The Non-medical Use of Legal and Illicit Drugs in Everyday Life

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'The way we live now is the way that we've always lived – the use of psychotropic drugs is at the same level in all societies at all times.'

Summary

Up to 1868 cannabis was freely available over the counter in this country, but was in fact rarely used. It was not until the 1950s that cannabis in any quantities came to Britain, largely to be used by Asiatic, African, and West Indian immigrants. Its use by the indigenous English was restricted to very small circles of, for example, jazz musicians. It was not until 1964 that for the first time there were more arrests of whites on cannabis charges than members of other groups. In 1964 the figures were whites, 284; other groups, 260, a total of 544. Cannabis rapidly became part of white youth culture. By 1967 the figures for white arrests had climbed from 284 to 1,737. This was more than twice the rate of increase of arrests 1964-1967 of people from other groups. From well under 600 *arrests* in 1964 the figure rose so much that by 1975, from the larger number of those arrested, 9,000 were *found guilty* on cannabis charges. That figure doubled from 9,000 in 1975 to 18,000 in 1985. The figure had doubled again by 1989, to 34,000. It then more than doubled from 34,000 in 1989, to 88,000 in 1999 – from 600 to 88,000 in one generation. The figures for other legal and illegal psychotropic drugs show the same steep upward trend.

Many influential commentators say that, even if the use of such drugs is a problem, it is age-old and universal, and is no worse than it has ever been. The figures are wrong, they say. What the correct figures would show would be little change in the overall use of legal and illegal drugs. Is their complacency on the figures justified? How sound is the case they put forward: that the statistical rise is just the result of 'moral panic'? Getting people to believe that there is no new problem is a certain way of ensuring that the problem will not be tackled. Many or most of those who deny that drug use has significantly increased are the same people who claim also that drug use is not a problem. There are several other ideas that can be used to corrode a culture, or to ensure that people do not act to prevent their culture being corroded, like the idea that 'everybody is doing it'. *The figures show that this contention is equally false.* The trends have dramatically risen, *but drug use is still very much a minority phenomenon.*

Introduction

One of the off-the-peg arguments that save the people who use it from having to have any knowledge about the subject under discussion – whether it is crime, adultery, drunkenness or drugs – is that 'it has always been the same'.

According to this argument, that things have not changed, the idea that crime rose enormously after 1955 was an illusion of people's irrational fears. The argument is very persistent that the real volume of crime has not altered. The only people that think it has are the unsophisticated and malevolent, especially the benighted remnants of the respectable working class on the one hand and the 'forces of conservatism' on the other.

All that has happened, we are assured, is that what was hidden is now being exposed. In this Tuesday's paper, *Le Monde* published a long interview with a thirty-three-year old French sociologist, Laurent Mucchielli.[1] According to Mucchielli, crime has not

actually increased. It is just that the threshold of the toleration of crime of the well-to-do has been lowered.[1] Crime gives the false appearance of rising only because respectable people's psychology, generation after generation, is that things only get worse.[2]

According to this argument, that things have not changed, because upper-class students on generous parental allowances binged at Oxford in the 1930s, a tiny proportion of their age group, nothing has changed when students, 30 per cent of their age group, binge on alcohol today in every city in England. Jeremy Paxman made this point in an article in the *Sunday Times*, 'Drunk? Throwing up is part of growing up for students'. By drunk he made clear that he meant regularly paralytic.[2]

Four things do give plausibility to the assertion that 'nothing has changed' in the levels of national 'bad behaviour'.

The first is that examples of almost anything that can be said about human depravity (or heroism) can be found in almost any society at any time. The earliest books of the Old Testament prohibit every kind of unacceptable human behaviour imaginable. Moses would not have taken the trouble to prohibit unacceptable conduct that did not exist – even if was only found among the heathens. If Freud is right, what is more, the id, the unconscious of each of us, harbours the potentiality for horrors unspeakable that are capable in certain circumstances of expressing themselves in our own actual conduct, and 'there but for the grace of God go I'.

