

Marijuana and the Politics of Reality *

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It is asserted that the marijuana controversy is primarily a political, rather than a scientific, debate. It is a struggle to establish moral hegemony. Stances toward marijuana use and legalization are largely a manifestation of prior basic underlying ideological commitments. Scientific truth or falsity seem to have little or no impact on the positions taken-although both sides will invoke scientific findings and in fact will actually believe them-and have been preselected to verify a position already taken. Widely used concepts such as "drug abuse" reflect the ideological character of the controversy.

INTRODUCTION

ONE of the more mystifying chapters in recent social research is the seemingly totally contradictory conclusions arrived at in regard to marijuana use. It is possible that no sector of social behavior is more disputed. To raise empirical questions concerning aspects of marijuana use is to arouse a hornet's nest of controversy. Even the fundamental question of the effects of the drug on the human mind and body is hotly disputed; two descriptions, both purporting to be equally "objective," often bear no relation to one another whatsoever² Is marijuana a drug of "psychic dependence"? Or is it meaningless to speak of dependency in regard to marijuana? Does marijuana cause organic damage to the brain? Are its effects criminogenic? How does it influence the over-all output of activity-in popular terms, does it produce "lethargy" and "sloth"? Does it precipitate "psychotic episodes"? What, specifically, is its impact on artistic creativity? What is the drug's influence on mechanical skills, such as the

ability to drive an automobile? Does the use of marijuana "lead to" heroin addiction?

These are questions which can be answered within the scope of empirical sociological, psychological and pharmacological scientific technique. Each query can be operationalized. Indices can be constructed; tests can be devised. Occasionally they are. Yet the zones of widespread agreement are narrow indeed. Surely this should puzzle the sociologist. We propose, therefore, to explore some of the likely sources of this controversy, and to attempt a partial explanation for this almost complete discord.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY³

All civilizations set rules concerning what is "real" and what is not, what is "true" and what "false." All societies select out of the data before them a world, one world, the "world taken for granted," and declare that the "real world." Each one of these artificially constructed worlds is to some degree idiosyncratic, unique. No individual views reality directly, "in the raw," so to speak. Our perceptions are narrowly channelled through concepts and interpretations. What is commonly thought of as "reality," that which "exists," or simply "is," is a set of concepts, conceptual frames, assumptions, suppositions, rationalizations, justifications, defenses, all generally collectively agreed-upon, which guide and channel each individual's perceptions in a specific and distinct direction. The specific rules governing the perception of the universe which

* The writing of this paper was facilitated by a grant (MH 15659) from the National Institute of Mental Health. The term "the politics of reality" seems to have been independently invented by politicians and symbolic interactionists, although to refer to two totally disparate concepts. Robert F. Kennedy used the term to mean something akin to Max Weber's *Realpolitik*, whereas Gregory P. Stone and Harvey A. Farberman, in their anthology (Stone and Farberman, 1969), parallel our meaning in this paper. I would like to thank Professor Farberman for suggesting the term to me, and for helpful criticism of an earlier draft of this paper.

¹ A recent anthology (Goode, 1969) includes sections which assert and supposedly demonstrate wholly contradictory answers to these questions.

² The title of this section is taken from a book of the same name (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

man inhabits are more or less arbitrary, a matter of convention. Every society establishes a kind of **epistemological methodology**.

Meaning, then, does not automatically announce itself. Rather, it is **read into every** situation, event, entity, object, phenomenon. What one individual understands by a given phenomenon may be absolutely **heterogeneous** to what another individual understands by it. In a sense, then, the reality itself is different. The only reality available to each individual consciousness is a subjective reality. Yet this insight poses a dilemma: we must see in a skewed manner or not at all. For, as Berger and Luckmann point out, "To include epistemological questions concerning the validity of sociological knowledge is like trying to push a bus in which one is riding" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 13). Sociologists, too, are implicated in this same process. But unless we wish to remain huddled in the blind cave of solipsism, the problem should not paralyze us. We leave the problem of the ultimate validity of sociological knowledge to the metaphysical philosophers.

If we wish to grasp the articulation between ideology and what Westerners call science, we must look to fundamental cultural beliefs which stimulate or inhibit the growth of scientific-empirical ideas. One form of this selection process, the course of defining the nature of the universe, involves **the rules of validating reality**. A procedure is established for accepting inferential evidence; some forms of evidence will be ruled out as irrelevant, while others will serve to negotiate and determine what is real. For instance, some religious systems have great faith in the validity of the message of the senses (Merton; Kennedy). Other civilizations give greater weight to mystical insight, to the reality beyond empirical reality (Needham: 417-422, 430-431).

