

# THE REAL NATURE OF AND THE ABUSE OF THE DRUGS PROBLEM

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FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

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When I first became interested in libertarianism as a philosophy, it seemed that drug use was a special problem. In those days, the late nineteen fifties, the problem was only just beginning to be widely discussed and was smaller than now in that it involved far fewer people and those largely from the middle class.

The philosophical problem seemed a special case from the libertarian point of view because the effect on other people of drug taking was minimal. Other people could just walk away if they did not want to be involved – in contrast to victims of violence or fraud or arson, etc.

The situation, as presented officially, was that taking certain drugs, at that time almost only cannabis, morphine, heroin, and cocaine, would cause *addiction*, which was a condition in which all choice – the cornerstone of freedom theory – was overwhelmed by an insatiable desire for the drug which dominated life and relationships and eventually resulted in degradation and death. Clearly a serious matter, if correct, and saving individuals from such a fate was assumed to be a legitimate intrusion on their unlimited freedom of choice, even if the effects on other people were minimal, and even more so if the effects were considerable.

For ten years or so this remained a nagging problem which was not easily soluble, at any rate not by pure thought, except perhaps by the most brutal freedom solution: if anybody risks addiction then they must take the consequences even if these consequences are financial ruin and early death.

Then it happened that someone I knew very well became “addicted” to legally prescribed pethidine (for severe pain) until the prescribing doctor got warnings from the Home Office that either the prescriptions must cease or the patient had to be registered as an addict. So the patient transferred to alcohol. Management then became much more difficult and I eventually made the naive error of ringing Alcoholics Anonymous and asking them to “send someone round to cure the alcoholic”. They pointed out that there was no such scheme but invited me to meetings of the associated organisation Al-Anon which advised people associated with alcoholics on how to cope. Narcotics Anonymous and Families Anonymous are similar organisations for drug addicts and their associates.

I found their meetings very helpful and important from my philosophical point of view, because their existence provided two observations of major significance – “addiction” was not permanent and inevitably disastrous, and there was no need for associates of addicts to be “devastated”. Naturally the “need” for help is emphasised, but

this is not necessarily true. AA was set up by two Christians and God is mentioned in a lot of recovery schemes, but generally not emphasised.

So I personally lived with addiction without either being tempted into it or emotionally repelled by it – my “so what?” solution.

## “A NICE BIG CRACK ROCK”

My early retirement at around fifty gave me more time for dilettante pursuits, such as libertarian writing, and freedom from any professional or social advantage from pretending to be respectable. (I assumed, correctly, that libertarians are much too sensible and intelligent to require respectability as distinct from polite civil behaviour in their associates.) This meant that I could associate with low life characters without arousing any suspicions that I needed to worry about. In fact I also had a good excuse for this interest because I was an officer of a political constituency association whose geographical area covered several deprived areas of a large provincial city including its red light districts.

After some experimentation I established contact with individual members of the “underclass”, as Charles Murray called them, mostly by offering them lifts in my car usually either to supermarkets or friends, who were actually drug suppliers.

I was regularly offered “spiffs” – rolled cigarettes laced with cannabis – whilst I was driving, which I usually accepted. I drove carefully, mostly in the nearside lane whilst smoking it, which I had done anyway when I smoked pure tobacco cigarettes. Quite often I was left one or two spiffs in the glove box as payment for the transport.

My first contact with so-called hard drugs came after I gave a twenty-year-old prostitute (“Toni”) and her boyfriend a lift to her beat on a warm summer evening in 1993. Whilst she was “working” I waited with her boyfriend in a secluded car park and smoked spiffs. (Incidentally the boyfriend was not her pimp, he was actually a Pakistani Muslim who objected to her prostitution. But Toni was a forceful personality and Ali had to take it or leave it. All the prostitutes I knew, with one exception who was eventually murdered, were self-employed.)

After about thirty minutes Toni returned, accompanied by a quite attractive looking coloured girl. Between them they had made £40, which they had already decided to spend on “a nice big crack rock”. I agreed to drive them to see some suppliers. The first dealer had nothing avail-

able, the second had only poor quality, but the third provided what looked like a small grey pebble wrapped in cling-film.

There were, of course, no formal introductions but I gathered that the coloured girl was called Kelly, and we went to her bedsit to smoke the crack. On the way we stopped at a late night garage and I lent them £5 to get a can of soft drink, a packet of ten Bensons, and a disposable lighter.

At Kelly's the can's contents were thrown away and Toni then put it on its side with the opening in its vertical end uppermost and dented it with a light Karate-type chop. Then after some searching she found a needle and punched about ten small holes in the can at the bottom of the dent. Meanwhile Ali had been ordered to smoke a cigarette to produce some ash. Toni then unwrapped the rock and broke some tiny pieces off it with her long thumbnail and carefully rewrapped the remainder. The ash from Ali's cigarette was then carefully placed over the holes in the can and a small piece of crack laid on the bed of ash. After that the can was handled very carefully, care being taken not even to breathe on it so there was no chance of losing any of the precious crack.

Toni let Kelly have the first "lick". Kelly emptied her lungs, placed her lips carefully round the can opening and used the lighter to burn the flake of crack as she filled her lungs with the smoke drawn through the can. She looked peacefully satisfied but had no other change in behaviour. Toni took the can and went through the same process with a new flake of crack and also looked satisfied but otherwise unchanged. Then it was Ali's turn, then mine. As I was inexperienced, Toni emphasised that I must not under any circumstances blow into the can as that would lose the crack, and she offered to burn it for me so I had as little to concentrate on as possible.

The effect is difficult to describe, not because it is especially fascinating, but because there is little to compare it with. The nearest I can get to a similar sensation is the effect of slight carbon monoxide poisoning I received from the first cigarette of the day when I smoked – a bit light-headed but more intense and longer lasting. Nothing much to get excited about though.

