

Nothing to Fear about Drugs... But Fear Itself

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“Dream with me for a moment. What would be wrong if we had perfectly safe intoxicants? Drugs that delivered the same effect (sensations) as the most popular ones but never caused dependency, disease, dysfunction, or death.

Imagine an alcohol type substance that never caused dependence, liver disease, hangovers, impaired driving or workplace problems. Would you care to inhale a perfumed mist that is as enjoyable as cannabis or tobacco but as harmless as clean air? How about a pain reliever as effective as morphine but safer than Aspirin (which causes overdose fatalities every year) or a mood enhancer that dissolves on the tongue and is more appealing than cocaine and less harmful than caffeine, a tranquilizer less dependency producing than a Valium and more relaxing than a martini, a safe sleeping pill that allows you to choose to dream or not to dream or perhaps you would care to munch on a user friendly psychedelic that is as brief, benign, but inspiring as a good movie?”

Drug users, in general, do not want to become dependent. When drug abuse does occur nowadays, abusers must admit they are powerless over all psychoactive drugs, remain totally abstinent and need to surrender to a “higher power” (usually the treatment program itself). To many drug abusers such “treatment” is little more than “ceremonial degradation” and treatment itself becomes something that is “feared and loathed”. Rehab needs to change so that when people are offered rehab, they benefit.

History shows that we, as a species, have always used drugs. In every age, in every part of the world, people have pursued intoxication with mind altering substances. We are not the only ones to do this. Almost every species of animal has engaged in this natural pursuit of intoxicants. In fact ancient peoples learned about natural plant drugs by watching animals consume them e.g. shepherds discovering coffee by watching goats eat the berries. Such behavior has so much force and persistence that it functions, as UCLA psychopharmacologist Ronald Siegel advises in *Intoxication: the universal drive for mind altering substances*, like a drive, just like our other drives of hunger, thirst, and sex, sleep.

The pursuit of intoxication is also a drive and a natural part of our biology, creating a demand for drugs. In a sense, the war on drugs is a war against ourselves, a denial of our basic nature.

It is only the institutionalization of the puritan ethos that stands as an impediment to current and future psycho pharmacology. Sociologists call this “cultural lag” in which outdated understanding, attitudes and behaviors compromise technological advances. In other words, this culture is simply too afraid of drugs when the only thing to fear about drugs is fear itself.

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