The sociologist's task only begins on this vast cultural canvas. While the "major mode" of the epistemological selection and validation process involves the decision to accept or rule out the data of our senses, within this tradition, minor modes of variation will be noticed. Clearly, even societies with powerful scientific and empirical traditions will contain subcultures which have

less faith in the logic of the senses than others. Moreover, all cultures have absorbed one or another mode of reasoning **differentially**, so that some institutions will typify the dominant mode more characteristically than others. Certainly few in even the most empirical of civilizations will apply the same rules of evidence in the theater of their family as in their workaday world.

The more complex the society, the greater the number of competing versions concerning reality. The Positivists were in error in assuming that greater knowledge would bring epistemological convergence. The arenas of controversy are more far-flung than ever before. Now, instead of societies differing as to how they view the real world, subsegments of society differ. This poses a serious problem for those members of society who have an emotional investment in stability and in the legitimacy of their own special version of reality. The problem becomes, then, a matter of **moral hegemony**, of legitimating one distinctive view of the world, and of discrediting competing views. These rules of validating reality, and society's faith in them, may serve as **strategies in** ideological struggles. Contending parties will wish to establish veracity by means of the dominant cultural mode.

All societies invest this selection process with an air of **mystification**, to use Peter Berger's phrase (1967: 90-91, 203): "Let the institutional order be so interpreted as to hide, as much as possible, its **constructed** character. ... [The] humanly constructed *nomoi* are given a cosmic status. ..." (1967:33, 36). This process must not, above all, be seen as whimsical and arbitrary; it must be grounded in the nature of reality itself. The one selected view of the world must be seen as the **only possible** view of the world; it must be identified with the real world. All other versions of reality must be seen as whimsical and arbitrary and, above all, **in error**. At one time, this twin mystification process was religious in character: views in competition with the dominant one were heretical and displeasing to the gods-hence, Galileo's "crime." Now, of course, the style is to cloak what Berger terms "fictitious necessities" with an aura of **scientific** validity. Nothing has

greater discrediting power today than the demonstration that a given assertion has been "scientifically disproven." Our contemporary pawnbrokers of reality are scientists.

VALUE AND FACT IN NEGOTIATING THE MARIJUANA REALITY

Probably no area of social life reflects this selective process more than drug use. Note the pharmacological definition of a "drug": "... a drug is broadly defined as any chemical agent that effects living protoplasm. ..." (Fingl and Woodbury, 1965 : 1). Yet very few in our society will admit to the use of drugs, including the man who smokes two packs of cigarettes a day, the barbiturate-dependent housewife, and the near-alcoholic. Society has constructed the social concept (if not the pharmacological definition) in such a way that it excludes elements which are substantially identical to those it includes. What is seen as the essential reality of a given drug and its use, then, is a highly *contingent* event. What society selects as crucial to perceive about drugs, and what it ignores, tells us a great deal about its cultural fabric.

The scientist makes a clear distinction between those questions which can be tested empirically and those which are wholly in the realm of sentiment. A man may have an opinion about whether marijuana causes crime, but the question is, ideally at least, answerable. As long as the combatants agree on the rules of the road, there is supposedly a more or less clear right and wrong here. But the question of whether marijuana is evil or not is intrinsically unanswerable, within an empirical and scientific framework; it depends completely on one's perspective. However clear-cut this distinction is in the scientist's mind, as a tool for understanding the combatants' positions in this controversy it is specious and misleading, for a variety of reasons.

To begin with, the strands of value and fact intersect with one another so luxuriantly that in numerous reasoning sequences they are inseparable. What one society or group or individual takes for granted as self-evidently harmful, others view as obviously beneficial or even necessary. In cru-

cial ways, the issue of harm or danger to society as a result of the drug pivots on moot points, totally unanswerable questions, issues that science is unable to resolve. Science requires that certain basic issues be resolved before any reasonable solution can be reached. And for many crucial debated marijuana questions, this modest requirement cannot be met. In other words, before we raise the question of whether marijuana has a "desirable" or a "noxious" effect, we would first have to establish the fact of the desirability or the noxiousness to whom. We must concern ourselves with the differential *evaluations* of the same "objective" consequences. Many of the drug's effects-agreed-upon by friend and foe alike-will be regarded as reprehensible by some individuals and desirable or neutral by others. Often anti-marijuana forces will argue against the use of the drug, employing reasons which its supporters will also employ-in *favor* of its use. In other words, we have here not a disagreement in what the effects are, but in whether they are a "good" or a "bad" thing. This is probably the most transparently ideological of all of the platforms of debate over marijuana. Three illustrations of this orbit of disputation should suffice.