When it comes to ordinary human weaknesses, parallels are never difficult to find. In that sense it is true that 'human nature doesn't change' and 'these things have happened before, there's nothing new under the sun'.

The second is that we can rarely be certain that the statistical data collected and handed down from the past are not hopelessly inaccurate. Nor can we be certain that observers at the time who were not statisticians, who have informed us through their social and political comment, through novels, poetry and pictorial art, were not wrong. We know that some of them were totally wrong, and that the complexity and flux of personal and social life mean that none of them gives us, or anyone ever could give us, a full and flawless account of anything.

Of course, in rejecting the consensus of the contemporaneous statistics, comment and other depictions of the past, we could be right. We can be right for all the wrong reasons, or without having any reason at all, good or bad. But to rationally *convince* other people that our version is the correct one, it is not enough simply to point to defects and omissions in past statistics and past documentary and artistic comment. It is necessary to show that we have the evidence for what we say the statistics and comment would have shown if they had been accurate and true. It is not enough merely to say, 'I can point to defects in the versions presented at the time, *and on those grounds alone* I claim that my *alternative* version is correct.' Without *better* evidence than that which we reject, the most that we can say is, 'we can't use the statistics and comment from the past; we therefore can't say what the truth of the past is, and nobody can'. When the mass of statistics and most commentators agreed on the same general picture of what is the past for us, but what was their present, we make an extraordinarily arrogant claim when we say, without having any evidence, that our own, different present-day version of their times is superior to their own version of it.

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[1] Le seuil de sensibilité des habitants augmente avec l'amélioration de leurs conditions de vie et santé.

[2] Catastrophisme permanent—what English sociologist popularised as 'moral panic'.

The third thing is that the 'mix' undoubtedly does change within a given category of conduct. Heroin consumption goes down while cocaine consumption goes up. Knocking down old ladies increases, but beating wives and children decreases. It can look as if 'drug taking' as a whole, or 'violence' as a whole has remained the same, the only change being in the ingredients that make up the whole. Some of you might have heard today that, on the other hand that (if the report is true), sexual modesty will not now by tolerated by some social workers. For those of you who have not heard, I am referring to the case of the 93-year-old great-grandmother and ex-school teacher, Una Penny, who objected to being bathed by a man. According to her son-in-law, she was told that Gloucestershire social services had taken legal advice that her refusal to be bathed by a man would be an infringement of his human rights to be treated without sexual discrimination against himself. According to the son-in-law, social services have said she would have to chose between having her care withdrawn, or being refereed to a psychiatrist to see if she had 'trouble with men', and have her aberration cured. The veracity of the report is confirmed to some extent by the response of the publications manager for Gloucestershire County Council, Stella Parkes, which was that 'Old men don't complain when they are cared for by women … but we are working with Una and her family on the situation'.[3]

The fourth thing that gives plausibility to the assertion that 'things have always been the same', is that in any association, or in any society, like England, people are concerned with maintaining the *current* standards of conduct.

Crime and Drunkenness in England and Wales

On the scale of the association language that would pass unnoticed in certain pubs would be deplored here. We are dressed in a variety of acceptable ways. The nuns of the convent of Bernard and Benedict in Dumas's *Les Misérables* would have been shocked in the unlikely event of one of their number showing as much worldly vanity and self-centredness as ever to clean her teeth.[4]

On a national scale, in 1927 there were 110 robberies recorded by the police in the whole of England and Wales in the whole of the year. When the figure for 1932 was announced, 342, public commentators were unanimous in proclaiming that this was proof that the country was going to the dogs. About the same level of concern was expressed when, according to the British Crime Survey, the robbery figures rose, from 183,000 in 1991, more than a thousand times the 1927 figure, to 353,000 in 1999, more than a thousand times the 1932 figure. There was horror when in its first presentation of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, nearly fifty years ago, the BBC showed the rat running down the tube towards Winston Smith's face. Something far 'worse' would be needed today to arouse anything like the same level of public protest.

