

# Why a High Society is a Free Society

A. C. Grayling (2002)

Intro to Philosophy  
Professor Douglas Olena

# Autonomy

- 363 “One measure of a good society is whether its individual members have the autonomy to do as they choose in respects that principally concern only them.
- The debate about heroin, cocaine and marijuana touches precisely on this.
- In my submission, a society in which such substances are legal and available is a good society
  - not because drugs are in themselves good
  - but because the autonomy of those who wish to use them is respected.

# No Difference

- 363 In logic [there] is no difference between legal and currently illegal drugs.
- Given this, consistent policy must do one of two things:
  - criminalize the use of nicotine and alcohol...
  - or legalize currently illegal substances under the same kinds of regime that govern nicotine and alcohol.

# Civil Liberties

- 363 On civil liberties grounds the latter policy is preferable because there is no justification in a good society for policing behavior...
- ...unless, in the form of rape, murder theft, riot or fraud, it is intrinsically damaging to the social fabric, and involves harm to unwilling third parties.
- Bad law tries to coerce people into behaving according to norms chosen by people who claim to know and to do better than those for whom they legislate.

# Actual Practice

- 364 Almost everyone who wishes to try drugs, does so; almost everyone who wishes to make use of drugs does it irrespective of their legal status.
- Prohibition in the U.S. is a stark example of the abject failure of law to restrict use.
- Prohibition created a huge criminal industry.
- Crime destabilizes society.

# Proposed Practice

- If all the illegal substances were legalized under the same auspices as alcohol and tobacco, the drive to criminal activity would diminish.
- Law enforcement could concentrate on real criminal activity—violence toward individuals.
- Safety would be increased in the actual drugs themselves through governmental control of processing and distribution.

# A Good Society

- 364 A good society should be able to accommodate practices which are not destructive of social bonds (in the way theft, rape, murder and other serious crimes are), but mainly have to do with private behavior.
- In fact, a good society should only interfere with private behavior in extremis.
- In the 1800s and before, “society was not adversely affected by the use of drugs” and was benefited by freedom from paternalistic behavior towards its citizens.

# A Good Society

- The place of drugs in a good society is not about drugs as such, but rather the freedom and the value to individuals and their society of openness to experimentation and alternative behaviors and lifestyles.
- The good society is permissive, seeking to protect third parties from harm but not presuming to order people to take this or that view about what is in their own good.