

The Drug Named “Control”

Written by Connor Boyack.

Over the past several decades, governments at all levels of society have incorporated into their codified laws prohibitions against drugs. Reviewing lists of banned substances has become an exercise in linguistic gymnastics. Consider just a few of the many, many items placed on prohibition by the government: gamma-Hydroxybutyric acid, a general anesthetic with minimal side effects; 12-Methoxybogamine, used to help cure opiate addiction; 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, used medically to help treat post-traumatic stress disorder; alpha-methyltryptamine, an anti-depressant; and dihydrocodeinone enol acetate, a semi-synthetic substance similar to hydrocodone, a popular pain reliever.

Here in Utah, the state government has gone so far as to ban a synthetic marijuana substitute called “Spice” as well as *bath salts*. But despite the sustained attack on all sorts of natural and synthetic drugs, there is one drug—an extremely addictive and popular one— that government will never prohibit.

Drugs laws in general are predicated on the assumption that though drug consumption is an individual behavior, the effects of that consumption, especially in the aggregate, are a net negative to society. Laws punishing the production, distribution, and use of drugs are therefore an attempt to prevent individuals from causing harm to society as a whole.

In pursuing such policies, the government which seeks to discourage drug use in fact encourages the abuse of and addiction to the one drug it loves and will never outlaw: control. Infinitely more problematic than a man ingesting marijuana is the politician who abuses the institution of government to exercise powers that have no legitimate basis nor delegated authority. This infectious addiction has permeated all levels of government, becoming a contagion spreading to every policy and issue in which government has any influence and impact.

Initially, a few people who had access to it experimented with this drug and had limited success in getting the “high” they sought after. Over time, trial and error has produced a far more potent synthesis of the drug which has created countless thousands of addicts and untold destruction to society.

Thomas Jefferson, in his first inaugural address, asked:

Sometimes it is said that man cannot be trusted with the government of himself. Can he, then, be trusted with the government of others? Or

have we found angels in the forms of kings to govern him? Let history answer this question.

History has conclusively answered the question. The overwhelming majority of government edicts seek to control the behavior of peaceful people by regulating, criminalizing, mandating, and subsidizing their actions. While such central planners excuse their policies in prohibiting drug use on grounds that such drug use hurts other people within that drug user's sphere of influence, they fail to apply the same standard to themselves. The arrogation and abuse of authority to use coercion against other people whose lives they wish to shape has a far more disastrous effect on society as a whole than does the ingestion of a plant by a man in his home. The latter's actions may only negatively affect the lives of a few people, if at all. The former's actions, on the other hand, affects the lives of all who have the misfortune of living under his jurisdiction.

Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis once wrote:

Experience should teach us to be most on our guard to protect liberty when the government's purposes are beneficial... the greatest dangers to liberty lurk in insidious encroachment by men of zeal, well meaning but without understanding.

Similarly Noah Webster cautioned us:

Good intentions will always be pleaded for every assumption of authority. It is hardly too strong to say that the constitution was made to guard the people against the dangers of good intentions. There are men in all ages who mean to govern well, but they mean to govern. They promise to be good masters, but they mean to be masters.

Many people fret over the "second hand" effects of a person's drug consumption, and rightly so. To the extent that one individual's actions cause harm to another individual, then there is opportunity for the law to intervene and uphold justice. Yet those who so often clamor for the law to control a person's drug consumption and discourage drug use become, in the process, enablers of a far more deadly, addictive drug whose side effects create not only "second hand" concerns, but rather permeate the entire social fabric and affect millions of lives with the single stroke of a pen.

If we are to outlaw drugs, then let us criminalize the worst drug of them all: the coercive control of sovereign individuals. Let us reject the notion that the punitive arm of the state can and should be employed to exceed its moral authority and instead impose whatever a majority of a legislature wishes. And most importantly, we must eliminate the cognitive dissonance permeating our society which supports outlawing certain harmful drugs while deeply inhaling the worst of them all.

By criminalizing an individual's drug consumption, the government turns a personal problem into a national disaster. But by allowing the criminalization of that drug, we turn a personal drug addiction into a systemic one. The second-hand effects felt by a few then become the routine oppression felt by us all.

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