Mucchielli's argument, typically put by sociologists for the past thirty or forty years, that the threshold of toleration of anti-social behaviour of all kinds, including crimes, has been steadily *rising*, and that we now *in general* condemn and report crimes that we would have overlooked as normal conduct before the 1960s, will strike most of us, I imagine, as the very opposite of the truth. Of course the threshold of toleration of some forms of unacceptable social behaviour, in particular anything that can be defined as 'racist', 'sexist', 'homophobic' or 'pro-marriage' has been rising, so that now almost nothing is permitted to cross it. But taking everything into account, paying only due attention to these important ethnic, feminist and social-worker topics, respectable people have ceased to be shocked, and certainly have ceased to report, all sorts of offensive and criminal conduct that formerly they would have played their part in trying to control.

The tendency for *the level of moral indignation* at bad behaviour to be fairly constant in all groups and societies at all times, that is, is a totally different phenomenon from *the level and seriousness* of the bad behaviour itself in different societies and groups at different times.

The thought- and knowledge-economising assertion that with drug use, and therefore with drunkenness and addiction, 'it has always been the same' is very commonly put. Is this true of alcohol?

In nearly every society very many people have used it. But London's experience with gin in the eighteenth century demolishes the argument that in a given society the non-medical use of the drug alcohol is more or less a constant. (Sometimes the 'nothing has changed' argument is even more extreme: '"human beings" have always used alcohol, so what's new?') At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Trevelyan writes, drunkenness was uncommon among English women. Among English men, on the other hand, drunkenness was 'the acknowledged national vice … of all classes'.

The sub-cultures of intoxication did not have it all their own way. There were social movements against drunkenness. Tracts were circulated in large numbers by religious bodies, concerned with the damage to family life, and by what Trevelyan calls 'anxious patriots'—people concerned with the damage that a culture of drunkenness inflicted on national efficiency.

After about 1720, however, drunkenness markedly increased. Until then the drink of the common people had been ale, if for no other reason that pure water was not always available. But because of bumper crops, and because distilling consumed corn, ale found that it had a new rival, 'worse than itself', Trevelyan said, in the 'deadly attraction' of alcoholic spirits.[5] Working-class gin consumption was good for the landed interest.[6] In the 1730s legislators encouraged consumption by throwing open distilling to the free market, and subjecting spirits to only a light tax. Gin-drinking was 'decriminalised'.

The result was that, during the thirty years from 1720 to 1750, among other baleful things, did 'much to reduce the population' of London.[7] As the appalling personal and social consequences were exposed by the media (in the form of, for example, Hogarth's famous print of Gin Lane) and attacked by an enlightened philanthropy, public opinion brought the situation under control with—by the standards of today—incredible speed.

After less successful attempts, an effective Act was passed in what was for that reason called 'the blessed year of 1751'. Various aspects of alcohol production, marketing and consumption were prohibited by state regulation. Spirits were highly taxed and their sale at retail by distillers and shopkeepers was stopped.[8] The change in public opinion, backed and in part symbolised by the Act of 1751, did not of course eliminate drunkenness. But drunkenness was drastically reduced. Seventeen fifty-one was a turning point in the social history of London and it was regarded as such both by those who experienced its consequences in the generation that could personally look back on 1751, and by later historians.[9]

The nineteenth century also proves that it is empirically untrue that so far as the use of alcohol is concerned 'it has always been the same'. For in the second half of Queen Victoria's reign drunkenness and excessive expenditure on alcohol were again subjected to fierce public condemnation, with palpable effects on consumption. Alcohol was attacked as one of the chief causes of crime and of the ruin of character and of families. The prints of the great caricaturist, George Cruikshank, 'The Bottle' and 'The Drunkard's Children' (1847-48), were circulated by the tens of thousands. In the years that followed the publication of 'The Bottle' an 'organized and largely successful' attack was made on the drinking habits of all classes by the 'Blue Ribbon Army'. Takers of the total abstinence

pledge wore the blue ribbon on their breasts, to invite public criticism if they did indulge in the damaging conduct they had foresworn.[10]

All religious bodies promoted the Temperance movement. It was a regular policy of Temperance societies to enlist children before they had acquired any taste for drink. In 1909 the Church of England Temperance Society had 639,000 members, of whom 114,000 were pledged to total abstinence. In the 1870s the Temperance party, especially strong among the Nonconformists, became a force in local and national Liberal politics.