They prepared for a second smoke. I noticed that Kelly seemed somewhat cool towards Ali and myself – she only spoke to us through Toni – "Does he want this?", "Can he do that?", etc. I declined a second lick on the grounds that the experience was evidently much more useful to them than me so I would not be greedy. Nobody seemed much affected. If anything I was slightly less bothered than before by the waste of time but still well aware of it. It was by then about 1.30 am.

After about half an hour of talk Toni and Ali decided to leave and that the remaining crack should be shared, but Kelly did not seem pleased with her allocation. I drove Toni and Ali to their flat which was on the fourteenth floor of a council tower block. On the way I learned that Kelly's attitude was explained by the fact that she had actually contributed the major part of the £40, because she had done a blow job for £25, whereas Toni had only

had a wanker for £15. But Kelly was a "moppet", women's prison slang for an inmate who could be imposed upon and did not fight. Toni expressed pride in her street fighting abilities and told me about men she had "beaten up"; I estimated her weight at only about 50kg but she was clearly assertive even without the crack.

I was invited in for another lick, which I accepted in spite of the late hour. The flat was very untidy and not particularly clean but at least we all had somewhere to sit. Toni reminded Ali that he was the only free loader – I had provided transport and the £5 (which there was obviously no chance of me being repaid). The second lick was better than the first in the sense of producing a somewhat more intense sensation, but still nothing very special as far as I was concerned.

As I drove back home I realized that the idea that my driving might be affected by two licks of a supposedly deadly dangerous drug just had not occurred to me because there was no lasting effect. So far as I could judge my driving was exactly as it usually was. Much more puzzling was how people having presumably experienced the full advantages of free education, 'health care', and the culture of an advanced industrial democracy had no misgivings about spending every penny they had, plus some borrowing, on achieving at most a transitory, vaguely pleasant, sensation.

## CLARE

A few weeks later Toni introduced me to Clare, who was obviously much older though quite well preserved. She had a long story, which I did not believe, about just having been released from prison and wanting to borrow some money as deposit for accommodation. She offered a mobile phone and its charger as security – in those days mobile phones were quite expensive compared with now.

Clare admitted to being a heroin addict and her prison sentence had been for conspiring to supply heroin. In contrast to Toni, Kelly, Ali, and every other user I had met so far, Clare had the sort of accent which would bar her from any broadcasting on the BBC because it sounded too educated and upper class. Her father was a university lecturer and she had several siblings and half-siblings, as a result of her parent's various partnerships. These siblings were apparently quite ordinary, with employment in various occupations from child care to dentistry. She had a grown-up daughter of her own and a husband who was not the father of her child, and she was now sterilised.

I took her to dealers several times in the succeeding weeks. She rang them first on the mobile. I had returned it to her after she repaid the loan by signing over payments from her income support book. Sometimes the dealers came in cars, sometimes she met them in an old council development of multi-story flats (now on the national heritage preservation list) where the long open walkways made it easy for the dealers to see who was coming.

She wanted to smoke it in the car. The technique is now called “tooting”, but used to be “chasing the dragon”. The ‘gear’ (street heroin) was melted on a square of kitchen foil using a disposable lighter, and the smoke sucked through a tube fabricated from more kitchen foil. She was very sensitive about the location insisting that I find somewhere not overlooked from houses. What a ridiculous performance for a mature woman to inhale some smoke I thought. She did not seem at all changed by smoking but insisted that she was much less “tense”. After a few sessions I reminded her that Toni offered me a sample of her crack after I had taken the time and trouble to drive her around and Clare took the hint very promptly.

The effect of heroin on me was more subdued than crack. Not much at all really, so I asked for a few more “lines” to see if it improved, but, apart from some mental fuzziness, still nothing much. Clare consumed much more of course, but then she was an ‘addict’, presumably with a high tolerance level.

I remarked that there was not much effect and apparently less than crack. Clare explained that the real effect on her was to stop her feeling ill. I drove back about twenty minutes later with no effect on driving skill or judgement so far as I could detect.

A few weeks later she had a room in a hostel run by the probation service. Being indoors I tried keeping up with her consumption to see if I could get any specially pleasant effect. There was still not much of a result but after about thirty minutes I felt distinctly unwell. I drove the mile or so home very carefully, had some dinner in the hope that it would make me feel better, but instead I was sick and a good steak was wasted. I still got a good night’s sleep though, and felt better than usual in the morning.

Just to make sure I was not put off by one unpleasant experience I had another small toot a few days later, then left heroin alone for years. The usual experience is that to become a real addict you have to take heroin fairly continuously over about six months. Also to have ‘problems’ during that time which is the only credible motive for keeping consumption going.

Soon after that I met Clare’s husband, Roy, just after he left prison. He had been receiving stolen goods, but now went begging and had made about £80 that day.

He was a heroin injector, melting the contents of a £10 bag in a teaspoon then injecting it in an arm vein which he had made prominent by constricting his upper arm with a thin belt. I declined to try injecting because the ‘gear’ was obviously nowhere near pharmacological purity. My recollection of the effect of pethidine, many years before, did not suggest I was missing much.

### **COMPLETELY DISORGANISED**

Following these early encounters I continued intermittent contact with Toni, Clare, Roy, and several others on a more casual basis. Contacts were typically several days and often weeks apart. Otherwise normal life continued

without disturbance. In these contacts with underclass individuals I soon found there was no need to pretend to be one of them, or even hide my interest in observing their behaviour, so long as they were sure I was not likely to grass on them about social security frauds or minor offences. Evidently I was worth cultivating for the advantage of free transport and the occasional early payment against social security books. I did of course make it clear that they must not bring anything illegitimate in my car (apart from drugs or ‘pornography’) or rely on my discretion about any really serious offences. And I made sure anything at all valuable was locked away in the car boot or glove compartment.

