Section 11. Philosophy

Zhengbo Li,
Sophomore of Highschool,
Wellesley High School, named after Hongchun Li
E-mail: John.z.b.924@gmail.com

THE MORAL WRONG OF DRUG LEGALIZATION

"The said truth is that it is the greatest happiness of the greatest
number that is the measure of right and wrong."

Jeremy Bentham

Abstract. If more drugs are legalized, the number of available drugs for the average population will increase, which would result in more addicts. This increasing number of addicts would lead to significant unwanted effects, to both individuals and the whole society. Addiction does serious harm to human health and decreases the physical strength of human beings. Thus, an addict would most likely not be suitable to work, but at the same time, would still need to make money, perhaps even more money than before. If their income could not cover the cost of drugs, the likelihood of turning to robbery in order to fulfill their needs might increase, and a greater police force would then be needed to prevent crime. The decreasing number of police available for other purposes would make society less stable. People's first concern would be to survive but not to study or better themselves; if the addicts were parents, their children would also be affected. Additionally, if more people take jobs on the police force due to the increasing need for law enforcement, people working in other fields would decrease, and less innovation would take place. For these reasons, legalizing drugs is not the greatest good for the highest number of people, and should not be allowed by governments. In conclusion, from a utilitarian perspective, the legalization of drugs is morally incorrect.

Keywords: morality, utilitarianism, drug legalization, marijuana, Opium, accidents, illegal trades, Opium Wars, personal health, crimes, child development, addiction, addicts.

Introduction

Addiction takes over a person, and nothing is more addictive than certain kinds of drugs. Addicts not only damage their own lives, but also become a factor affecting their society. Governments of individual states in the United States are legalizing certain drugs and arguing for the overall good of such legalization. For instance, the state of Massachusetts has just legalized marijuana, which is a drug from the cannabis plant. It is used for medical and recreational purposes, and it can be smoked, vaporized, built into foods, or extracted. Some argue that marijuana is not addictive but research suggests otherwise. Results from the 2017 National Survey on Drug Use

and Health show that "approximately 4.1 million American adults over the age of 12 battled a marijuana use disorder in 2017" [13]. From a Utilitarian perspective, the possibility of potential negative consequences of the legalization of currently prohibited drugs is not the greatest good for most people, and thus it is a moral wrong. In this paper, I will argue that a product that does so little good for society and leads to primarily negative consequences is therefore morally wrong. Even though drugs have incredibly adverse effects, some argue that drug trade would support the economy, and would be subjected to more regulation were they legalized. The positive aspects of legalization would be true benefits if drugs did not have any other effects on society, but the negative impact on individuals and society outweigh any perceived benefits and makes the legalization of drugs a moral wrong.

Containment After the Legalization

If all drugs were legalized, they would be available at convenience stores and pharmacies. The ease of access would allow people with passing curiosity to try drugs without any of the former obstacles to stop them. For instance, the underaged group, which would not have had access to drugs previously, would be more likely to purchase them. The current restriction system is not efficient enough to prevent drug sales and related addictions. With current restrictive policies, alcohol and drug addiction is still a major issue in the U. S. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, "In 2015, 66.7 million people in the United States reported binge drinking in the past month" [13]. Furthermore, even with heavier restrictions, there are "27.1 million people were current users of illicit drugs or misused prescription drugs" [13]. The large number of people involved in using drugs indicate that the policies designed to control illegal drugs have failed. But abuse of legal substances is even more prolific. According to the data provided, the population which drinks alcohol is more than 100% larger than the population which used illicit drugs. Thus, if drugs

were legalized like alcohol, drug sales would likely significantly increase and would influence a larger population. In addition, according to the NCBI, not all alcohol trades were legal, "pseudo-underage buyers were able to purchase beer in 50% of 82 attempts (SD=0.50)." This high rate of illegal trades implies that when more drugs are legalized, the underaged could have easier access to them, just like they have a 50% rate of getting alcohol, which is also a legalized drug [15]. Even when it is legalized and under the supervision of the government, illegal trade still happens. This indicates that the government would not sufficiently be able to monitor and regulate drug trade after it is legalized. If not all drug sales are accounted for and monitored, the risk of spreading drugs widely is still extremely high. If tens of millions of people are using drugs illegally now, the number of people abusing drugs will grow exponentially with easier access. Thus, an increasing amount of people would be affected by drugs and the problems that accompany them, which would not produce the most good for most people. A Utilitarian framework for ethics tries to reason what is likely the greatest good for the most people. The likelihood that addiction will increase with easier access to drugs shows, therefore, that legalizing drugs is not morally right.