With marijuana use more prevalent than today would come the billowing of a distinct esthetic. The state of marijuana intoxication seems to be associated with, and even to touch off, a unique and peculiar vision of the world. That the marijuana-induced vision is distinctive seems to be beyond dispute (Anonymous, in Goode, 1969; Adler, 1968; Ginsberg, 1966; Ludlow, 1965); that it is rewarding or fatuous is a matter for endless disputation. Inexplicably, the drug seems to engender a mental state which is coming into vogue in today's art forms. An extraordinarily high proportion of today's young and avant-garde artists-filmmakers, poets, painters, musicians, novelists, photographers, mixed media specialists-use the drug and are influenced by the marijuana "high" (Anonymous, in Goode). Some of the results seem to be: an increasing irrelevance of realism; the loss of interest in plot in films and novels; a glorification of the irrational and the seemingly nonsensical; an increased faith in the logic of

the viscera, rather than in the intellect; a heightened sense for the absurd; an abandonment of traditional and "linear" reasoning sequences, and the substitution of "mosaic" and fragmentary lines of attack; bursts of insight rather than *chains* of thought; connectives relying on internal relevance, rather than a commonly understood and widely accepted succession of events and thoughts; love of the paradoxical, the perverse, the contradictory, the incongruous; an "implosive" inward thrust, rather than an "explosive" outward thrust; instantaneous totality rather than specialization; the dynamic rather than the static; the unique rather than the general and the universal.³

Those with conventional, traditional and "classic" tastes in art will view these results in a dim light. A recent anti-marijuana tract, for instance, comments on the highly unconventional and antitraditionalist novelist William Burroughs' approval of marijuana's influence on his creative powers: "The irony is that Burroughs meant his remark as an endorsement" (Bloomquist, 1968 : 189). The sociologist of knowledge seeks to understand and explain the bases from which man's intellectual efforts spring. He will notice the prominent place in this debate of the manner in which matters of taste, such as artistic esthetics, are intimately and inseparably bound with views of the empirical reality of the drug. He who is opposed to the use of marijuana, and who believes that it is (empirically) harmful, is very likely to dislike contemporary art forms, and vice versa. The two are not, of course, necessarily causally related, but rather emerge out of the same matrix.

Marijuana's reputed impact on sexual behavior is all to the good to some who are comfortable with an unconventional view of sex. To the sexually traditional, the fact that marijuana could disrupt man's (and woman's) traditional patterns of sexuality is an out-of-hand condemnation of the drug. While marijuana's opponents would label any imputed increase in sexual activity as a result of the drug ⁴"promiscu-

ity"⁵ and would roundly condemn it, the drug's apostles would cheer society's resurgent interest in the organic, the earthy, the organic, the sensual.

The argument that marijuana is a "mind altering" drug has discrediting power to he who thinks of the everyday workings of the mind as "normal" and desirable. But to the explorer of unusual and exotic mental realms, its mind-altering functions are an argument in its favor. The ideologues of the psychedelic movement-and marijuana is considered by most commentators as the weakest of the psychedelic or "hallucinogenic" drugs-claim that every member of society is lied to, frustrated, cheated, duped and cajoled, and thus grows up totally deceived. Barnacles of attitudes, values, beliefs, layer themselves upon the mind, making it impossible to see things as they truly are. This ideology maintains that far from offering an "escape from reality," the psychedelic drugs thrust man more intensely into reality. By suspending society's illusions, the "voyager" is able to see reality "in the raw," with greater verisimilitude. Aldous Huxley (1963 : 34) exclaimed, under the influence of mescaline, "This is how one ought to see, how things really are."

The anti-psychedelic stance will, of course, deny the validity of this process. What is "real" is the world as the undrugged person perceives it. Any alteration of the "normal" state of consciousness is destructive and inherently distorting. Drug use, it is claimed, is "a way to shut out the real world or enter a world of unreality"; the psychedelic drug user attempts to "take a trip away from the real world

sexual impact. Although pharmacologists today generally feel that marijuana is either non-sexual or even anti-sexual (anaphrodesiac) in its effects in the strict physiological sense, marijuana users often feel that the drug acts as a pleasure-stimulator. In a study still in progress by the author, of 200 marijuana users, 44 per cent said that marijuana increased their sexual desire, and 68 per cent said that it increased their sexual enjoyment.

