

Free essay on legalization of medicinal marijuana

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The Legalization of Marijuana

The question of whether or not to legalize marijuana is one which has raised its head on a number of occasions and under a variety of contexts. Derived from the plant, *Cannabis Sativa* (Goode 1), it can be smoked or eaten or even inhaled through a vaporizer. Its effects can vary depending on the individual and its strength but it is generally thought of as being a psychoactive drug due to the effect it has on the user. Many people consider marijuana to be dangerous and to be the 'gateway' to other drug use and in terms of its use, it is only eclipsed by alcohol and tobacco (Goode ix). Its mythology tends to suggest that it is used primarily by teenagers and induces a relaxed, 'chilled out' mentality in the user. In truth, it is less of a stimulant than alcohol in the sense that there are less violent incidents following marijuana use than alcohol consumption, and as such, it seems strange that it is illegal when the latter is readily available in stores everywhere. Marijuana should be legalized.

Marijuana is a drug which is made from the leaves of the *Cannabis* plant. It is smoked as a cigarette, it can be inhaled via the use of paraphernalia such as 'bongs', it can be ingested orally and is often used in cooking or baking, or it can be made into a 'blunt' which is where it is rolled in a cigar paper and is often combined with another drug. It is popular amongst young people and this is probably due to it being recognised as being one of the least damaging of illegal substances. Arguably, young people might also use it so much due to its illegal status; if a young person under the age of twenty-one were to walk into a liquor store, they would be told to leave straight away or would even have the police rung about them. However, because marijuana is

already illegal, the sheer act of procuring it (and selling it) is already illegal: the dealer is unlikely to care about their age, for example, if he is already in possession of an illegal substance. Therefore, marijuana is a risky purchase but one which is less likely to lead to an immediate amount of trouble with the police. If marijuana was legalized, it seems obvious that the police and the various authorities would be able to manage it so much more succinctly than they currently are. The amount sold and consumed could be regulated and, arguably, many would lose interest in it due to the fact that it has that 'dangerous' element removed from it. Nobody gets a buzz from alcohol because it's dangerous, and removing the criminal element of marijuana would dull it down to the same effect.

There are, of course, medical issues which surround the use of marijuana: in a study comparing the health of those who do and those who don't smoke it, users' health was found to be worse (Eisohly 240). These included an elevated rate of respiratory problems, increased pulmonary complications, and increased numbers of visits to hospital or hospitalization amongst chronic marijuana smokers (Eisohly 240). Tests also show that marijuana is also associated with an increased likelihood of schizophrenia: between the years 1969-70, a study of 50, 087 young men was conducted in which the sample was designed to represent 97% of the country's 18-20 year old male population. The results showed that, from this sample, there was a clear correlation between marijuana use and increased mental health problems, such as schizophrenia (Ross 81). As scary as these statistics seem, it is vital to contextualise them by examining the negative health effects of the next two biggest drugs of choice: alcohol and tobacco. In the USA, tobacco is the

leading cause of preventable illness and death with 80% of lung cancer deaths being due to smoking, and with it causing roughly 443, 000 deaths every year (National Cancer Institute). Equally, the CDC list alcohol-induced health problems as ranging from unintentional injuries whilst drunk and an increased risk in sexual behaviour, right up to psychiatric problems such as depression and anxiety, and liver disease and various forms of cancer (CDC). In short, the message is clear: too much of anything is bad for you. Marijuana is harmful but then so is alcohol and tobacco, which are both available in every supermarket and store on the street. So why is marijuana treated differently?

The effects of smoking marijuana help to relax the user's body. The effects of the drug depend on a number of factors such as their previous use of the drug, how strong the marijuana is, what the user expects to happen and so on, but generally the user will either feel nothing at all or they will feel extremely relaxed and/or high (University of Oregon). In short, marijuana makes the user very passive. There are very few recorded examples of marijuana users exhibiting violent exploits whilst high. This is due to the relaxing nature of the drug. By comparison, the number of criminal offences that were carried out whilst under the influence of alcohol is palpable: on an average day in 1996, the authorities supervised around 5.3 million offenders; nearly 2 million of these offences were carried out after the offender had been drinking (Bureau of Justice). It is clear, from these statistics, that marijuana does not induce criminality in its users but rather the system criminalises the users for smoking dope.

Marijuana has also been proven to have medicinal qualities. Many have

argued the case that if someone was starving and needed to feed their child and stole a loaf of bread, would many of us consider that to be a wholly illegal and criminal act? Equally, if someone is in pain and is suffering, how many of us would condemn them for finding some solace in the use of marijuana? (Kent 14). Sufferers of glaucoma, for example, often find some peace in the smoking of marijuana: it helps to relieve pressure, alleviate the pain, and reduce the number of headaches which sufferers experience (Kent 15). Many sufferers of glaucoma are elderly and opt to use marijuana to help themselves feel better and to strengthen their sight. However, in the eyes of the law, this means that they are as guilty as a teenager who chooses to smoke it in his friend's basement for pleasure. In either of these scenarios, is anyone being directly affected by these choices? Is anyone being harmed? No. It is the choice of the individual and they each have their reasons for smoking it. In neither scenario are they affecting anyone else and so, why should their choices be criminalised? If an individual plays an excessive amount of video games, it can induce epilepsy, but video games aren't illegal because they come with a warning and it is left up to the individual to choose the correct path for himself, so why is it any different with the use of marijuana?

The reason for marijuana being illegal is clear: it does have some long-term health problems and it also contains psychoactive ingredients. However, evidence here shows that it does not create more problems in society, but rather society creates a problem out of marijuana for itself. By criminalising its users, we are creating a sense of self-fulfilling prophecy: marijuana creates criminality, or, rather, society criminalises marijuana. There is no

obvious reason for this other than a governmental desire to control its people. If we continue to remove the peoples' right to make their own choices then we are patronising and belittling them. Marijuana holds important medicinal qualities which could be harnessed to help relieve the suffering of countless people without criminalising them, and it also induces a strong, passive sense of relaxation which, in today's hectic world, is no bad thing. By legalizing marijuana, we would be choosing our battles wisely and it would free the police up to spend time more valuably on seeking out dangerous and threatening criminal elements, as opposed to little old women with glaucoma. Support the fight to legalize marijuana and stand up for your right to choose your own path in life and to make your own choices.

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