Temperance in those days was a movement of the Liberal party and of most of the socialist left. But it did not have all its own way in the propaganda battle. It provoked the better-led activities of the brewing companies and their great army of capitalist shareholders. In the last decades of the nineteenth century brewers captured the Conservative party, with whom after 1886 the government of the country was principally to lie for many decades.

Trevelyan attributes the decline in drunkenness not only to Temperance propaganda, but also to the increasing amenity and diminishing monotony of working-class life. Trevelyan lists the following among what he called ‘drink’s fresh enemies’ as the nineteenth century reached its close: reading; music; playing and watching organized games; bicycling and sightseeing; country and seaside holidays; ‘above all more active and educated minds and more comfortable homes’.

Even the brewing companies were gradually frightened or shamed by public opinion into a more enlightened policy in the management of the public houses they controlled, making them more decent, more ready to see other things besides drink, and less anxious to send their customers away drunk. The pressure of anti-drink public opinion led to the Conservative government’s Licensing Act of 1904, which reduced the number of public houses and other drink outlets.

When Victoria died, alcohol use was ‘decidedly less’ than when she came to the throne.[11] But, from the top to the bottom of society, excessive drinking was still a great evil. So far as I know all historians who deal with the matter take this view of improvement and a large residual problem, and the statistics on alcohol consumption per head from population figures and the returns of Customs and Excise confirm this.

By the 1950s in this country the most careful social surveys were showing that in England, just as the debauched upper class had followed the bourgeoisie in sobering up in the nineteenth century, the rough working class followed the respectable working class in sobering up in first half of the twentieth. Rowntree made very intensive and detailed surveys of working-class life in York in 1899 and 1936. He was able to state unequivocally that there was less heavy drinking in 1936 than at the beginning of the century, not only in York, but in the whole country.[12] With a higher standard of living, in 1936 working-class families bought about half the volume of beer they had bought in 1899 (52 per cent). The beer, moreover, was 25 per cent weaker.

Today we assume that greater prosperity means increased alcohol consumption. What Rowntree says about the causes of sobriety is therefore startling to the modern reader. Speaking of York in 1899, he says that at that time

> the vast majority of the workers were living in comfortless, overcrowded houses. A workman's house in York with a garden or a bath was almost unknown. The number who owned their houses was insignificant. There were no cinemas, there was no wireless, no public library. Books worth reading were dear. There was no music hall, and only a few working people could afford a seat in the theatre, which was much dearer than it is today. Bicycles were costly, and the roads bad. Motor-bicycles had not been invented. No wonder that so many men spent their evenings

> and their money in public houses! What else was there for them to do unless they wandered about? Twenty or thirty years ago, the main street in York was crowded, night after night, with young people walking aimlessly up and down.[13]

Drunkenness was far less in 1936, he says, because by then comfortable houses with gardens could be counted in their thousands. Nearly 3,000 working class families lived in the homes they owned or were buying. The purchase of these houses, and the addition of amenities to them ('for the workers take great pride in their homes', he says), absorb a great deal of money which might otherwise find its way into the publican's till. Science, industry and public enterprise, have placed within reach of the workers forms of recreation, some undreamed of and others far in advance of anything available forty years ago, he writes.

