorian era and ending with a flourish in modern times—and more significantly, why the use of intoxicants is, and will continue to be, an essential part of being human.

“An insightful overview of humanity’s historical and cultural attachment to various intoxicants. . . . It deserves a prominent place in the emerging discussion reshaping understanding and policies regarding intoxication and the use of drugs and alcohol.”—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred)

“Walton is particularly, and convincingly, engrossing, an elegant and forceful stylist.”—*The Guardian*

Out of It: A Cultural History of Intoxication Details

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Brianne Walasek says

FASCINATING... how can you hate a book that says the pursuit of intoxication is as much a part of human nature as hunger, sex and greed?

Erik Graff says

The author, a wine critic, has written a delightful appreciation of intoxication and the means by which humans have sought it from prehistory to the present. Seeing the pursuit of ecstasy, given its ubiquity, as a species given, Walton delivers as well a critique of the various wars on drugs from the Islamic prohibition of terrestrial alcohol (wine is fine in the afterworld) thru Nixon and Reagan and the contemporary government of the U.K.

While refreshingly positive about the use of drugs from caffeine and nicotine to opium and cocaine, Walton does acknowledge that some intoxicants are inherently dangerous. He sees little to recommend the sniffing of glues or gasoline. He does note, however, that the prohibition of relatively innocuous drugs, such as pot, can lead kids towards the really dangerous stuff, like the inhalants, which are common, legal and readily available.

The best guide I know to the psychoactives conducive to intoxication/ecstasy is the book Buzzed, itself a sort of encyclopaedia. This sprightly text, sharing a similar practical perspective, might be taken as a gloss on that reference book.

Mitch says

A rambling collection of tidbits about drugs. A real chore to slog through as the author insisted on cramming every sentence with new vocabulary from his word-of-the-day calendar. Also, drugs are good.

Alan says

It definitely gave me a lot to think about though pretty self-righteous at moments.

Nathan says

Walton takes a refreshingly libertarian view of intoxicants, which adds a little verve to his boring narrative and prose. Quick and forgettable.

Stefanie says

I haven't read this in a while, but I will say that years ago when I did, this was the one book that most influenced my philosophy and understanding about drugs and drug use, and inspired me to pursue a job in the field of drug policy reform, where I work today to change this country's drug laws.

Robert says

Thorough but dull rehash of attitudes regarding familiar psychoactive substances.

Andy V says

Lovely anecdotes, Stuart. To pen probably took all of an afternoon with Encyclopaedia Britannica, back issues of National Geographic and Readers Digest from the 80s. The bright orange jacket and bomb human head should've set alarm bells jangling.

Who doesn't like to get 'out of it', once in awhile? Just look in your nearest supermarket chiller. There is no need to examine mummified remains to justify drug reform (of the most onerous and unjust laws). Just focus on prohibition and it's demise.

Noticeably absent is any mention of the downright disgusting privatised prison system of the USA. Highly pertinent and very relevant to this discussion.

If only these same drug laws could be applied to imprison the puritanical imbecile charlatans peddling religion. This would go a long way to rectifying the imbalance. Maybe one day.

Brandon says

made wanna go take lots of drugs. and accually, i did end up taking lsd again after reading it. also foud it very interesting to discover coffee was banned in a ancient cultures. overall worth the read.

Amanda says

Much more academic than I thought it would be. But filled with great information and quite a page-turner! I fully endorse the creation of intoxicology as a serious area of study.

julieta says

Everything there is to know on the history of intoxication. Some interesting facts I didn't know about before, or drugs like ketamine, who knew people would be using anesthesia used for animal for recreative purpose. Damn interesting.

Samantha says

this book was given to me by a friend who knew me all too well. the history starts from as far back as the author could go, detailing the ancient greeks and their, er, bathing rituals. if you don't like pronouncing greek names, the first 75 pages probably aren't for you. he goes from there to indian cultures eating hallucinogens for thirty days in the jungle and any other crazy rites of passage that exist. through european history, a delightful account of how sigmund freud single-handedly killed his assistant with cocaine. into america, temperence movements, the LSD revolution, how to go "skiing" in the 1970s and 80s, and how to form holes in your brain from serotonin depletion in the 1990s. the book is a wonderful look at the ubiquity of mind-altering substances, from the infancy of human culture to the present day stalemate we find ourselves in concerning the drug war. the author himself makes no secret of his habit of popping speed and snorting other stimulants, and sometimes you get the feeling that he's turned somewhat pedantic in his summation of this family of drugs, as he kind of endorses these drugs over the others. whatever, pick your poison. the books is extremely thorough, a vast study on everything you'd ever want to know about intoxication.

Kate says

The cultural/historical content of use is fascinating, especially when tied to current political policies. My only complaint is that the author can come off long-winded and a bit erudite, which will turn some readers off. It almost turned me off; it took me a few months to slog through the book when I can usually tear through a book in a week.

Vivian says

This book was a real slog. The author's impassioned and intelligent arguments, and his impressive breadth of knowledge on a variety of intoxicants, at times got lost in a lot of meandering verbiage. A good editor could have tightened up this text considerably, and much to the reader's benefit.