The first observation was just how completely disorganised their existence was. Staying in bed until the early afternoon and not returning until the early hours of the next day was quite usual. Houses were incredibly untidy, with hardly anything undamaged – though there was always a television set permanently on but hardly watched with any attention. In summer it was quite common for a gas or electric fire to be on full heat and the windows wide open. Light bulbs were often missing. Clothing was usually stored in disorderly piles so getting changed, particularly for females, was a long and time consuming process, as was the subsequent ritual of applying make-up. Consequently important appointments such as at hospitals or with officials about social security or unemployment pay were often missed.

Considering the conditions of these individuals it became clear why they found the so-called dangerous drugs attractive. They had virtually no worthwhile property. Housing belonged to the Council and was allocated rather than chosen. Most other possessions were probably stolen or obtained by mail order fraud. I never heard of, or saw for myself, any of them go into a shop and buy a TV, VCR, radio, microwave oven, etc. though they nearly all had this equipment.

They had no discernable prospects either. With little education and a criminal record, getting a job with any sort of status or promotion prospects was hardly an option. In fact if they thought about their condition at all it is not at all surprising that a spell of altered consciousness was an attractive alternative to further contemplation of their situation. If heroin and crack have any effect beyond the thirty minutes or so of buzz, it is that, though one is still perfectly aware of one’s circumstances, any resulting anxiety is damped down. From there it is easy to see how behaviour usually regarded as addictive develops. The drugged condition is simply preferable to reality. Though the conditions appear unacceptable to most people, they are nevertheless tolerable for anybody who is content with survival and the sort of society which may be unstable in the sense of frequently changing, but is nevertheless supportive in the sense that a “friend”, and certainly a sexual partner, can always be found, even if such friendships don’t last long. Drug use is part of the culture – a way to become accepted. But if drug supplies were cut off completely it is unlikely that crime would reduce. That is part of the culture as well, and successful burglaries, frauds, or shoplifting expeditions are praised

and commended, not condemned. It was observed as long ago as 1990 that in New York, when “evil and unscrupulous” dealers cut the heroin content of smack to less than three per cent, it was still bought and thefts and other crime continued. It was the way of life that the criminals were really addicted to, even when drugs ceased to have a mental effect.

The grasp of fundamental reality was highly tenuous, being largely composed of superstition and fantasy. Rosanne was a crack enthusiast who was quite an avid reader. But her literary taste was not even Mills and Boon. It was just paperback fantasies about strange worlds and mythical creatures. I once took Rosanne for what I expected to be a pleasant smoke in the shade of trees in a cemetery. But she would not stay in the cemetery. She complained of feeling paranoid because she thought the “ghosts are coming for me”, so we had to go to some desolate car park on an industrial estate instead.

Clare, with her education and associated accent, was evidently a case of what sociologists call downward social drift. I suspected that her intelligence was not as high as her education suggested. She probably could not keep up with her siblings in normal life. I occasionally put to her suggestions on the lines of: “A woman with your background should have a house, a car and a pension plan, not be street walking and dossing down with low life characters.” The explanation was always that her situation was Roy related. The dissolute husband was a good excuse for her condition; and she always mentioned that she expected to inherit around £100,000 eventually, which would somehow solve her problems.

## A DRUG TESTING CONFERENCE

On January 28th 1999 I attended a conference, “Drugs - a testing issue”, organised by Mainliners under the auspices of SCODA (Standing Conference On Drug Abuse). I got in free as a reporter on the strength of editing *The Individual* and writing for the Libertarian Alliance. (The attendance fee was officially £150.)

There was of course an opening Press Conference. This was addressed by the director of SCODA, Roger Howard, and the UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator Keith Hellawell (popularly known as the “drugs czar”).

On the face of it both speeches were moderate, thoughtful, gave due regard to “rights”, and were quite reasonable with nothing much to worry about, even for libertarians.

Roger Howard said there was bound to be some increase in drug testing due to the technical possibilities, but ethical and moral considerations had to be carefully evaluated. Just because testing was possible it did not justify its use without proper safeguards and we must be very careful about developing a “surveillance society”. In America drug testing was big business worth millions of dollars. SCODA believed that drug testing should only be used where necessary in the workplace to reduce any safety risks to employees or customers from personnel who used drugs. But, he asked, how far is the definition to be stretched? If performance is the only problem then

there are other ways that should be used instead of testing.

In particular we must not be seduced by technology on the assumption that if it is there why not use it? Drug testing is already widely used in UK but should nevertheless only be used with consent and where there is a comprehensive and well thought out policy for the response to any positive results on test subjects.

Keith Hellawell said that drug testing had to be seen in the context of the Government’s ten year strategy to reduce drug use and produce a healthier society. He supported work-place drug testing but only in the context of a proper health and safety programme, which should include legal as well as illegal substances. Safety of the public and other employees was paramount so testing was particularly important in transport, but he would not go so far as to suggest that all air pilots should be routinely tested, for instance.

Nevertheless testing could be important for drug use reduction and improving health and safety in any organisation. Mr Hellawell implicitly endorsed drug testing only in a general comprehensive health and safety programme. People with problems need proper facilities to deal with their problems. Any person tested positive should be seen as letting themselves, their colleagues and customers down. Again drug testing is to be regarded as part of a long-term strategy to reduce drug use in society.