> There are more than 25,000 wireless sets in York, and so people can sit at home and listen to music of all kinds, to variety entertainments, or to talks on countless subjects; they can hear news from all over the world-sometimes within a few minutes after the incidents have taken place; important sporting events are reported every day. On Sundays, in addition to the miscellaneous programmes, they can listen to religious services. Or if they prefer reading to listening, they can get from the public library, free of cost, almost any book they want either grave or gay. If they want to own books, they have the choice of hundreds of worthwhile books which they can buy for sixpence. If they do not want to stay at home, they have the choice of ten cinemas where for a few coppers, they can spend a couple of hours in watching a film that may have cost hundreds of thousands of pounds to make. Or if they prefer the theatre or music hall they can get comfortable seats in either at cinema prices. The repertory theatre is one of the best in the country. Those who want to take exercise can buy a good bicycle for a few pounds, or a second-hand one for a few shillings. A short ride takes them to the open country; and no matter where they go they will find excellent roads. Those who are more ambitions can buy a motor-bicycle and in less than an hour be at the sea-coast forty miles away. Many hundreds of young men in York are saving up to buy motor-bicycles, or have already bought them, and are spending their money in touring the country, and have little to spare for drink. There is little doubt that counter attractions and the higher cost of drink combined, are preventing young people from acquiring the drink habit – a fact which is giving great concern to both publicans and brewers as evidenced by the colossal sums they are spending on their 'Drink more beer' campaign.[14]

There were 'parks and public gardens, swimming baths, cheap railway facilities, … adult education classes and an educational settlement'. 'All these, and others not mentioned, were unknown to workers in 1899'. He adds, 'It is an amazing list!'[15] What chance did intoxication as a pastime stand against all these opportunities for self-improvement and rational recreation?

Trevelyan's judgement was that the problem of alcohol abuse had been so far reduced by the early 1940s that 'gambling perhaps now does more harm than drink'.[16]

That 'it has always been the same' in the consumption of drugs other than alcohol became a staple of university sociology in the nineteen seventies, filtering down to teacher training colleges, to the broadsheet press and to radio and television commentators, into the schools and then into the great unexamined fund of what the French call society's *idées reçues*.

Drug Taking

A typical exponent in the field of psychotropic drugs of the 'it has always been the same' school of thought was Jock Young. I quote from his book, *The Drugtakers*, published in 1971 (when we should have been paying attention to the alarm bells not to the siren voices).[17] Publishers were falling over themselves to get books dealing favourably with the many aspects of the cultural revolution of the late 1960s—pro-drugs, pro-sexual permissiveness, pro-Mao and Che, and generally anti-establishment in the spirit of 'the long march through the institutions'. You have only to glance at the titles in the Penguin lists of this period and compare them with the titles in previous Penguin lists to see to what extent works by 'establishment' intellectuals were replaced by works by our adversarial, disruptive and counter-cultural elites. In America Ken Kesey became a counter-cultural icon, taking advantage of the fact that the hallucinogenic drug LSD—'acid'—was not yet controlled by the law to tour the United States (1964-65), administering 'acid tests' and 'super acid tests' and dispensing LSD-laced orange juice to all comers. Defences were so weak against the new onslaught of drugs culture that on one occasion, when he was invited to speak at a Unitarian Church conference on one of his trips with his 'Merry Pranksters', he won some delegates to embrace his LSD cult. Tom Wolfe through one of his most famous books,[18] and Jack Nicolson through one of his most famous films,[19] gave Kesey a world-wide audience. He was a kind of Jack London, personally vigorous, fearless, the enemy of humbug, and bursting with the joy of being alive – and broadly survived all his own experiments, as some people do. But Jack London and Ken Kesey each gave to their own and future generations a totally different account of how a man should answer, in Jack London's phrase, 'the call of the wild'.

Young's book was a success on its own. But one chapter from it was published as 'The drugtakers: the role of the police', in what soon became as standard course book for University courses in sociology, social administration and social work, Butterworth and Weir's, *Social Problems of Modern Britain*.[20]

Young's topic was what he called the 'fantasy crime wave' of cannabis dealing and cannabis smoking of the late 1960s. A fantasy cannabis crime wave is one that does not involve at any time any actual increase in the number of cannabis smokers.[21] When the cannabis *figures* rise, Young says, *all* that has happened is that we have dug deeper into the undetected part of the iceberg. The iceberg, actual consumption and dealing, is always the same size, has always been, and will always be the same size.