Effects on Individuals

Illegal drugs are more powerfully addictive than alcohol. The National Institute on Drug Abuse "estimates that nearly one-fourth (23 percent) of people who try heroin will become addicted" [14]. An addict's personal health is also significantly affected by drugs:

- Drug abuse and addiction can affect almost every system in your body. You probably know that drugs affect feelings and moods, judgment, decision making, learning, and memory. But they can also cause or worsen other health problems – cancer; heart disease; lung disease; liver function; mental disorders; and infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, and tuberculosis. Some of these effects occur when drugs are used at

high doses or after prolonged use, and some may occur after just one use [5].

People with mental illness and poor health find it physically hard to work, and studies have shown that over 42 percent of employees who have substance abuse or addiction in their family feel their productivity suffers as a result [1]. Thus, an increasing population affected by drugs would lead to a higher percentage of employees experiencing decreased productivity during work. Moreover, these employed addicts would make more mistakes and cost the company more. They would then face increased possibility of losing their jobs, which would result in failures to support themselves and their families. Unemployment due to poor work performance cannot be considered the highest good for the greatest number of people and, as drug abuse increases the risk of unemployment, it is thus not suitable for society.

During work time, addicts find it difficult to focus when attention is necessary. Data has shown that 15.1% of engineering and related technicians and 8.1% of all computer and mathematical scientists are dependent on or abusing drugs [4]. This high rate of drug abuse has high costs in terms of productivity. Addiction Center estimates "$25.5 billion dollars of this money [$81 billion dollars spent per year on drug abuse in the workplace] is spent due to lost productivity and absenteeism at work due to drug abuse each year. Another $25 billion is lost due to healthcare costs per year. Also, an estimated 80% of drug users supported their drug use by stealing from their work" [12]. Direct costs come to companies in other ways as well. According to studies, workers with alcohol problems were 2.7 times more likely than workers without drinking problems to have injury-related absences [1]. According to research, "approximately 16 percent of emergency room patients injured at work have alcohol in their system" [1]. The significant cost for both individual workers and their companies cannot be justified as the greatest good for most people.

Societal Influence

Addicts are not capable of living a safe and productive life. For instance, they cannot drive safely, yet many continue to drive. "According to the 2017 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), in 2017, 21.4 million people aged 16 or older drove under the influence of alcohol in the past year and 12.8 million drove under the influence of illicit drugs" [9]. It is reasonable to assume that legalized drugs would increase the rate of impaired driving and subsequent accidents. People working in many fields would also be affected by the lack of productivity that comes with addiction. They would not be able to do what they used to do, and they would need to rest more than before. This would lead to early retirement as other workers, in better physical condition, would replace them.

These hypothetical widespread consequences of addiction have historical precedent. Right before the Opium War, due to the importation of opium, "China found itself with many millions of addicts – men and women, court officials, students preparing for exams, soldiers going into combat, and common laborers seeking to overcome the pain and drudgery of their work" [11, 937]. However, when people affected by drugs lose their jobs, they still need drugs to fulfill their need to get high. The damage that drugs cause society is potentially significant, and if more drugs are introduced to the market, the potential possibility of more harm would be higher, thus increasing potential damage. These risks make the legalization of drugs contrary to any plan for the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

Subsequent Effects

Drugs like cocaine and heroin are extremely addictive and expensive. In Cleveland, 1/10 gram of heroin is worth $10–20, 1 gram is worth $90–120 [2]. People without jobs are usually not able to afford drugs, especially when large quantities are needed because of addiction. People who struggle with addiction will do anything they can to prevent their suffering, but without money they often are unable to provide for themselves. They might commit robberies, even with great

