

Szasz vs goodin on legalization of drugs



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Should drugs be legalized? Drugs have been one of the major problems in our society for many years. The policy of the American government at present is against the legalization of drugs. However, this policy is costly, and it seems like an endless war. As time goes on, people start to examine some moral theories to explain what has happened and to predict what will happen if drugs are legalized. However, people have different opinions on the same question as usual. Two authors, Thomas Szasz and Robert E. Goodin, put forward their suggestions that oppose each other.

Szasz in his article, *The Ethics of Addiction*, proposed the legalization of drugs. He argued that using drugs is a personal matter. As long as this person does not harm other people, a government should not use its power to interfere. Goodin raised an objection that using drugs is a matter of personal choice, but ends up as a disease. Goodin doubted how much people recognize the addictive nature of tobacco and really accept the consequence. In addition, Goodin analyzed the costs of smoking and found that thus were astronomical. He suggested several ways in which we should handle the problems of smoking.

Let us go a step further to examine the divergence of views of two authors. First, Szasz and Goodin have different views on what drug addiction is. Szasz thought that the term "addiction" is moral judgment. In his article, Szasz stated, "the regular administration of morphine by a physician to a patient dying of cancer is the paradigm of the proper use of a narcotic; whereas even its occasional self-administration by a physically healthy person for the purpose of 'pharmacological pleasure' is the paradigm of drug abuse" (381).

The same drug, but in a different context or intention causes people to judge drugs differently.

Why? He concluded that our moral judgment actually played an important role. He said that using drugs is just a personal life style. But the society imposed the concept of “ drug abuse” on drug using. If we just treat drug abuse as a disease, then the society would deal with it in a different way. Goodin may respond to the argument in this way: a knife can be used as a cooking utensil or as a killing weapon. We do judge things depending on their context and intention. Moreover, if the drugs are addictive, which means when people wish to extricate themselves from these drugs, they cannot.

That results in addiction— “ the absence of feel will”(392); then a government has to take some measures to prevent what would happen. Second, Szasz and Goodin have different views on the risks that using drugs brings and what the governments should carry out in the matter of the drugs. Goodin doubted that if drug users voluntarily accept the risks, and how much they know about drugs at the beginning? Szasz thought that these risks are that “ physicians fear the loss of their privileges: laymen, the loss of their protection”(387). He cited some examples that people spent years on drugs without being addicted.

He argued that so-called “ addicted” people mean that people are just habituated. It is a learning process. And why should they break the habit? As for the government, he suggested that, “ in an open society, it is none of the government’s business what idea a man puts into his mind; likewise, it

should be none of the government's business what drug he puts into his body"(382). Goodin questioned that an addiction differed from a habit because " its tendency to generate compulsive, repetitive behavior in consequence has been well established"(392). The outcome of an addiction is predictable.

Scientific evidence has proven that the active ingredients of drugs can replace particular neurotransmitter receptors in central nervous system of human beings, which means drugs have the abilities to affect the behavior of drug users. And when drug users realize that drugs impair their health, they have to try very hard to resist the impulse. Therefore, a government should prohibit such things " on grounds of public health"(393). Szasz argued, " every individual is capable of injuring or killing himself"(382). It is a personal choice. The government's interfering is " degrading tyrannization"(382).

However, the government should be responsible for " safeguarding the purity of the product and veracity of the labeling" which prevent accidental overdose. Third, both authors mentioned the benefits and the costs of free trading on drugs. Szasz considered that " free trade would bring the price of narcotics down to a negligible amount"(384). Furthermore, he pointed out that if using drugs costs less and reduces crimes, and the government does not have to carry out those " cure" programs, such as narcotics addiction control commission, then we save money.

Goodin argued, " much evidence suggests that even rather large increases in the price of the product result in only slight decreases in sales to adult consumers"(394). Therefore, the price of drugs is not a decisive factor of

drug consumption. However, the medical costs that relate to drug use will increase; and the crimes that relate to drug use will also increase. The tangible part is just a small portion that compares to the intangible part. Free trade on drugs will not only cause harm to families' members, but it also has contagious effects.