⁵A recent court ruling by Joseph Tauro (1967), Chief Justice of the Superior Court of Massachusetts, held that "sexual promiscuity" was one of the undesirable consequences of marijuana use; Justice Tauro rejected the defendants' appeal. Strangely, *Time* magazine claimed that Tauro's ruling would be judged fair by even the staunchest of marijuana supporters.

³ The parallel between the mental processes associated with the marijuana "high" and the "tribal" mind typified by McLuhan (1964) is too close to escape mention.

⁴ There is some question about marijuana's

and **to** a society of his own making." (AMA, 1968, 6:1, 4). But what is astonishing about the controversy is that both sides presume to know precisely what *reality* is. Whichever version we choose to guide our senses, we should not fail to notice the ideological character of the controversy. Both orientations are to a large degree arbitrary, conventional. **Epistemological** questions cannot be resolved by fiat or empirical test. Even the natural sciences rest on faith, an unproveable assumption that the senses convey valid information. Yet each side insists that it alone has a monopoly on knowing what is true and what false, what is real and what illusory. Both sides attempt to mask the capricious nature of their decision with an air of legitimacy and absolute validity. Taking a relativistic stance toward both perspectives, we are forced to regard both to be statements of political persuasion.

An essential component of dominant medical and psychological thinking about illicit drug use is that it is undesirable, that the user should be "treated" in such a manner that he discontinues use. The user is felt, rightly or wrongly, to threaten some of the more strongly held cultural values of American society:

In my opinion, psychopharmacologic agents may be divided into two major categories depending on the manner in which they either help or hinder the individual in his adaptation to society.

Drugs may be used in one of two ways to help relieve ... tensions : by sufficiently diminishing emotional tension to permit the individual to function or by allowing the individual to totally escape from reality. Sedatives, tranquilizers, and antidepressants ... often permit an individual to function more effectively. Psychedelic drugs ... allow the individual to escape from reality so that he need not function at all. The first group of drugs is often useful to **society**; the second group would only destroy it (Kissin, 1967:2).

Given the basic premises on which statements such as these are based, it is difficult to understand just what the notion of detachment and objectivity toward drug use might mean.

Another locus of unresolvable controversy, where value and fact interlock inseparably, is the question of a **hierarchy** of

values. An impartial stance is claimed by combatants in a multitude of pseudoscientific questions. Here, even the value issues may be resolved. Everyone agrees that marijuana may precipitate psychotic episodes, and that, further, psychotic episodes are a "bad thing." The issue then becomes not, does it occur, or, is it good or bad, but: Do marijuana's claimed dangers outweigh its possible benefits? Should we restrict society's right to access to drugs so that we may minimize the potential harm to itself? How does one set of values stack up against another? One might, by donning a white coat, pretend to scientific objectivity in answering this question, but it might be wise to remember that even the emperor didn't succeed in the ruse.

THE LOGISTICS OF EMPIRICAL SUPPORT

A second powerful reason why strictly empirical arguments seem to have exerted relatively little hold in the marijuana controversy, aside from the intricate intertwining of value and fact, seems to be a basic **panhuman** psychic process which leads to the need for the confirmation of our strongly held biases; moreover, empirical reality, being staggeringly complex, permits and even **demand**s factual selection. We characteristically seek support for **our** views : contrary opinions and facts are generally avoided. This opens the way for the maintenance of points of view which are contradicted by empirical evidence. And there is invariably a variety of facts to choose from. It is a comparatively simple matter to find what one is looking for in any moderately complex issue. Each individual facing an emotionally charged issue selects the facts which agree with his own opinions, supermarket-like. Individuals do not judge marijuana to be "harmful" or "beneficial" as a result of objective **evidence**, rationally weighed and judiciously considered. The process, rather, works in the opposite direction: the drug is considered harmful-as a result of customs which articulate or clash with the use and the effect of the drug, as a result of the kinds of people who use it, and the nature of the "reading" process society applies to these individuals, and as a result of campaigns conducted by "moral entrepreneurs"

(Becker, 1963), as well as innumerable other processes-and **then** positive and negative traits are attributed to the drug. The explanation for perceiving the drug in a specific manner *follows* attitudes about it. A man is not opposed to the use or the legalization of marijuana because (he thinks) it "leads to" the use of more dangerous **drugs**, because it "causes" crime, because it "produces" insanity and brain damage, because it "makes" a person unsafe behind the wheel, because it "creates" an unwillingness to work. He believes **these things because he thinks the drug is evil**. The negative consequences of the use of marijuana **are superadded to support a basically value position**. But everyone, Pareto says, seeks to cloak his prejudices in the garb of reason, especially in an empirical age, so that evidence to support them is dragged in **post hoc** to provide rational and concrete proof?