This produced four questions from the audience of reporters. The first was about whether purely recreational use might show up in tests and affect work prospects (unjustly, by implication). The answer boiled down to asserting that recreational use could nevertheless affect work performance so possibly testing would be justified even in those circumstances. The second was about the danger that testing could become just another management tool – managers hoping to be thought successful would just have to have some drug testing scheme in place to be thought to be doing their job properly. The comment was that any introduction of a drug testing scheme would require a full ethical discussion among all concerned. The third was essentially to be reassured that the basic justification of any drug testing would be in the resulting help provided. Agreed, this was very important. Lastly there was a question about the direct evidence for the effects of drugs. The questioner pointed out that the anti-drink-and-driving campaign was justified by experiments which allegedly demonstrated that even two whiskeys could affect the skill and judgement of drivers. Question: were there any corresponding experiments to demonstrate the effects of other drugs, and if not wasn’t the availability of accurate measurements of drug levels in the body a chance to get verifiable evidence on the effects reliably linked to actual levels? Answer: there weren’t any results and there were no plans to get any.

Keith Hellawell rounded off with emphasis on the ultimate aim of a “drug-free society” and that this was to be achieved mainly by encouragement and cooperation rather than punishment. He mentioned the change in attitude to police who were drunk on duty. Instead of this

being regarded as a criminal offence, police were encouraged to recognise their drink problem and seek help. This had improved the situation. He ended with a Smart-Alec observation. "I'm sure nobody would want his child operated on by a surgeon who had just had a shot of cocaine," he asserted.

The choice of cocaine was interesting to me in view of my own experience. As its effect is so short-lived, by the time the surgeon had gone through the standard pre-operation rituals – bath, robing, scrubbing-up, gloving – any effects would have worn off even assuming the surgeon wasn't intelligent enough to plan his consumption to fit in with his schedule.

During the Press Conference there was a demonstration by a drugs legalisation group who handed out leaflets and mock urine sample bottles labelled "Taking the Piss". They were ejected by Mainline staff.

There were about thirty reporters who dispersed after the Press Conference, no doubt reassured about the benign motives of the anti-drug industry. I was the only reporter to stay for the rest of the conference, now virtually wholly attended by professionals – probation, prison, education, police, and rehabilitation workers.

The conference itself was opened with a Keynote Address given by Keith Hellawell. Some of the same points as in the Press Conference with the addition of an assurance that action had to be securely based on facts, which was surprising in view of his Press Conference answer to the question about actually getting some facts.

Next came Mike Goodman of Release. His talk was freedom oriented. It was listened to politely but subsequently ignored. The 'opposition in principle' line had been given a hearing at the conference, but nobody was really listening.

After Mike Goodman there was some consideration of the technicalities of drug testing. This was given by a representative of a firm producing testing equipment and advice on how to use it. The main points were on "custody procedures" for samples to ensure that they were "genuine" (i.e. not diluted or substituted by the provider and not contaminated). This was to ensure clever defence lawyers could not mount a successful legal challenge in any proceedings involving the tests.

The assumed health and safety effects of drugs was the only argument consistently relied upon. It appeared in two forms which were not clearly distinguished.

One was the public safety aspect, particularly in transport. There was no attempt to justify the illegality and "dangerous" category for some drugs compared with alcohol – no firm distinction, just the assurance that the real aim was to provide help with individual problems. That was the really helpful way of ensuring public safety, we were constantly assured.

The other aspect was performance as an employee. "Whilst it can be argued that anybody has a right to do what he likes with his own body, it cannot be argued that he has a right to impose his behaviour on other people",

Dr Roythorne of BP said. He added that drugs were taken to change behaviour "so individual use was a communal responsibility". This assertion that drugs were taken to change behaviour was surprising because it was wrong, though nobody disputed it. In fact the usual motive stated for taking drugs is to achieve a better *feeling*, or even an altered state of consciousness. This might, of course, alter behaviour because the drugs changed users appreciation of the significance of environmental factors or even the sensory perception of them. Or it might not. In the absence of properly validated evidence for the effects of various drugs, the assumption that the effects were inevitably deleterious on the performance of all activities is not soundly based, in fact it is just an assumption without evidence.

## DEVELOPMENT DEPENDS ON ENVIRONMENT

I attended two specialist workshops, one on schools and one on prisons.

The one on schools never actually got underway because all the teachers were actively opposed to having anything to do with any drug testing of pupils. This was evidently both surprising and disappointing to the professional drug councillors who were attempting to lead the discussion. The reason was that the teachers regarded the time and trouble testing would take, together with the reinforcement of the impression that many pupils have that the education system and teachers are too prescriptive and authoritarian, was just not worth whatever benefits it was supposed to confer. Apart from Mike Goodman's contribution this spirited resistance on the part of teachers was the most encouraging aspect of the conference.

In contrast, the situation revealed in prisons was seriously disturbing. Perhaps you adopt the widespread view that whatever happens in prisons doesn't matter much so long as the inmates don't escape, and it's not at all comfortable for them, because they shouldn't have got themselves there anyway. If so I would ask you to consider for a moment some fundamental observations.

First, we all draw our inheritance from the common human genome (or set of genes) which implies that we all start off equal, in one sense at least. But the result of each individual getting a different set of genes is that there are considerable differences in both physical and mental capacity between individuals. The development of individual potential depends critically on environment, family and culture in particular. According to what behaviour is found either rewarding or painful in some sense, the various behaviour patterns are established (or "inculcated" as it is sometimes described). If this learning produces desirable, or at least acceptable, behaviour the process is regarded as "the socialisation of children" or "teaching the difference between right and wrong". Otherwise the process is known as neglect, or abuse, or "corruption" of the young.

Of course all the people attending that conference were educated middle-class – in that sense at least having much in common with readers of this account. So being normal is having similar views at least on the value of

life, property, and the general desirability of obeying the law. To such people (including us libertarians) the behaviour of drug users and other “criminals” appears abnormal and unnatural – and must be the result of some sort of perverse choice. But choices have two components; the preferences of whoever makes the choice, and the range of alternatives available. In the usual legal and moral assessments most weight is put on the individual, who is punished and vilified for “wrong” decisions but rarely directly rewarded for “right” decisions.

