

nathaniel borenstein

Cannabis, a personal mind-expander

In the 1960's, back before Timothy Leary was a stand-up comic or Ken Kesey a silent hermit, there were, among the drunkards and pleasure-seekers of the college campuses, a few serious people who firmly believed in the spiritual worth of drug-induced visions. In the enlightened 70's, of course, everyone recognized that all spirituality was mere self-delusion, and this realization has freed today's college students to use drugs in a spirit of absolute hedonism. In the moralistic backlash that is sweeping us into the 80's, drugs are often seen as one more dangerous symptom (or cause) of decadence, nothing more. For those of us who often rely on drugs, and are not unhappy with that state of affairs, the trend is troubling.

Marijuana, specifically, is a very good thing. It offers a unique perspective on our internal universes. In this respect it resembles the much-heralded positive aspects of LSD and other hallucinogens, the unavailability of high-quality specimens of which has rendered them hopelessly unstylish. Of course, there are those who deny that drugs can ever alter for the better the consciousness of a human being. There are even a few who have used a drug such as mescaline and still take that position. But on a personal level, I can only understand this denial by concluding that I and they have some basic psychological differences that alter our responses to drugs. For me, many drugs, and most notably marijuana, radically redirect the currents of my soul's ocean for the better, and with a minimum of pollution of my body.

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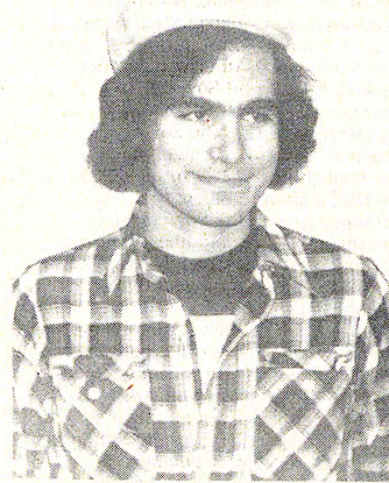
Unable as I am to witness the inner workings of any mind other than my own, I can make no generalized claims about what marijuana can do that is good. For me, it is a wellspring of hope, creativity, and insight. Marijuana is, for example, highly valuable to me as a Mathematics major; a few puffs were a sure source of insight into a difficult concept of Topology. A larger-scale indulgence is the best way I know to rid myself of psychological writer's cramps: After weeks of writing nothing at all, a good high will often keep me up past dawn

at the typewriter. In general, cannabis unlocks the barriers my mind erects against itself. It lets me feel my highs and my lows more deeply, more entirely, and thus helps prevent the occurrence of unresolved emotional conflicts which can simmer within. It clears my mind, not by wiping away what I am, but by teaching me how to arrange my mind with wide open corridors for learning and creating, reciprocal processes which must use the same mental avenues of communication.

Of course, there can be no denying the harmful side effects of marijuana and other drugs, including alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and sugar. Physically, marijuana pollutes the lungs, may damage chromosomes, and probably will turn out to cause cancer. Mentally, it can dilute concentration or can cause paranoia in varying degrees. While I won't feel much of the physical effect for at least a few more years, the psychological effects are a recurrent reality for me. I am no stranger to paranoia; yet writing itself is a mental aberration, indicating a perception of the inadequacy of oral communication. Certainly the same lobotomy could eliminate both paranoia and the desire to write; should we be too surprised if drugs that promote one also promote the other? I, for one, am neither surprised nor discouraged. Without paranoia, I fear, I could write myself death. With paranoia, I fear I could write myself to death.

My final argument in favor of marijuana is a highly subjective and disputable one, but it is one that I

know from discussions is widely shared. Psychoactive drugs, I believe, can activate certain aspects of the mind that, in some people, lie dormant for a lifetime. In other words, drugs can, if properly used, afford genuine spiritual insights into the nature and meaning of human existence. Such things as understanding math better are just a side effect of these insights. I would not go so far as to claim that drugs offer the same fulfillment found in mystical religious traditions, for I do not believe this to be the case. But every mystical tradition requires first



that an individual be religiously curious and alive, before he can begin to unlock the secrets of existence. In a society where religious orientation is generally laughed at, drugs offer an alternative mode of awakening. Ken Kesey compared taking LSD to walking through a door: you can keep going through the same door time after time, or you can begin to explore the other side. He said this as a warning to the flower children against drug use for its own sake, but today it stands out more as a positive claim: Drugs can open up many people's minds to view a world they have never before imagined.

The warning, however, ought not to be ignored. After ten years of drug use, I am more aware than ever that I depend upon these substances for assistance in many creative and intellectual endeavors that I should properly be able to do independently. It does disturb me that I use marijuana to enhance my enjoyment and appreciation of everything from Math to Religious Studies, from programming a computer to singing a madrigal. Yet still I wonder whether, without the drug, my interests would have ranged so widely. Certainly I know people who live perpetually in a smoke-filled haze and get nothing done. But I know many more people who lead lives of crystal clarity and sobriety, with no idea of what should or even of what could be done. I have chosen to try to return into the haze exactly often enough to clarify the goals and meaning of the rest of my existence. This is an endless tightrope over an abyss, but having come thus far it would be no safer to turn back. The patterns of my thoughts are by now themselves psychedelic; I could never again transform them into sobriety. Why, then, should I deny myself the chemicals that oil my bearings, lubricate my mind, and keep me running smoothly?

Scarlet and Black,