Szasz stated that " the fear that free trade in narcotics would result in vast masses of our population spending their days and nights smoking opium or mainlining heroin, rather than working and taking care of their responsibilities, is a bugaboo that does not deserve to be taken seriously"(383). He questioned that alcohol, tobacco, and guns cause more problems, but they are legal. Goodin may admit that it is a fact; however, it does not mean drugs are safer than alcohol, etc. Szasz's statement in the above is just personal opinion, and it is not a convincing argument.

The authors have different opinions on the same issue. Regarding both sides of the argument, I support Goodin who opposed legalization of drugs. Let us analyze two examples that had related to legalization of drugs. I believe that if people would like to learn a lesson from history, then the Opium War in China is a best example. Opium appeared in China around 1500. It had been used as a medicine prior to 1800, and people and the government did not pay much attention about it. However, after 1800, the Chinese government exported tea and silk and imported opium from British, resulting in opium being sold in the markets.

People in all classes then had access to it, and they began to use it. The British government made huge profits from the growing number of Chinese

opium addicts. Subsequently the Chinese government realized that opium endangered public health and national safety, and raised an economical crisis. The Chinese government forbade the use of opium. This conflicted with the British making the profit of it. Hence a war that lasted for about a hundred years broke out. The harm that opium brought was incalculable. Numerous people died. There were no schools for the children and no hospitals for the patients.

People may ask this question: what if the Chinese government did not forbid the use of opium? Just let people do whatever they wanted to do. I would say the result would have been probably the same or worse. The war was not avoidable because the profits that the British gained from opium would not stop the British from conquering a weaker country. However, if the Chinese government had forbidden the use of opium from the beginning, then the war might have been avoided. The second example is that several European countries allow people to use marijuana.

For example, Holland has legalized certain drugs for over twenty years. It seems like a successful case of legalization of drugs. I have obtained some data in two opposing articles through the Internet. One is that Holland has “ 60% of the drug use that the US has by kids and adults including hard drugs and marijuana; Holland has a quarter crime rate, a quarter homicide rate, a quarter violent crime rate and a tenth of the incarceration rate of US”(Why the US Should Legalize Drugs, 7). Another is that “ Holland has decriminalized drugs and tried harm reduction.

Since the softening of drug policy there, shootings have increased 40%, robberies 62%, and car thefts 62%.... "(Drug Decriminalization in Holland Has Increased Crime and Addiction). Apparently the two articles opposed each other; however, they reached the same conclusion: no matter whether the drugs are legalized or not, the less the drugs use, the less the criminal cases there were. This is how people easily relate drugs to crimes. My personal opinion are as followed: first, many American people consider that we have an " unhealthy relationships with drugs because drugs are strictly forbidden"(Internet).

I do not agree with this. For example, we have to buckle our seat belts when we are driving a car. This is a law. Do we have an unhealthy relationship with the seat belts? There always is a conflict between the government's enforcement and personal interest. A government is a legal foundation that should serve people; therefore, it should respect a personal choice. People doubt that the enforcement of the government hinders the development of personal interest or the pursuing " highness" of a person. All these can be summed up as one problem: do we really need a government? This is another controversial issue.

Second, at the end of his article, Szasz concluded " we must choose between the ethic of collectivism and individualism, and pay the price of either—or of both"(388). This is dialectical logic. I agree with this. Everything has a good side and a bad side that associate together. If we choose individualism, then we can do whatever we would like to do. We may have our own happiness either in physical or emotional way; however, our society have to guarantee national safety so that we have personal freedom. Otherwise, the loss

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outweighs the gain. If we choose collectivism, we may give up some of our personal choices.

People do not live alone. We all live in a society. We have to take our responsibility for our roles. We have to realize that many drugs can be used as medicine if human beings do not use in an abused way. In another word, a drug has its beneficial side if we know how to use it properly. I understand that people want the freedom that hides behind the legalization of drugs; people do not want the drugs that do bring harm to human beings. I believe that people do not want to become the slaves of drugs. If someday human beings can say no to the drugs of their own will, then it is the time to legalize the drugs.