Conceptions of true and false are extravagantly refracted through social and cultural lenses to such an extent that the entire notion of empirical truth becomes irrelevant. "True" and "false" become, in fact, what dominant groups define as true and false; its very collectivity establishes legitimacy. A pro or anti-marijuana stance reflects a basic underlying attitudinal syndrome, ideological in character, which is consonant with its drug component. Prior to being exposed to attitudes or "facts" about marijuana, the individual has come to accept or reject fundamental points of view which already lead him to apprehend the reality of marijuana in a definite manner. These ideological slants are not merely **correlates** of related and parallel attitudes. They are also **perceptual screens** through which a person views empirically grounded facts. In other words, marijuana provides an **occasion** for ideological expression.

⁶ Clearly, not many interested participants in a given controversy are aware of the rules of the scientific method. They may feel that they are empirically proving a point by submitting concrete evidence, yet the mode of reasoning merely confirms their ideological biases. "Proof" by enumeration exemplifies this principle. The criminogenic effects of marijuana is "demonstrated" by a listing of individuals who smoke marijuana who also, either under the influence or not, committed a crime. Munch (1966) and Anslinger and Tompkins (1953: 23-25) exemplify this line of reasoning.

Perceptions of the very empirical reality of the drug are largely determined by prior ideological considerations. Almost everyone facing the issue already has an answer concerning its various aspects, because of his attitudes about related and prior issues. He finds facts to suit his **predilections**—whether supportive or critical-and commandeers them to suit his biases. The essential meaning of the marijuana issue is the meaning which each individual brings to it. The marijuana "reality" going on before us is a vast turmoil of events which, like all realities, demands factual selection. Yet the selection of facts is never random. It is always systematic, it always obeys a specific logic. Any message can be **read into** the impact of the drug; anything you wish to see is there. We support our predilections by seeing in the drug only that which supports them. If the critic wants to see in the drug and its use violence, sadism, rape and murder, they are there, buried in the reality of marijuana.⁷ If the drug supporter wishes to see peace and serenity, it is no difficult job to find them.

This is not to say, of course, that no research has ever been conducted which approaches scientific objectivity. (Scientific objectivity is, as we pointed out above, one form of bias, but since on most issues all participants in the dispute pay their respects to it, this axiom is apolitical in its import). It is to say, however, that not all participants in the marijuana controversy have been trained as scientists, nor do they reason as scientists. **Interpretations** of the marijuana studies are more important to us here than the studies' findings themselves. Out of a multitude of findings a diversity of mutually exclusive conclusions can be reached. The multitude of results from the many marijuana reports forms a sea of ambiguity into which nearly any message may be read. The researcher's

⁷ In its Field Manual, the Federal Bureau of Narcotics requests district supervisors to obtain from state and local officials "reports in all cases . . . wherein crimes were committed under the **influence** of marijuana." To illustrate the selective process involved in this request, imagine the impressive dossier which might result from a request that reports be conveyed on anyone wearing a hat while committing a crime; a case could thus be made on the criminogenic effects of hat-wearing.

findings do not announce themselves to the reader. Any opinion may be **verified** by the **scientific** literature on marijuana. Mayor LaGuardia's Report (The Mayor's Committee on Marihuana, 1944) rivals the Bible in the diversity of the many conclusions which have been drawn from it.