Thus he writes of the 'emergence' of 'large numbers of young people' indulging in deviant activities such as drug taking, in particular areas such as Notting Hill, at a particular time, such as the late 1960s.[22] What had always been there had 'emerged', that was all. The existing 'large numbers of young people' consuming illicit psychotropic drugs had 'emerged' only because the mass media had 'fanned up' public indignation. The public then demanded that the police should solve what was erroneously thought to be the 'growing' drug problem. The police became more active in this field. Without there being any change in cannabis use, the *statistics* for cannabis *offences* soared. The public, the press and the magistrates then viewed the new figures with even greater alarm. Increased pressure is put on the police … a moral panic was in full flow.[23] Clearly this kind of thing *can* happen. Young does not show it *did* happen in this case.

An aspect of the extreme ahistoricity of the 'moral panic' argument—I'll say bluntly the historical ignorance that underlies the moral panic argument—is its assumption (and frequently explicit assertion) that each generation has always thought that personal character and the civic virtues have always deteriorated as compared with the previous generation. This is demonstrably not so. To seek no further than this country in the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there have been extensive areas of social life, crime and psychotropic drugs among them, where for considerable periods the consensus has been, if you like, 'moral complacency', when the consensus has been that things were 'improving', and when social research seemed to show that they were in fact improving. Rowntree's comparison of drunkenness in York in 1936 as compared with 1899 and other examples I have looked at with you this evening are sufficient to show this. [24]

Young and his successors never say what the statistics and surveys are, that they claim are demolished by their theory of 'moral panic' and by their stale metaphors of the lowering of the threshold, the exposure of more of the iceberg, and so on. I sometimes feel that I'd like to test them on what they do know.

Up to 1868 cannabis was freely available over the counter in this country, but was in fact rarely used. It was not until the 1950s that cannabis in any quantities came to Britain, largely to be used by Asiatic, African, and West Indian immigrants. Its use by the indigenous English was restricted to very small circles of, for example, jazz musicians. It was not until 1964 that for the first time there were more arrests of whites on cannabis charges than members of other groups. In 1964 the figures were whites, 284; other groups, 260, a total of 544. Cannabis rapidly became part of white youth culture. By 1967 the figures for white arrests had climbed from 284 to 1,737. This was more than twice the rate of increase of arrests 1964-1967 of people from other groups.[25]

From well under 600 *arrests* in 1964 the figure rose so much that by 1975 from the larger number of those arrested, 9,000 were *found guilty* on cannabis charges. That figure doubled from 9,000 in 1975 to 18,000 in 1985.[26] The figure had doubled again by 1989, to 34,000. It then more than doubled from 34,000 in 1989, to 88,000 in 1999.[3] [27]

The figures at any point of time are without any doubt defective; there are without any doubt difficulties in assessing changes over time, as the available bases of comparison change. But those who dismiss these figures as an illusion created by increased police activity and unreasoning panic have some duty to show what proportion of such a large rise can be attributed to these factors, rather than to the factor that seems decisive on all sorts of other grounds also, namely, that that the illicit use of cannabis for pleasure has indeed grown enormously since the early 1960s.

The use of psychotropic drugs in Britain was the subject of a report from a committee of the Ministry of Health in 1926, the Rolleston committee.[28] Rolleston said that not only was drug addiction rare in Britain, but that it had diminished in recent years. There were two groups suffering from addiction to opiate drugs—by far the highest proportion of addicts at that time—to whom the administration of morphine or heroin would be legitimate as medical treatment, namely, those who were undergoing treatment for cure of the addiction by the gradual withdrawal method, and those who had proved to be incurably addicted 'after every effort has been made' for the cure of the addiction. According to Edwards, the Rolleston report showed that 'the objective problems of drug misuse were less threatening than at any previous moment in at least the previous hundred years'.[29] The small size of the problem meant, in Rolleston's view, that a compulsory register of addicts was not necessary.

