

Marijuana, Death of All that is Holy

Nathan Reents 2009

Marijuana legalization is a polarizing topic. For some it's the bane of civilized society, while for others it's a harmless trip down Psychedelic Lane. Unfortunately, the effects of marijuana are all too often ignored or downplayed, misleading some into thinking that marijuana isn't harmful or is even beneficial. Much of the support for marijuana legalization is centered around the myth that it's a viable medicine with a variety of uses. However, marijuana should never be legalized because of the powerful, adverse side-effects it causes in users and because of its complete uselessness in dealing with anything.

Marijuana is a melting pot of dangerous and harmful chemicals, with over 400 substances contained in every plant. While many of these chemicals are destroyed when burned in a cigarette, they're replaced with many more, including carbon monoxide, cyanide, and tar. (A. Strumolo) All of these chemicals get deposited in user's lungs after being inhaled, screwing up their respiratory systems and giving them ugly teeth. Of these chemicals, there is one that is the most potent. Tetrahydrocannabinol, referred to by those less sophisticated as THC, is the psychoactive drug that produces the effects most sought by marijuana smokers. Tetrahydrocannabinol produces a large variety of effects, including a sense of sleepiness, heightened creativity, the munchies, and a greater appreciation for children's cartoons. There are also some less-obvious effects of Tetrahydrocannabinol, such as impairment of the ability to learn and retain information, but, while high, most users are generally less concerned with learning and more concerned with getting a snack. (A. Strumolo)

There are hazardous physical effects of marijuana that go along with the mental impacts. These include a risk of sterility, heightened heart rate and blood pressure, and a slower reaction time, which can and does become very dangerous while driving. Users also tend to become incredibly lethargic, unwilling to do much of anything. (A. Strumolo) Normally, these effects fade away a few days after smoking. However, for long-term users of marijuana, these effects begin to stay longer and longer, often lingering for weeks at a time. Heavy users also tend to develop a tolerance for Tetrahydrocannabinol, requiring larger and larger doses to gain the desired effects of the drug. (G. Biernson) This increased need for the drug can really put a strain on the wallet, possibly causing one to choose between seeing the latest Saw movie and getting baked.

Despite these obviously harmful effects of smoking marijuana, there are many who believe that the drug holds great potential as a medicine. This is complete bollocks. Modern medicine has advanced in leaps in bounds since the early 20th century, and drugs as imprecise as marijuana certainly do not hold to current standards. In modern times, medicines have to be heavily researched to discover all of the effects of administering them. Should the benefits manage to outweigh the negative side-effects,

further research would be required to ascertain the proper dosage for which the medicine would be administered. Unfortunately for those wanting a good excuse to toke, marijuana is a horribly impractical medicine.

When marijuana is the subject matter, everything is a side-effect. One of the most touted uses of medical marijuana is its potential to increase the appetites of those suffering from AIDS, who generally would waste away to nothing. (B. Demmer) This is akin to prescribing alcohol to those suffering from depression. Accompanying this increase in appetite would be extreme lethargy, a total head-trip, and horribly reduced reaction times. That's quite a price to pay just to be a little hungry, something that could be accomplished by any number of commercial medications on the market, including Marinol, which uses a synthetic form of THC to get the same effect. Even moderate exercise has been proven to effectively increase appetite.

Another supposed use for marijuana is as a painkiller, as many have reported marijuana to work better than morphine to relieve pain (From Marijuana to Medicine). Despite the obvious implications that the pain was reduced because the (illegally-used) marijuana was screwing with the users' heads, there are all kinds of commercial painkillers that could be used. If none of them work, then maybe the problem lies with the user and whatever pain they perceive themselves as experiencing and not with the painkiller medication that's been clinically proven to be effective.

Even at the most basic level, marijuana is not a viable medicine. Medical drugs have to be administered in measured doses, to be certain that the desired effects are achieved without overdosing. This becomes impossible with marijuana, because marijuana is a plant. A plant that people smoke. As marijuana cannot be grown to exact specifications, it cannot be dosed, as every plant will invariably be more or less potent than the ones next to it. THC concentrations can be vaguely controlled through plant species and growing conditions, but ultimately it will always be unique the individual plant. Add to that uncertainty 400 different chemicals contained within each plant, and attempting to use marijuana medically becomes laughably absurd.

Despite what supporters or opponents of marijuana legalization may say, the topic is a very difficult one. Both sides have, quite frankly, brilliant reasons for their respective right-ness, and both sides also rely heavily on petty arguments that quickly fold under heavy scrutiny. In truth, there is no right answer. Marijuana hurts people. Marijuana ruins lives. There's no way to stop this. Should it be legalized, the number of marijuana users would increase by leaps and bounds, and those impacted by the associated side-effects would become more prevalent. However, the continual ban on using marijuana also impacts millions of lives in a profoundly negative way, as arrestees pile up in jails and cartels continue to devastate everything around them. The question of marijuana is not finding a cure-all fix-all solution, but

simply to find the one that will cause the least pain. You can't help everyone, and you certainly can't please everyone.

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