risk to themselves, as robbery would lead to more relief than pain as compared with other options (for example, visiting a drug rehabilitation center to go through a long, painful withdrawal). If they succeed, they gain money to get high, and do not have to worry about working for a while, so robbery might seem like the best option to them. If more drugs were legalized, the possibility of more addicts would increase the chance of robberies and other crimes, and would thus cause problems for social stability. Furthermore, in the U.S., with legalized guns, the chance of violence would be even higher. When addicts have firearms, they could cause more potential damage. The study "Loaded: Gun Involvement among Opioid Users" suggests that "opioid users had significantly higher rates of gun involvement than persons in alcohol detoxification; for example, 31.3% (vs. 3.9%) had carried a gun for protection, 45.1% (vs. 25.5%) had been threatened with a gun, and 13.8% (vs. 2.0%) had shot at another person" [10]. With the higher possibility of gun violence and casualties during robberies, the potential threat of such events is sizeable. It is reasonable to assume that in a society with legalized drugs, a larger police force would be required to protect innocent people from increasing theft and violence. The increasing chance of people being injured and the necessity of a larger police force is not the greatest good for most people.

The purpose of a police force is not only to protect people from robbery and the police must serve many other purposes. However, because a greater number of police force would be needed to handle robbery, police available for other purposes would decrease. The entire police force would need to increase to protect citizens, but since the total number of people in the U.S. would not increase, it could lead to one of the two undesirable results. First, as few people want to work in law enforcement, the police would not be able to recruit enough new officers. Second, if people did become police officers just to fight the increase in crime, people who might have been great scientists might end up in the police department and their contribution to society would

not be maximized. Eventually, this might lead to a safe society, but fewer innovations might take place than should in normal society.

People in such a society would prioritize their survival and they wouldn't study as much as they would in a safer place. Especially for children, the environment which they live in could greatly affect their development of habits. According to the NIH, "the home environment, especially during childhood, is a very important factor. Parents or older family members who use drugs or misuse alcohol, or who break the law, can increase children's risk of future drug problems" [3]. If the children also do drugs, their future would be extremely limited and all their talents would be wasted, study have shown that addicts will "will compulsively seek and use drugs even though doing so brings devastating consequences to his or her life, and for those who care about him" [6]. In pregnant mothers, drug abuse is "interfering with normal fetal development, damaging the baby's organs, damaging the placenta and putting the baby's life at risk, and increasing the risk of miscarriage" [7]. The mother accepted the risk which might sacrifice the health and life an unborn baby; under all scenarios, drugs have threatened and limited the future of the youth. A decision that puts the children of a society at such risk is not the greatest good for the greatest number and is therefore not a moral good.

Failure of Prior International trade

As new products are introduced to the market, legal drugs might boost the local and national economy and trade, but such economic benefits would be short lived. Developing an international trade would not be any different, as it would not be beneficial for participants and the situation would be more complicated if the drug trader opened new markets by exporting drugs to foreign lands. Even for countries where drugs are still illegal products, drug trades could still develop. For instance, in China in the 1800s, "opium importation was illegal, it had to be smuggled into China, thus flouting Chinese law" [11, 936]. In 1838, the British exported 40,000 chests, each of which

held about 130 to 160 pounds of opium [8, p. 74–75]. Though risky, the huge profit was worth it. Thus, legalizing drugs in one market could lead to negative consequences in other markets.

People argue that government regulations could prevent overdoses, and taxation of legal drugs could be used to provide treatment centers for addicts; whereas now criminals control the market and no taxes are collected on this commerce. However, it is challenging for the government to fully control and monitor all legal drug trading. If drugs are legalized, criminals who now sell drugs could then do business with a lower risk. History suggests that it is close to impossible to regulate the drug trade. In China, the Opium trade caused great damage; it led to the collapse of the tea transportation industry, which led to the displacement of many laborers who later became addicts [8 p. 74–75]. The addicts existed because of the Opium importation, and lead to the destruction of many industries. Because of the cause was the only the Opium Trade, thus further drug legalization and international drug trade would cause a similar consequence. Thus, in conclusion drug legalization was not moral. Furthermore, in 1838, the Chinese government attempted to change the situation. One of its officials, Liz Zexu, "imposed increasingly severe penalties on users and traffickers and destroyed 20,183 chests of confiscated opium" leading to the first Opium War [8, 74]. The British won a complete victory over the Qing dynasty, and in order to satisfy the British, the Qing dynasty signed the Nanjing treaty, which the emperor Daoguang rejected saying, "nothing will induce me to derive revenue from the vice and misery of my people" [8, p. 75–76]. Despite all this, the amount of opium transported into China was not affected, and there were an increasing number of addicts, causing more problems. The Qing Dynasty then lost the second Opium War, which allowed more foreigners to trade and travel, and lost control of its own territory [11, p. 937–938]. The failure to stop the trade indicated that the Chinese government lacked agency over its market and society. Even the Qing government tried to resist, but the resistance only led to war, and more damage to the country. In conclusion, the legalization lead to these consequences which could not be morally justified as greatest good for most people, so legalization is not the greatest good for most people, and is thus wrong.