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[3] The figures to the nearest hundred are:
1975 8,800
1885 17,600
1989 33,700
1999 88,500.

Up to 1868 opium, too, was available without any form of restriction. Laudanum, a pleasure tincture of opium, was in regular and sustained use as virtually the only available pain-killer and sleeping draught. In these circumstances, the fact that its use for purposes of pleasure and addiction were not more widespread is a remarkable proof of the anti-drug culture of this and previous periods. Its use was, indeed, endemic among a large proportion of the poorer sections of working-class population engaged in the heaviest of manual labour, notably in the agricultural districts of eastern England.[30]

In drug discussions today the fact that opium was in 'normal' use in the nineteenth century in this section of the population, to dull the pains of continuous unrewarding toil and, for instance, to enable mothers working in the fields to calm the babies who accompanied them, is somehow represented as proof that it was not a problem then, and if the same permissive attitude were to be readopted today, it would not be a problem now as a recreational drug.

But the condition of the opium-using labouring poor and the welfare of their opium-controlled children *was* regarded as a problem by many of the reforming organisations of the period, political and charitable. They no more regarded the 'normality' of such uses by such users as proof that it was not a problem than their predecessors had regarded the acceptance of the 'normality' of slavery among by some slaves as proof that slavery was not a problem.

Though judged by figures on consumption and poisoning its influence was not dramatic, its provisions being laxly applied, by placing the first restrictions on supply by restricting sales to qualified vendors, the Pharmacy Act of 1868 marked the first victory for the reformers.

Sentiment against the non-medical use of drugs became more general at home after 1874, with the founding of the Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade. Its campaign against the Indian opium trade with China inevitably fed into opinion about its use here. If it was bad for the Chinese, it was bad for us as well.

Over the latter decades of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century, the figures on consumption and poisoning deaths, and the decline in references to it as a problem indicate that the use of opiates gradually became less prevalent. By the beginning of the 1914-18 war, the use of opium was assumed to be an exotic activity restricted to some members of Chinese communities in Limehouse and in large ports elsewhere in Britain. Expressions of reforming concern with the evils of opium almost disappear, with public opinion largely leaving the Chinese communities to get on with things in their own way.

The Dangerous Drugs Act of 1920 initiated controls in essentially the form we know today. With the exception of certain very dilute oral preparations. for example, Collis Browne's Chlorodyne (a compound that contains morphine) opiate drugs were confined to medical prescription. (In the influenza epidemic of the previous year, 1919, the police went around with a the 'Police Bottle' – Liquorice Phenol Chlorodyne – and a desert spoon, to administer it where they saw fit.). Regulations made under the Act controlled import and manufacture. There were heavy penalties for infringements. Informal controls were still exercised by pharmacists, simply from the taken-for-granted good citizenship of the time. Such responsible pharmacists would recognise someone who was becoming too attached to, say, Dr Collis's quite legal opiate medicine, and refuse to sell any more of it to him (or her). There is no record of any appeal against this informal social control as an infringement of the legal or human rights of the costumer.

But the Act of 1920 was not a response to a problem of any national significance. Great Britain was simply falling into line with international measures, where America

was the driving force. The Shanghai meeting of 1909 had proposed the regulation of the opium trade in the Far East. The Hague Convention of 1912 had proposed a world-wide system of control. The Versailles Treaty that concluded the Great War required all signatories to introduce legislation for domestic drug control.[31]

In the years that followed the Rolleston report, and right up to the beginning of the 1960s, drug problems in Britain remained at the low levels of the period 1890 to 1926. In 1938 there were only 6 prosecutions for opium offences. As Edwards wrote, 'Putting the matter in its simplest terms, Britain's drug problem was of interest exactly and only because of its trivial size'.[32]

There was an outbreak of concern that soldiers and sailors on leave in London were being introduced to cocaine. It is difficult to find any evidence for this, but anything concerned with recruits from their own towns and villages was likely to engage public sentiment in communities in the provinces, still heavily influenced by their nonconformist chapels. Very likely these reports could be properly regarded as 'scare stories', as a 'moral panic' over a problem of minute proportions. There were only 58 prosecutions for cocaine offences in 1921—the residue of the cocaine scare of the Great War. In 1927 there were only 2.[33]

When the breakdown of this equilibrium came—the stable experience of at least two full generations of the English—it was dramatic.