Such rewards as there are consist of the opportunity to be accepted into prestigious and possibly rewarding company, and employment opportunities, mostly commercial or professional. Any bad record causes exclusion from entering such sections of society, or rapid ejection from them, though quite alarming levels of *professional* incompetence are routinely ignored or covered up.

The drug testing conference followed this pattern very clearly (and amusingly for anybody with the appropriate sense of humour). Keith Hellowell in both the Press Conference and Keynote Address emphasised that drug testing was not to be regarded as just a means of finding users with the aim of dismissal or demotion. No, it had to be used in conjunction with agreed (with Unions and professional organisations) systems of counselling and treatment. Dr Chris Roysthorne laboured the point in more detail. As one might expect Health and Safety was always a prime concern – not just for customers and public, but also for fellow employees and the firm’s “duty of care”. (So what is left for which this excuse cannot be used?)

The attitude that came through to prisons and prisoners was quite different. A system of Mandatory Drug Testing (MDT) had been introduced – in other words Hobson’s choice for inmates. There had apparently been initial misgivings about whether the proposal to introduce MDT would present “control problems” (riots) but apparently this did not happen.

The Home Office bureaucrats were evidently pleased with themselves over this achievement. It remains to be seen whether the inevitable claimed successes are used as evidence for an expansion of this intrusion to non-prison situations.

The final session of the conference was addressed by a youngish woman in a trouser suit, an employee of SCODA. Not surprisingly she was sure that drug problems were bound to increase in society necessitating a continued expansion of SCODA and similar organisations, more testing for information and therapeutics, and, of course, “more resources”.

### TONI AND HER CHILDREN

Toni (the crack-using prostitute) had given birth to her first child a few months before I attended the conference. Ali was undoubtedly the father and they had been allocated a council flat soon after she became pregnant. Toni and Ali lived almost normally for over a year. Normally at least in the sense of keeping the flat reasonably clean and tidy, caring for the child, buying a good supply of

food as soon as the social security money was paid, and supplementing that income with a bit of cannabis dealing (which covered their own use plus a small profit). Toni effectively gave up prostitution because Ali didn’t like it and she no longer had time for it due to looking after the child.

Ali then had to go back to Pakistan for a few months on family business and Toni soon got friendly with another Pakistani and pregnant again. On Ali’s return she persuaded him to accept the second child as his and register himself as the father. However it soon became evident that looking after two children effectively was beyond her capabilities and Ali got custody of both at his own home, so Toni was evicted from the council flat. Toni then returned to part-time prostitution and also consumption of both heroin and crack.

She still had social-services-supervised access to her children and on one occasion met another man, white this time, who was doing building work at the social centre. She moved in with him, solving her accommodation problem, and was soon pregnant yet again. So at twenty five she had equalled her mother’s achievement of children by three different fathers.

However the latest father, Harry, was both a saint and genius compared with the other men she had associated with. For one thing he had always worked, never having drawn benefits, and for another he was not only willing but anxious to take on the responsibility, not only for his own child, but the others as well. They were married, on Harry’s insistence, very soon after the birth.

Soon after he was born, the Social Services in effect kidnapped Toni’s latest child from the hospital – just by turning up and taking him with no warning or explanation to the parents – and put him in care, allegedly because of Toni’s record of prostitution and “drug abuse”. Toni continued with “drug abuse” but Harry fought back against the Social Services for custody of all the children, not just his own, for which he had to give up work and go onto benefits.

### NEWS OF THE WORLD

This was also about the time (October 1999) I was featured in an article in the *News of the World* accusing me of being a “heroin dealer” and even more libelously of “looking like a grandad”. The source of this story is still obscure, though I had a long and still unresolved dispute with the *News of the World*. The Press Complaints Commission (newspaper sponsored and financed) said the article was justified because I had admitted to drug taking. The Commission completely ignored my explanation that I was more than willing to admit to, and publicise, my experiments with, and observations on, so-called dangerous drugs, but had always been careful to make sure they were given to me not but “supplied” by me. This was only so I could not be compromised by being accused of *criminal* behaviour, and in fact the police have not contacted me at all, though the *News of the World* said, of course, that their “evidence” had been passed on to the police. I suspect that this accusation might be con-

nected with my support of Robert Henderson, because all the drug using “suspects” I have enquired from strongly deny any guilt, but, in fairness, this would be expected because being known for grassing on a dealer – real or imaginary – could be dangerous for them.

However the *News of the World* story produced an enquiry from a Ben Smith of Chameleon TV in Leeds with a view to making a programme in a series to be called “Films of Fire”. I made a proposal on the lines of using the modern methods of testing to get precise information on the effects of “dangerous drugs” on actual people preferably of various levels of education, backgrounds, and personality. I would obviously volunteer myself as one subject for experiments and a number of “addicts” I asked expressed interest as well, including being interviewed about their involvement and experience. The proposal was not taken up, supposedly because Chameleon had enough material for the series already.

So far as I am concerned it is still open and one of the main purposes of this account is to seek out anyone who has any ideas or contacts to pursue obtaining verifiable information on the effects of drugs. As indicated, I do not think my driving is affected by either heroin or crack after about thirty minutes (probably less), but independent assessment would be more convincing and very gratifying if it confirmed my own impression. About twenty years ago I passed the Advanced Driving Test and believe I have maintained that standard since then – drugs or no drugs.