Marijuana's proponents take heart in its conclusions (Rosevear, 1967 : 11 l-l 12), and nearly all of the report has been reprinted in a recent pro-marijuana anthology (Solomon, 1966). Yet anti-marijuana forces find in the study solid evidence for the damaging effects of the drug (Bloomquist, 1968: 122-126; Brill, 1968:20-21; Louria, 1968 : 105). Our point, then, is that drawing conclusions from even the most careful and parsimonious scientific study is itself a highly selective process. The welter of findings are subject to a systematic sifting process. Often the researcher **finds** it necessary to disassociate himself from the conclusions which others have reached on his work. For instance, a sensationalistic popular article on LSD (Davidson, 1967) was denounced as a "distortion" and "an atrocity" by the very scientists whose research it cited. More attention ought to be paid, therefore, to the "reading" process of drawing conclusions from scientific work, rather than the tidings themselves. In fact, specifically what is meant by the "the findings themselves" is unclear, since they can be made to say so many different and contradictory things.

STRATEGIES OF DISCREDITATION

Naming has political implications. By devising a linguistic category with specific connotations, one is designing armaments for a battle; by having it accepted and used, one has scored a major victory. For instance, the term "psychedelic" has a clear pro-drug bias: it announces that the mind works best when under the influence of a drug of this type. (Moreover, one of the psychedelic drug proselytizers, in search of a term which would describe the impact of these drugs, rejected "psychodelic" as having negative overtones of psychosis). Equally biased is the term "hallucinogen," since an hallucination is, in our civilization at least, unreal, illusory and therefore undesirable; the same holds for the term "psy-

chotomimetic": capable of producing a madness-like state. The semantics and linguistics of the drug issue form an essential component of the ideological skirmishes⁸ (Fort, 1967: 87-88; Goode, 1969).

Drug "abuse" is such a linguistic device. It is often used by physicians and by the medically related. Encountering the use of **the** term, one has the impression that something quite measureable is being referred to, something very much like a disease, an undesirable condition which is in need of remedy. The term, thus, simultaneously serves two, functions: (1) it claims clinical objectivity; (2) it discredits the action which it categorizes. In fact, no such objectivity obtains in the term, and its use is baldly political. Drug use is the use of **a** drug in a way that **influentials** with legitimacy disapprove of. Their objections are on moral, not medical, grounds, although their argument will be cast in medical language. The American Medical Association, for instance, defines the term: "drug abuse [is] taking drugs without professional advice or direction" (AMA, 1967:2). **Nonmedical** drug use is, in the medical view, **by definition** abuse. **Any** use of **any** drug outside a medical context, regardless of its consequences, is **always** undesirable-i.e., is by definition, abuse.

A linguistic category both **crystalizes** and influences responses to, and postures toward, a phenomenon. The term "abuse" illustrates this axiom. It announces that nonmedical drug-taking is undesirable, that the benefits which the drug-using subculture proclaims for drug use are outweighed by the hard rock of medical damage. Yet, since the weighing of values is a moral, not a medical process, we are full-face against an ideological resolution of the issue, yet one cast in a scientific and empirical

⁸ As an example of how naming influences one's posture toward a phenomenon, note that the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs has jurisdiction over "addicting" drugs, which supposedly includes marijuana, while the Food and Drug Administration presides over "habit-forming" drugs. Because of this jurisdictional division, the Bureau is forced into the absurd position of having to claim that marijuana is an "addicting" drug, and to shore up this contention, it supplies drug classifications which follow jurisdictional lines (School Management, 1966a), as if they had some sort of correspondence in the real world.

exoskeleton. Further: **the linguistic category demands verification.** By labelling a phenomenon "abuse," one is willy-nilly under pressure to **prove** that the label is valid. The term so structures our perceptions of the phenomenon that it is possible to see only "abusive" aspects in drug use. Therefore, data must be collected to discredit the beneficial claims of drug use.

Another strategy of disconfirming the marijuanaists' claims to legitimacy is the notion, closely interconnected with drug use as "abuse," of marijuana use as being the manifestation of medical **pathology**. This thrust bears two prongs: (1) the **etiology** of marijuana use as an expression of, or an "acting out" of, a personality disturbance (Ausubel, 1958:98-100, 102-103, 106; AMA, 1967:369-370; AMA, 1968b:2; Halleck, 1967:4-5);⁹ (2) the effects of the drug as a precipitator of temporary but potent **psychotic episodes** (Farnsworth, 1967:434-435; Farnsworth and Weiss, 1968; Isbell, et al., 1967; Keeler, 1967 and 1968; Ungerleider, et al., 1968:355).¹⁰ By assigning marijuana use to the twilight world of psychic pathology, its moral and willful character has been neutralized. The labelled behavior has been removed from the arena of free will; its compulsive character effectively denies that it can be a viable alternative, freely chosen? An act reduced to both symptom and cause of pathology has had its claims to moral rectitude neutralized and discredited. As a manifestation of illness, it calls for "treatment," not serious debate. In a sense, then, physicians and psychiatrists have partially replaced policemen as preservers of the social order, since attempts at internal controls have replaced external sanctions. Both presume to know for the

subject how he "ought" to act. Yet the new sanctions, based on an ideology which the deviant partially believes in-scientific treatment of a medical illness-becomes a new and more powerful form of authoritarianism.

