The Question Of Legalizing Drugs Essay, Research Paper

The Question of Legalizing Drugs?

Drug legalization is an enduring question that presently faces our scholars. This issue embraces two positions: drugs should not be legalized and drugs should be legalized. These two positions contain an array of angles that supports each issue. This brief of the issues enables one to consider the strengths and weakness of each argument, become aware of the grounds of disagreement and agreement and ultimately form an opinion based upon the positions stated within the articles.

In the article ?Against the Legalization of Drugs?, by James Q. Wilson, the current status of drugs is supported. Wilson believes if a drug such as heroin were legalized there would be no financial or medical reason to avoid heroin usage; therefore, anybody could afford it (367). Wilson stated that during 1960?s, British physicians were allowed to prescribe heroin to addicts until the number of addicts increased fivefold. He argued that cocaine is not a ?victimless crime.? Addicts victimize children by neglect and spouses by not providing (370). Wilson upholds that illegality of drugs increases crime because users need to pay for their habit (372). He believes the benefit of illegal drugs is it forces patients who enter under legal compulsion to complete their treatment due to the pressure and drug-education programs in the schools (374). Wilson is convinced the difference between nicotine and cocaine is that while tobacco shortens one?s life, cocaine debase it and destroys the addicts humanity (375).

Wilson?s argument is strong because he demonstrates his knowledge of the subject and supports it with many clear, scientific facts and historical examples of drug usage. He interprets facts differently by seeing ?logical fallacy and factual error? (371) in what other perceive as being a true. He also acknowledges his opposition by addressing how the advocates of legalization respond to his position. Wilson recognizes that that he may be wrong about his conclusions of drug legalization. Yet he states if he is wrong, money will be saved, while if he is right, and the legalizers prevail, then millions of people, thousands of infants and hundreds of neighborhoods will live a life of disease (377-8).

In the article ?Drug Policy and the Intellectuals,? by William J. Bennentt, drug legalization was not supported. Bennett wants to address the ?root causes? of drugs by means of the education, prevention, the media, and most of all the law (359). Bennett believes legalization will remove the incentive to stay away from a life of drugs (360). He thinks legalizing drugs would lower the cost to the allowance budget of a sixth-grader (360-1). Bennett believes that drug use will rise dramatically if legalized. (361). Bennett says that legalization advocates believe the cost of enforcing the drug laws is too great, but they do not ask what is the cost of not enforcing the laws. Bennett thinks the hospitals would be filled, more school dropouts would occur, and more crack babies raise the stakes of legalizing drugs (361). Contrary to Wilson, Bennett argues that crime would not decline with legalization. He believes there is a particular lesson to be learned from Prohibition. He is convinced that when alcohol was illegal, consumption went down, less alcohol-related disease existed, and much less public drunkenness happened(362). Bennett has no doubt law enforcement is needed with drug treatment and education plans and calls for a bigger criminal justice system in the form of drug prevention (363).

Bennett holds a relatively strong argument. He blends clear and concise facts with a logical understanding of the matter well within his argument. He shows an understanding of others? viewpoints by addressing points of opposition several times during the article. Bennett demonstrates knowledge of the subject by supporting his points with examples and facts.

In the article ?A War for the Surgeon General, not the Attorney General,? by Kurt Schmoke, legalization of drugs was supported in his argument for decriminalization. Schmoke agrees with Wilson saying that drug users are committing vast amounts of crime (379). He argues that the current criminal-justice system cannot handle the drug-related cases because there is no placement for the drug offenders now being arrested. He states that with less crowded prisons, there will be less pressure on prosecutors to plea bargain with the nondrug, real criminals (380). Schmoke believes decriminalization will stop street hustlers from persuading children into ?easy money,? and will ultimately free up valuable criminal-justice resources (382). Like Bennett, Schmoke sees an important lesson to be learned from the mistakes of Prohibition. However, Bennett interprets Prohibition differently and thinks we need to educate society as to the dangers of drug use (383).

Schmoke carries a medium-strong argument. He presents the unique idea of ?decriminalization? and supports it well with a number of clear facts and statistics, but he does not clearly define the term at the beginning or even throughout the article which leads to confusion of what he is arguing for. Schmoke acknowledges and addresses the dispute that decriminalization will end drug education campaigns saying that it will actually provide money to those programs (382). This acknowledgment validates his understanding of others? viewpoints. Schmoke is in dispute with Wilson because Schmoke believes tobacco is as much of a drug as cocaine or heroin. Schmoke says, ?By every standard we apply to illicit drugs, tobacco should be a controlled substance? (383).

?Our Current Drug Legislation: Grounds for Reconsideration,? by Michael Tooley, supported drug legalization. Tooley presents two reasons for reconsideration of our current drug policy: first, the great difficulty of justifying prohibitive laws placed on peoples? liberty; second, the social and personal costs of a prohibitionist approach. (385). Tooley finds a great need to define terms necessary for a valid argument. He believes misunderstanding comes from the inability to define words such as justice and morale (386-7). Tooley also believes there are certain costs associated with our present approach. Tooley reports, as Wilson and Schmoke will agree, one cost is the increased crime and violence in society. A second cost is of enforcing drug laws because detection is difficult and there are no victims (contrary to Wilson?s belief) of this crime (387). Tooley agrees with Schmoke that it is a high cost to incarcerate drug offenders while violent criminals are released after a short-term (388).

Tooley presents a medium-weak argument. His argument format is clear and concise with his objectives stated. Tooley offers no statistics that makes one question the validity of his argument. He does demonstrate an understanding of others? viewpoints because he offers a few lines of argument. Tooley?s argument is weak because he offers little scientific evidence for the basis of his ideas. Coercion is not likely to occur because only his opinion is given and no scientific facts are exhibited.

This brief of the articles enables one to evaluate the strengths and weakness, become aware of the grounds of disagreement and agreement and to finally form an opinion based upon the material. The two basic positions of this issue provide were fully supported. I concluded that the anti-legalist hold a stronger argument than the legalist. Still, Drug legalization is an enduring question that presently faces our scholars.

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