INTRODUCTION

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I would like to point out first of all that Dr. Freedman's stance—that of the "middle range" outlook on narcotic addiction—is really out of character. I have rarely before seen him assume such a dispassionate stance. He is usually found at one extreme of an issue or the other passionately pursuing goals, usually for uplifting the fallen or freeing the underprivileged. This new, dispassionate, fence-sitting role ill becomes him, yet there seems to be a good justification for his position.

The middle-range outlook, like sitting on the fence, invites brickbats from all sides but also gives an unobstructed view of the scene below. What does our fence-sitter see? A striking panorama of "social, chemical, pharmacologic, psychologic, psychiatric, legal, and political forces" interacting with each other in a most intricate network so that it is almost impossible to separate primary from secondary factors, causes from effects. Some of these forces, however, seem to be better supplied and better reinforced than others. Thus, as far as governmental support is concerned, the chemical, pharmacologic, legal, and political forces have the upper hand while, until recently, the social-cultural forces were almost completely neglected. Yet, our biochemistry hasn't changed all that much in the past decade to explain the drug explosion and, if anything, our legal and political forces have served to increase rather than decrease the drug explosion. This puzzles Dr. Freedman greatly, and his paper demonstrates the appalling results of stressing only a few of the options that we could investigate to determine the causes of our drug era.

Our 20th century has comprised several eras, to which various moods have been attached. First was the era of anxiety, fanned by several world wars. Then began the era of depression in the post-sputnik period, and now we have an era of reveling in mood alteration reflected in the use of drugs. Social philosophers
have tried to point out that during our anxiety era we really were not more prone to anxiety than our predecessors. The difficulty was that the institutions we established to assuage and contain anxiety had begun to fail. We lost faith in them and had not yet found substitutes. The drop in religious belief, the rise in divorce rate, the loosening of social structure—all influenced man’s anxieties, and without new institutions to replace or bolster the tottering ones, anxiety increased.

We probably had no increase in proneness to depression either but, here again, the usual avenues for containing depressive moods and disorders apparently failed to assuage the hopelessness and futility of life faced by the atomic bomb.

How did the drug era develop? First it is important to distinguish between the so-called hard drugs, such as heroin and cocaine, and drugs such as marijuana and LSD which have different histories. Leaving aside the difficult issue of whether or not there has been a great increase in the number of individuals addicted to opiates, the characteristics of the addicted population have changed dramatically over the last 60 to 70 years. At the beginning of this century, the majority of addicted persons were white, middle-aged, middle-class southern women. Today the majority of addicts are black young males from deprived backgrounds. The use of marijuana, of psychedelics, of “ups” and “downs” by our population of youth is a new phenomenon altogether. The reasons for these trends are unclear, but they certainly do not lie in changed metabolism or chemistry of the human body in this period. For this reason, it is essential that studies of the ecological forces underlying drug use become a focus of our concern. The few studies conducted in this area have demonstrated, for example, that such factors as precocious maturity, peer-group and friendship patterns, rather than parental influence, are probably very influential in the spread of drug usage. Is it possible that our overcrowded schools, stress on watching rather than participating, sports, enforced schooling for a longer period—all conspire to turn our youth inward in search of self-stimulation for kicks? It is clear that such questions require a careful examination of the entire field from the vantage point that Dr. Freedman has taken.