What is really needed is a properly planned and conducted experimental enquiry into the effects of drugs. This is in principle quite straightforward now that there are accurate tests for the levels of drugs in bodies. But there is of course virtually no chance of any official or government backed enquiry because the last thing any government wants on this topic is accurate information. This is because accurate information would completely spoil their use of the drugs so-called problem for propaganda and as an excuse for intrusive and repressive legislation.

### THE GROWTH OF THE DRUG ABUSE INDUSTRY

From our libertarian point of view the rewards of accurate information would be considerable. In the first place it would dispose of the absurd idea that some drugs are “instantly addictive” which is the only even vaguely rational basis for the drug laws. The fact that the “drugs czar” and practically all politicians and drugs professionals strongly resist any factual enquiry on actual effects is very revealing. It strongly suggests that the drugs hysteria is really an excuse for interference in purely individual choices and for justifying repressive legislation. The existence of repressive legislation in one area is then used as a precedent for even more repressive legislation. This is a very dangerous development, though it must be admitted that there has almost always been some scare or delusion which has been used for much the same purpose. These have ranged from medieval spirits and devils, through various foreign spies and infiltrators, to moral panics of various sorts. So any success we might have in

rolling back the “dangerous drugs” fiasco must be accompanied by pre-emptive measures against any possible substitute.

But the advance of libertarianism is not the only or most important reason for attacking the present beliefs about drug problems.

The drugs scare has fostered the growth of a considerable drug abuse industry with a vested interest in sustaining public anxiety. This industry has all the hallmarks of taxpayer financed organisations which effectively have an open ended brief to “solve problems”. The problems are never solved, they continually expand and new ones are found. In fact the industry continues to require more and more public funds and provides ever more lucrative career opportunities. Have you ever heard of a report on some “social problem” from experts or organisations dealing with that problem which said, in effect, that the problem had been solved and all that remained to be done was dispose of the premises and equipment and redeploy the staff? No, neither have I.

But most important for the drugs problem in particular is the deflection of attention from the real problems and their real causes. When I taught statistical analysis I was always very careful to impress on students that the observation that two phenomena were correlated (or linked as it is often vaguely and confusingly described) did *not* imply that one *caused* the other. Particular care needs to be used to avoid jumping to any apparently “common sense” conclusions, because such conclusions are often wrong. The connection might just be coincidence, but it was always quite likely that both phenomena were the result of a common cause – the “third factor” explanation.

### DIFFERENT CULTURES

Though the government and its drug abuse industry beneficiaries make out that drug users and dealers “cause” crime and social deprivation it is clear that both these phenomena are third factor effects. The third factor is government attempts at social engineering and vote rigging by spending on supposed social benefits. The social security system is probably the chief contributor to deprivation – at any rate indirectly. Social Security is just enough to live on without starving or significantly going without essentials. Or it would be if the recipients could use it effectively, as some can and do. If I had to pick just one third factor as the *cause* of underclass deprivation and degradation, I would nominate the inability to do simple arithmetic and so calculate how to pace expenditure to match income. Running out of money because of the habit of spending everything available as soon as possible is the main cause of *deprivation*, from which drugs are at least a temporary relief as well as a social habit and ritual.

C. P. Snow, who wrote about the “Corridors of Power”, also, in the late nineteen fifties, invented the notion of “two cultures”, by which he meant the arts or literary outlook and the scientific outlook. These were essentially relevant to the educated middle classes of the time. At

that time there was also supposed to be a respectable working class, as portrayed for instance by Richard Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy*. The underclass certainly existed then but had not been *discovered*, because its high profile manifestations of single parenting, welfare dependence, “drug abuse”, and low level crime were not so evident. So we really have four cultures with, I suspect, the vast majority of “us” being in one or other of the Snow categories.

From this point of view it is very easy, in fact natural, to regard our own behaviour as normal and any significant deviation from it as wilfully perverse. From which follows the usual blame theory – if there is a problem find somebody to blame, pass some more laws with punishments – problem solved. But whether the problem really is solved or not, make sure there is plenty of publicity about the “action being taken” to gain media and voter support for the action.

On common sense grounds it seems bound to work. But the common sense of the lawmakers and their respectable supporters is based on introspection. With a lot to lose in terms of friends and respectability it would almost certainly work on those sort of people. And it gives them an opportunity to indulge their self-righteousness, which is always a big incentive to agreement. The trouble is that this system has been tried for a very long time and we still not only have the same old problems but new ones as well which always seem to be getting worse and needing “more resources” to provide solutions. Unfortunately it is Snow’s literary culture types who gravitate to the media, which are the main propaganda channels, and the bureaucracy where the new initiatives are dreamt up. Their backgrounds of English Lit, History, and Politics – where who is to blame for this and that is often a main theme – gives them a preconditioned inclination to indulge in blame games and an entirely unjustified confidence in their ability to find solutions to “problems in society”.

## INDIVIDIVISIBLE AND DIVISIBLE GOODS

An application of science would lead to the question “Why is this happening?” in place of “Who is to blame?” Action would depend on the answer to that question rather than a rearrangement of the pieces in blame games. Also there would be an implied requirement for *coherence* – consistency with any other ideas or observations.

In science consistency is demanded between what might seem at first widely separated areas. For instance a major difficulty with the theory of evolution in its early days came from astronomy, not biology or religion (though the religious objections were the most publicised). On the basis of known sources of energy at the time astronomers calculated that the sun could not have existed long enough for the time scales demanded by evolution (and geology) to have been available. The discovery of nuclear fusion solved that problem.

But in politics and “social policy” there are no such demands. Incoherence is rife. In particular a number of

libertarian ideas have been, in effect, shamelessly exploited after distortion and misrepresentation. Three of these are particularly relevant to the current general situation in general, and the drugs situation in particular.