Conclusion

Everything has another side to it; even legalizing drugs has some short-termed positive effects. However, it is long-term effects that destabilize society, and the effects on the next generation are too significant to ignore. People's life and property are threatened and their own future is destroyed by drug addiction. Legalized drugs would be harmful to society, and the government should proceed cautiously with any legalization effort because of all the effects that legalization could have on society. It is reasonable to posit that society would be safer and better without drugs; it is therefore morally right to limit them as much as possible.

References:

1. "Addiction in the Workplace – Occupational Hazards of Drug Use," AddictionCenter, 2018. [Online]. Available: URL: https://www.addictioncenter.com/addiction/workplace/ Accessed: 25-Dec-2019.
2. Brown D. "Study: The Cost, Quality and Availability of Drugs Around Cleveland," Cleveland Scene, 11-Feb-2015. [Online]. Available: URL: https://www.clevescene.com/scene-and-heard/archives/2015/02/11/study-the-cost-quality-and-availability-of-drugs-around-cleveland/ Accessed: 25-Dec-2019.
3. "Drug Misuse and Addiction," Drugabuse.gov, 2018. [Online]. Available: URL: https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugs-brains-behavior-science-addiction/drug-misuse-addiction/ Accessed: 25-Dec-2019.

4. "Drug Use in the Workplace," Treatment 4 addiction.com, 2010. [Online]. Available: URL: https://www.treatment4addiction.com/find-out/drug-use-by-occupation/ Accessed: 11-Oct-2019.

5. "Get the Facts: Drug Abuse Puts Your Whole Body at Risk | Scholastic: Nida," Scholastic.com, 16-Oct-2007. [Online]. Available: URL: http://headsup.scholastic.com/students/get-the-facts-drug-abuse-puts-your-whole-body-at-risk/ Accessed: 08-Dec-2019.

6. "How Drugs Alter Brain Development and Affect Teens | Get Smart About Drugs," Getsmartaboutdrugs.gov, 2017. [Online]. Available: URL: https://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.gov/consequences/how-drugs-alter-brain-development-and-affect-teens/ Accessed: 09-Dec-2019.

7. "Pregnancy-medication, drugs and alcohol," Vic.gov.au, 2012. [Online]. Available: URL: https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/pregnancy-medication-drugs-and-alcohol/ Accessed: 09-Dec-2019.

8. Primary Source, Inc, China in the world: a history since 1644. Boston: Cheng & Tsui Company, 2009.– P. 70–80.

9. "Results From the 2017 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Detailed Tables," Sep. 2018.

10. Stein M. D., Kenney S. R., Anderson B. J., and Bailey G. L., "Loaded: Gun involvement among opioid users," Drug and Alcohol Dependence,– Vol. 187.– Jun. 2018.– P. 205–211.

11. Strayer R. W. Ways of the world: a brief global history with sources, 2nd ed.– Boston Mass.: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2013.– P. 930–940.

12. "Substance Abuse and Addiction in the Workplace – Addiction Center," AddictionCenter, 2017. [Online]. Available: URL: http://www.addictioncenter.com/addiction/workplace/ Accessed: 08-Dec-2019.

13. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US and Office of the Surgeon General (US, "Introduction and Overview of the Report," Nih.gov,– Nov, 2016. [Online]. Available: URL: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK424860/ Accessed: 08-Dec-2019.

14. The Recovery Village. "Can You Become Addicted to Heroin the First Time?," The Recovery Village, 13-Dec-2014. [Online]. Available: URL: https://www.therecoveryvillage.com/heroin-addiction/faq/addicted-first-time/#gref/ Accessed: 11-Oct-2019.

15. Toomey T. L., Erickson D. J., Patrek W., Fletcher L. A. and Wagenaar A. C. "Illegal Alcohol Sales and Use of Alcohol Control Policies at Community Festivals," Public Health Reports,– Vol. 120.– No. 2.– Mar. 2005.– P. 165–173.