

# LAW AND CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS

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VOLUME 22

WINTER, 1957

NUMBER I

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## FOREWORD

Freedom from pain—the avoidance, or minimization, or obliteration from memory of unpleasant experience, physical or psychic—is an instinctively sanctioned value to which our ethic has attached considerable weight. It is not, however, an absolute value, and when, accordingly, it collides with others, some mutual accommodation must be effected that will reflect the relative importance of each. This, indeed, has been the rationale and the history of the regulation of narcotics.

Narcotics, at once a blessing and a bane, invite a curious ambivalence. Their medical use as analgesic agents has enjoyed universal approbation, and substantial resources, both human and material, have been devoted to their discovery and to the development of more effective techniques for their utilization. Nevertheless, their prolonged administration invariably produces side effects of a most deleterious sort, and, owing to this, their nonmedical use has unequivocally been proscribed.

While the unauthorized use of narcotics may, perhaps, be regarded as a relatively inconsequential matter in light of the small number of persons directly affected, both absolutely and proportionately, the practice assumes a larger significance when viewed in the light of its human and social costs and the manner in which it has taken root and spread. In fact, a searching examination into the considerations that should shape a sound narcotics policy, as well as the extent to which these considerations are reflected in the prevailing pattern of control, seems quite urgently to be indicated. It is to this end, therefore, that this symposium has been directed.

Our contributors have addressed themselves widely, and among the principal foci of their attention have been such fundamental inquiries as: What is the present state of knowledge concerning narcotics, narcotics addiction, and its treatment, and what are the portents for the future in these areas? Are there any discernible personality or environmental factors that appear to predispose to narcotics use, and, if so, can this intelligence beneficially be exploited? What significance, if any, should be assigned to the apparently rising incidence of narcotics use among juvenile elements, and what role, if any, has that other recently observed urban phenomenon, the “street gang,” played in this development? Is there any direct relationship between narcotics use and criminality, and, if so, what is its precise nature?

Other areas have also been probed, as our contributors have sought answers to such questions as: What social control mechanisms, international, national, and local, have been devised and instituted to cope with the narcotics problem, and how effective has their operation been? Have any feasible alternative schemes been proposed that promise possibly greater success, and, if so, why have they not been further implemented? What has been the experience of similar societies in dealing with this problem, and does it afford any illuminating insights into our situation?

Controversy is rife in this area—but where, as here, many basic data are still lacking or are fragmentary at best, where “experts,” self-styled and otherwise, vigorously propound diametrically opposed views, where opinions may well be colored, to a greater or lesser extent, by sensational and often distorted popular treatment, the absence of greater consensus is not really surprising. Nevertheless, a perceptible *rapprochement* has been and is being made, and it is hoped that this publication may, by ventilating the subject more fully, clarify thinking in this area and, thus, ultimately share, albeit, perhaps, somewhat remotely, in the formulation of a rational narcotics policy—one that will faithfully respond to society’s needs and interests.

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