Generally, some sort of explanation, particularly one involving compulsion and pathology, is called for wherever it is not rationally understandable to the observer 'hat is, it "doesn't make sense." An anomalous and bizarre form of behavior demands an explanation. We can understand repeated dosages of poetry, because we all approve of poetry, so that no special examination is necessitated. It is only where the behavior violates our value biases that we feel it necessary to construct an interpretation. There is the built-in assumption that the individual **should** be able to do without recreational drugs, that their use is **unnecessary**, and a life without them is the **normal** state of affairs. Violation of our expectations requires an explanation. No explanation for **abstinence from drugs** is necessary, since our biases tell us that that is the way one "ought" to live.

Looking at all of the actions of which society disapproves-"deviant" behavior—we notice that they share fundamental similarities. However, these similarities inhere not so much in the acts themselves as in the way society responds to them. One of the more interesting responses is the tendency to impute psychological abnormality to their authors. The issue of whether such judgements are "correct" or not is less relevant to us as is the nexus between the kinds of acts which attract such judgements, and the nature of the society in which they are made. It is said that Freud once had a patient who believed that the center of the earth was filled with jam. Freud was not concerned with the truth or falsity of that statement, but with the **kind of man** who made it. Similarly, the sociologist of knowledge concerns himself with the kinds of explanations a society fabricates about behavior in its midst, and what those explanations reveal about that society. It should be regarded as extremely significant that deviant behavior seems to have attracted explanations which activate a principle of psychological abnormality. The sociologist legitimately raises the ques-

Q Most formulations, however, include the important qualification that the more the user smokes, the greater is the likelihood of a personality disturbance; the less he smokes-the "experimenter" and the "occasional," as opposed to the "regular," smoker-the greater is the likelihood that accidental, cultural, social, contextual, factors play a role.

¹⁰ Likewise, as above, the greater the dosage, the greater is the chance for such episodes to occur; at lower dosages, it is less likely.

¹¹ A recent discussion (Stone and Farberman, 1969) argues that assigning the status of medical pathology is an effective device for neutralizing the legitimacy of a political opponent's ideology.

tion as to what it is about American society which begets a personality abnormality explanation for marijuana smokers, as well as heroin addicts (Chein, et al., 1964), homosexuals (Bieber, 1962; New York Academy of Medicine, 1964), **unwed** mothers (Young, 1945 and 1954), criminals (Abrahamsen, 1960), juvenile delinquents (Grossbard, 1962), prostitutes, as well as a host of other deviant groups and activities. The **fact** that each of these social categories-and the activities associated with them-are severely condemned by American society makes-the nature of the process of constructing pathology **interpretations** of deviance at least as interesting as the etiology of the deviant behavior itself. In all of these cases, adopting a medical approach to the deviant and his behavior effectively neutralizes his moral legitimacy, as well as the viability of his behavior. In this sense, the constructors of such theories serve to mirror the basic values of American society.

OVERVIEW

It is the sociologist's job to discover and explicate patterns in social life. When one side of a protracted and apparently insoluble controversy activates arguments that involve such putatively repugnant components as: "socially irresponsible," "vagabond existence," "outlandish fashions," "long hair," "lack of cleanliness," and "disdain for conventional values," (Farnsworth, 1967), while the other side emphasizes factors which it deems beneficial, and which sound very different: "discovery," "optical and aural aesthetic perceptions," "**self-awareness**," "insight," and "minute engagement," (Ginsberg, 1966), we are ineluctably lead to the conclusion that the controversy is a matter of taste and style of life, that it revolves about basically unanswerable issues, and its adjudication will take place on the basis of power and legitimacy, and not on the basis of scientific truth. In fact, given the nature of the disputation, it is **difficult** to know exactly what is meant by scientific truth. The problem becomes one of gathering support for one or another bias, rather than the empirical testing of specific propositions, whatever that might entail.