First: our key concept of freedom. This is often mentioned but its meaning has been virtually reduced to “health and safety”, in the sense that just about any restriction or expenditure of taxation can be justified, so long as it is supposed to promote health and/or safety. As indicated earlier, it came up again and again in the discussions on compulsory drug testing, with the implication that the slightest evidence for – even suspicion of – drugs being “dangerous” was assumed to justify virtually any restriction or control. This is in spite of the fact that simple observation shows that the vast majority of people in practice, *judging by their actual behaviour*, rate health and safety well down their list of priorities for allocating their time and spending. Otherwise there would not be so many fat, or anorexic, or unfit, or overworking, or couch-potato TV watching, or regularly boozing, individuals about. With all the government sponsored and space filling newspaper and magazine articles about – to say nothing of endless books about – health, there can surely be nobody unaware of the rules for “healthy living”, yet those who take it at all seriously are regarded (rightly) as self-righteous bores or health freaks.

I suppose the argument, such as it is, is that health, and certainly life itself, is necessary for any exercise of “freedom”. Ill health certainly restricts the range of choices. But people in poor health, particularly the aged and infirm, still generally have a considerable range of choices on which to exercise freedom. And some people willingly risk their lives, usually for money, but quite often just for sport. In any case “health and safety” is just one of the factors in any range of choices, and so long as the level of risk involved in any choice can be assessed, decisions about how much health and safety can be risked are very properly left to individuals.

## “PUBLIC SERVICES”

As if to pre-empt such observations, some control addicts invented a strange and quite invalid variation. The purpose of the government, it is stated, is to protect “the people” from dangers. This has long been accepted in the form of armed forces to protect the nation from foreign invasion and a police force to protect the majority from the criminal minority. These were the classic examples of what the economists called “indivisible goods”, because it was seen as simply impracticable to provide these desirables in any other way. Then the notion was extended to many other areas and the “indivisible” characteristic quietly dropped and replaced by “rights” to be provided by “public services”.

This “public services” re-designation obscures a great deal of incoherence. Whilst defence and law-enforcement, as well as more modest enterprises such as sewage disposal, might well be accepted as indivisible goods, education and health, to select the two most frequently quoted government black holes for “resources”, certainly are not. So the concept of protection is extended to in-

clude even protection from the predictable consequences of individual decisions, particularly if there is any chance of these being in any way unpleasant or dangerous for the individual making the decision. This is, then, a virtually infinitely extensible excuse for interference and regulation. If “public service” education was any good we should expect the need for protection to *decrease* because improved knowledge would enable people to make the appropriate assessment of risks for themselves.

## PROTECTION FROM PERSUASION

Then we have the notion of responsibility. The Society for Individual Freedom puts its aim of “promotion of freedom with responsibility” on its literature as the society’s main function. By responsibility is meant primarily the obligation, and expectation, to assess and be prepared to accept the consequences of decisions – the disadvantages that might result as well as the hoped for benefits. The ability to do this requires training and experience. It does not come *naturally* to any substantial extent, though it might seem that it does for people who have received the appropriated training. Applying it to people who have no such background is inappropriate to say the least, and is one of the great dangers of generalising from an educated and civilised position.

A much more important and corrosive distortion is what might be called “displaced responsibility”. The application of displaced responsibility presents drug users as, in some contexts, dissolute and degraded, and in other contexts as helpless victims. With the user a helpless victim role, the supplier or dealer becomes the “real” criminal – as if providing the means for supposed destruction, degradation, death, etc. was somehow a *cause* of such consequences – with the user reduced to an apparently terminally stupid victim. Being a victim implies the “need” for protection of course, and we have another version of the function of government to protect!

But the logic is completely haywire. Protection against foreign invasion or random criminal attack is arguably an indivisible good, but being protected from persuasion to indulge one expected pleasure rather than another is clearly not – it is a classic very divisible good, and an essential element in any coherent concept of freedom. This confusion has evidently perplexed even the voluntary addiction advice organizations, such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, who concentrate on promoting total abstinence. It is actually addiction management which is really needed, with abstinence as a possible later stage. In practice it is almost certain that a lot of intelligent and prosperous addicts have learnt management to fit in with normal life – which is why most of them are not noticed.

## RIGHTS AND THE RESTRICTION OF FREEDOM

The concept of rights has also been subjected to corruption. It is certainly puzzling, for instance, why Toni’s mother evidently has the right to nine children (at least one of whom has clear foetal alcoholic syndrome, two others now have long criminal records, and all except the latest, including Toni, have been permanently in care) by

three different fathers, yet Toni herself apparently does not have the right to breathe substances of her own choice. Her mother’s children, including Toni, must have cost taxpayers hundreds of thousands of pounds in one way or another. Toni pays for her drug pleasures but is on schedule to match her mother’s consumption of “public services”.

The libertarian concept of rights was confined essentially to the right to be left to one’s own devices and the consequences of one’s own choices, with the usual caveat that choices involving the unwilling participation of other people are not allowed. This notion of rights has been corrupted into granting certain social sub-groups a long list of calls on other peoples’ resources, usually on the grounds of some supposed need which has been newly discovered. Apart from that novelty, “rights” have one other common property – they invariably require extra bureaucracy and “government resources” for their implementation. Very soon we notice that these new rights somehow lead to new and unforeseen obligations. The “right” to education evidently implies the obligation to be subjected to indoctrination in various notions such as equality and equal opportunities, and the “right” to health implies being pressured into abstinence from smoking, drinking, indolence, and drugs (of course).

