

Foreword

There has been an extensive polarization of both political and public opinion over the last ten years in the area of drug use. The phrase "drug abuse" has been promoted into the role of a metaphor for the problems in our society, and it has become the straw man for their solution. If we could win the "war on drugs" we would have no more problems with crime (or poverty, or racism, or street gangs, or illiteracy) and our social system would again become healthy and stable. The blaming of all of our problems on the drug abusers of today is a chilling parallel to the assigned role of the Jews as the target problem in Germany, in the mid-30's. It is as if there are two opposite camps, the drug warriors and the legalizers. If you were to speak against one, you would be branded a member of the other. Neither statesmen nor politicians can dare voice any rationality in these areas of controversy as neither chose to be branded as a spokesman for the other side. Quite literally, the arena has become a, "If you are not for us, you are against us," dichotomy, and there is less and less dialog occurring. At the Congressional level, any new law that mentions the word "drug" in the definition of a crime or the increasing of a penalty against crime, is rarely opposed. Any counter arguer would be seen as "soft on drugs," and would fear losing voter support. In recent years, even the Supreme Court has voted more and more frequently on the side of perceived public response to their decision, rather than on the Constitutional fine print, when an appeal being considered has involved the word, "drug."

Even simple phrases have become loaded sound-bites. A convention on harm reduction in the area of drug use or the potential medical uses of marijuana will be seen by law enforcement and the political establishment as a gathering of drug legalizers, and they will condemn it from a distance. A convention on international precursor control or the neurological risks associated with the use of illegal drugs will be seen by the medical and academic community as a gathering of politically motivated authority figures who wish to limit our freedoms for socially valid reasons. There is no question but that the pendulum is swinging more and more to the side of restrictions and punishment, but any voice that speaks too loudly against this position is condemned as "sending the wrong message."

In the medical area, this division is extreme. The definition of a Schedule I drug is that it has a high abuse potential and no accepted medical utility. Yet there is no provision for any abuse potential other than "high" nor any statutory guidance as to what would constitute "accepted." There is the voice of the "drug warrior" camp that there can be no toleration of any use of a scheduled drug until it has been proven to be safe. There is the counter voice of the "legalizers" that there is no research permitted to establish hazard and, furthermore, there is no definition of the nature of the needed evidence that would constitute proof of safety.

The extremes of this positional separation are just as dramatic in the area of scientific research. In the academic world there has been a gradual shifting of research funding sources from the interests of the University to the interests of the Government. Today a very large percentage of research at both the graduate and the post-doctoral levels is supported by grants from any of several institutes in Washington. And, as the recipients of these grants are increasingly beholden to the political bodies that fund them, they effectively define what is acceptable science. Whereas grant applications were originally chosen to reflect the questions arising out of the curiosity of the experimenter, now they usually reflect the quest for answers that would be of interest to the funder. And again, in the area of drugs this is strongly biased towards the perceived need for information that would support the war on drugs and further justify its escalation. Many grants are awarded specifically to document some negative property of a given drug, rather than simply to search for the properties of that drug.

I would like to propose a middle ground within this turmoil. The perceived "drug" crisis is thought by most people to reflect the use of stimulants and narcotics, with a generous sprinkling of marijuana. There are obvious problems with the stimulants, cocaine and methamphetamine, as well as with the depressants opium and heroin. And marijuana is the favorite *bête noire* as it is the *de facto* major justification for our entire law enforcement's existence. Without this plant, our need of drug law enforcement would collapse to about one fifth of where it is today. But, almost unnoticed are the psychedelic drugs which are quite different and distinct. They have been caught up in this anti-drug rubric, even though very few problems have been specifically associated with this minor

category. A few of them, such as LSD and MDMA, have become front-page stuff, and occasionally there are scare stories in the papers concerning novelties such as toad-licking and mushrooms. But to a large measure, this psychedelic fringe is neither newsworthy nor threatening, within the public awareness. It rests there largely as an unknown.

Perhaps we can use this relative anonymity as a modest platform, as a foundation, for the development of a research philosophy that is, truly, on middle ground. The political community, along with the law enforcement and the fundamentalist communities, have all found positions at the extremes, and they cannot take a position that even recognizes a middle ground. When a statement is made by a person in power demanding agreement and compliance concerning some evil drug matter, almost all public figures accept and support his statement. In private, there might be some reservations, but in public there are none. The political position has been lost. But maybe the scientific position has not yet been committed.

Might this community begin to ask questions about a drug such as, "What is its action?" rather than, "Does it have a good or a bad action?" "What is the mechanism of action?" rather than, "What is the mechanism of neurotoxicity?" Small changes such as these would in no way change the intended research protocols, and what is to be observed will still be observed.

Many scientists in the academic community are to some degree intimidated by subtle restraints, and are thus unable to talk with complete candor. But I believe that it is in this very community that the battle-lines of the war on drugs have not yet been cast in stone, and that honest inquiry might still be sought.

Here is a request to the scientists of the world. The next time you submit a grant proposal, state your questions as being from your curiosity, rather than from a search for answers that might bring you government approval. Think twice about framing your question as an answer that you expect to verify experimentally. The excitement of science is in discovery, not in confirmation.

As research scientists, we still command a broad audience, and we do not need to become political lackeys. We must remain articulate. We must remain sincere. And we must retain our integrity. We are the middle ground in a very polarized system, and we must confirm and expand that central position.

Alexander Shulgin
Lafayette, California