The American Medical Association urges educational programs as an "effective **deterrent**" to marijuana use (AMA, 1968a: 92). It is not, however, the sheer accumulation of information about marijuana which the AMA is referring to, since any marijuana user knows more-than the average nonuser about the effects of the drug. What is being referred to is *attitudes toward the drug*, not factual information:

... district officials are so fired up, they'd **interrupt** the routine of the whole district just to make sure our kids hear a good speaker or see a movie that will teach them the basic fact: **stay away from drugs**.

In order to know exactly what it is that they should stay away from, students must know the **nature** of drugs ... they're provided with basic facts. These facts aren't given "objectively"-they're slanted, so there's not the slightest doubt that students understand just how dangerous drugs can be.

You can call it brainwashing if you want to. We don't care what you call it-as long as these youngsters get the point. (School Management, 1966b: 103).¹²

Not only is the "meaning in the response," but both meaning and response are structured by power and legitimacy hierarchies. Society calls upon certain status occupants to verify what we wish to hear. These statuses are protective in nature, and are especially designated to respond to certain issues in a predetermined manner. Threats to society's security must be discredited. An elaborate charade is played out, debating points are scored-with no acknowledgement from the other side-and no one is converted. Inexorably, American society undergoes massive social change, and the surface froth of marijuana changes with it.

SUMMARY

(1) Civilizations differ in their rules for validating reality.

(2) The particular manner in which a given culture chooses to view the material world is an arbitrary and conventional decision.

¹² The interview is with Dr. Sidney Bimbach, director of school health, physical education and safety in the Yonkers, New York, school system.

(3) Yet this decision must be, and generally is, accorded a semi-sacred status.

(4) Empirical and scientific rules and statuses have become basic arbiters of reality for the recent West.

(5) Yet, different subcultures within the same society vary in their conceptions of what is real.

(6) Yet these subcultures also vary significantly in their access to power and legitimacy.

(7) He who is dominant in a given society attempts to enforce his version of reality on the rest of society, both in terms of legitimacy (i.e., moral hegemony), and in terms of making sure that others who disagree with him do not do anything which he disapproves of. He generally believes that he does this for the good of society, for the good of the individual whose behavior is restricted, because it is both moral and scientifically sound. In other words, society is not merely an agglomeration of different individuals and social groups, each neutral to one another, getting "equal time," but is made up of elements which are differentially able to enforce and impose their own unique version of reality on others.

(8) Imposing a dominant mode of thinking about reality-as well as behavioral compliance in correspondence with that definition-involves questions of strategy.

(9) Thus, the scientific status of one or another version of reality becomes a political and a tactical issue.

(10) Yet the complexity of empirical phenomena, along with widespread unfamiliarity with scientific reasoning processes, and the degree of emotion engaged by the issue, combine to make a "genuine" scientific adjudication of the debate spurious and nonexistent.

(11) Moreover, many of the issues surrounding the controversy and ideological, **matters** of taste, beyond the test of scientific instruments (*de gustibus non est disputandum*); they sum up styles of life, ways of viewing the universe. They represent inviolable cultural perspectives, attitudinal gestalts, outlooks on the world, which shape the individual's behavior patterns, which represent taken-for-granted realities, irrefutable and unquestionable.

(12) These basically non-rational beliefs shape perceptions of empirically testable assumptions. He who thinks of marijuana use as morally wrong is likely to exaggerate its criminogenic effects; he who thinks of it as beneficial will minimize its impact on crime.

(13) It is not uncommon to assume that from the acceptance of a particular empirically relevant belief that he who has a belief which is in disagreement with my own is **wrong**, ignorant, and possibly stupid as well.

(14) The line between what can and cannot be tested empirically is fuzzy, **non-existent** and irrelevant to most people. Therefore, not only is he who disagrees with me on scientific matters wrong and ignorant, but he who disagrees with me on matters of taste and style of life is also wrong and ignorant.

(15) Marijuana can be thought of as a kind of **symbol** for a complex of other positions, beliefs and activities which are correlated with and compatible with its use. In other words, those who disapprove of marijuana use often feel that he who smokes must, of necessity, also be a political radical, engage in "loose" (from his point of view) sexual practices, and have a somewhat dim view of patriotism. Marijuana use is seen (whether rightly or wrongly) to sum up innumerable facts about the individual, facts which can clearly place him along the **conservative-liberal-radical** dimension in a number of areas of social and political life.

(16) In view of these and other intricacies, the debate over marijuana use is unlikely to be solved in the foreseeable future.

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