Though there are other areas where the ideas of freedom, responsibility, rights, and logic, are unscrupulously abused, drugs are the present day classic example in so-called advanced democracies. Consequently a successful demolition of the present drugs policies would be a key achievement for real liberty. Also a genuinely humanitarian achievement as it would clear the way to abolishing the legal oppression of a significant number of otherwise innocent people. As with other major changes in attitude, this must be based on clear facts and argument. Our arguments are clear, but the notion that drugs are somehow irresistible, so that eliminating them is actually a humanitarian project rather than being insufferably arrogant, is very deeply embedded in public opinion. This is objectively wrong, but so long as it persists it diverts attention, and the precious “resources”, from the real problems and failures of policy, and onto the absurd “drug wars” instead.

## AN ALTERNATIVE HYPOTHESIS

This why I would like to see a proper experimentally and statistically verified survey of drug effects on normal people, using the presently available tests of drug levels together with established physical and psychological tests of performance.

I suggested that coherence should be required of any supposed explanation and the typical examples briefly indicated above show the complete incoherence of conventional wisdom. Coherence can be restored on two levels. The first is by applying the classic scientific approach of looking for an alternative hypothesis. The third factor theory is one step. Another is to realise that the real political purpose of engaging in drug wars and inventing drug problems is not in any sense humanitarian – the pur-

pose is to find an excuse for extending political and bureaucratic power over the general population.

On a more fundamental level there is the behaviour “linked” to crime and general disorder and supposedly “caused” by drug abuse. The real explanation is easily provided by evolutionary psychology. This is now widely discussed, mainly to explain sexual behaviour, particularly the difference in male and female aims and satisfactions. However there are other applications of the theory and the underclass is an important one.

It is clear that underclass characters were not only behaving in a primitive fashion in their casual sexual behaviour, as we are all inclined to given the chance, but also in a primitive way in respect to property and friendship. Our primitive ancestors roamed around appropriating and using anything they found useful, then discarding it – just like our present day underclass, who have very little concept of property rights beyond wanting to hang on to anything they find temporarily attractive or useful. Otherwise they assume they can pick up or take over anything they have access to. To verify that this behaviour is in a very real sense *natural*, one has only to observe the behaviour of children before they are socialised, or “taught the difference between right and wrong”. They try to grab and hold on to anything they fancy, and then discard it when it is of no further interest.

## THE CONTINUATION OF THE UNDERCLASS CULTURE

This presents some theoretical and practical difficulties for libertarians. For one thing there is a significant part of the population for whom an abstract argument is simply unintelligible. In my initial contacts with drug users I was surprised and puzzled by their lack of resentment towards the law and its enforcement. I often made remarks to them such as: “You people just let yourselves be walked over – why don’t you do some demonstrating or something – insist on some ‘natural rights’?” But such suggestions were simply ignored and I eventually realized that they just did not have any notion of freedom or abstract justice – they just took the world as it was and made the best of it from their own point of view. Considering their circumstances and prospects, their decisions, including the drug use, probably really were the best available for themselves.

More fundamentally, from the freedom point of view, is the continuation of the underclass culture. Some success seems to have been achieved in America from certain rehabilitation programmes often, it seems, Christian inspired. Some of these are enthusiastically reported by Melanie Philips in *America’s Social Revolution* (Civitas, £4, ISBN 1-903 386-15-2). Marriage has been promoted as a favourable condition and policy changed from telling teenage girls that the state would pay for their babies to incentivising them not to have children out of wedlock. (p. 11) Also, there has been positive action to reunite absent fathers with their families.

Then there are schemes of cooperation between the Churches and the probation service to make sure that con-

victed criminals abide by probation conditions and attend courses with a Christian basis. Some activists running these course become “surrogate fathers”. There are also schools with dedicated head teachers who, in effect, introduce positive values and insistence on proper behaviour, which looks remarkably like that which was taken for granted in schools before so-called progressive education methods were adopted.

Of course drugs are ever present, and it seems that a prime indicator of success is that the subjects give up using drugs. Melanie Philips puts great emphasis on the importance of “faith” in motivating both the activists to dedicated action, and motivating the reformed criminals and drug abusers to stay reformed. In passing it might be noted that the Scientologists (who always receive a bad press compared with Christians) have a rehabilitation program for both criminals and drug users which specifically *excludes* indoctrination pressure on clients.

However a more critical view of the American initiatives tends to confirm the third factor explanation. Whatever the motive, the result of the action is that individuals who had no aims beyond immediate indulgences and (criminal) peer-conformity are induced to realise that they can achieve in other ways than criminal ones, and appreciate “straight” company. And the continual harassment to conform simply reduces the opportunities for any other behaviour. This might seem a new idea to white liberal intellectual social workers and politicians, but it is in fact as near an imitation as practicable with the underclass of the formative experiences of these intellectuals. Their basic error was to assume that the way the liberal intellectuals behave was somehow natural. If the conditioning which leads to that behaviour is absent in early life then it is very difficult – though evidently not completely impossible – to inculcate it later. Drug use will probably be present in underclass behaviour but that is not the primary *cause* of crime – it is just a commonly associated indulgence and emotional escape mechanism.

## NOTES

1. SCODA is now amalgamated with the ISDD (Institute for the Study of Drug Dependence) and renamed Drugscope. The web page – [www.drugscope.org.uk](http://www.drugscope.org.uk) – contains a lot of information, including a brief survey of legalization considerations and links to other organizations and reading suggestions.
2. For a survey of the history of drug prohibition (and its political purposes) see *The American Disease* by David F Musto, Oxford University Press, 1999 (3rd edn.), ISBN 01951125096. (Available from amazon.com for about \$20. Also related works, some on the ‘other side’.)
3. Also see Transform Easton Business Centre, Felix Road, Bristol, BS5 0HE, website: [www.transform-drugs.org.uk](http://www.transform-drugs.org.uk) – Tel: 0117 941 5810 – Fax: 0117 941 5809. This organisation campaigns for the repeal of drugs prohibition and replacement by effective regulation.