Getting as close as we can to comparable figures, the first official statistics furnished by the Home Office to the League of Nations gave the number of *all* addicts as 300 in 1934[34] The number of *new* addicts was 5,400 in the year 1984.[35]

Among young people, as late as 1962 there were only *three* opiate addicts under the age of 21.[36] There were over 1,200 *new* narcotic drug addicts under the age of 21 in the year 1984.[37] In 1985 the figures were missing in the Home Office's annual drug report. Its excuse was that there was a hitch in the installation of a new computer system. But these interesting and some might think disturbing figures never appeared again. Correct me if I'm wrong, because I'd like to see them.

In the mid-1960s, for the first time in Britain, injected heroin replaced morphine as the opiate of choice. A black market appeared, with pure heroin freely available on the streets. The source was drugs from the medical prescriptions of the Rolleston system, which up to that time had been a model for the world of decriminalised opiate treatment. The heroin problem had mushroomed—people thought—by 1975, when 390 people were found guilty of heroin offences. But by 1985 the figure had risen to more than eight times that figure, to 3,200.[38] By 1999 the closest comparable figure had quadrupled again, from 3,200 to 12,800.[39]

Heroin was only part of what was becoming a multiple-drug problem. As early as 1962 there was evidence that heroin addicts were also mixing cocaine with heroin and consuming large quantities of barbiturates.[40]

The figure for people found guilty of cocaine offences rose from 380 in 1975 to 620 in 1985.[41] There were no entries in the statistics for crack cocaine offences until 1996. The figure for cocaine (excluding crack) was 790 in 1989. This figure rose sevenfold in the next decade to 5,300 in 1999. From no crack cocaine offences in 1995 the figure rose to 1,100 in 1999.[42] The *Guardian* on Monday (12 November 2001) dealt with the news that the Lord Chancellor's son was addicted to crack cocaine. Without approving of it, the article nevertheless quoted another newspaper's comment that the drugs culture was now so pervasive that it reached into the homes of the most powerful in the land. What chance, then, had the poor and the weak to combat it?

In 1989 over a thousand children under the age of 17 were guilty of drug offences (1,340). By 1999 the figure was 7,540.[43]

In the early 1960s the use of amphetamines began to be seen among young people in London and other large cities, and pill-taking became part of the café scene.[44] In 1967 and 1968 the use of injected methamphetamine became common as a replacement for cocaine. [45] Under the influence of the American hippy culture of Kesey and others, LSD came into fashion over roughly the same period.

The statistics on drug use are more or less defective before 1994. The British Crime Survey (BCS) has at last provided us with a series of good statistics of the prevalence and, what is certainly more important, *the trend* in the use of psychotropic drugs for non-medical purposes—nowadays the purpose being principally pleasure.[46] The proportion of 16 to 24 year olds reporting that they had used heroin in the previous year tripled between 1998 and the year 2000, from 3.0 per 1000 to 8.0 per 1000. Those reporting they had used it in the previous month rose from 2.7 per 1000 in 1998 to 3.2 per 1000 in the year 2000.

Between 1998 and 2000, among the 16 to 19s there was a rise in the use of cocaine, to 40 per 1000, 'significantly higher', the BCS report says, than in previous sweeps. The rise in popularity of cocaine among young people was attributed to the reduction its price,[47] and the fact that young people are so often told (we all are), and have come to believe, that cocaine use is somehow 'sensible' because it is not as dangerous as drink and cigarettes,, and as everybody has either to smoke, drink or take drugs, taking drugs is the best thing to do. That is one of the bizarre results of the emphasis on 'harm-reduction' at the expense of 'prevention' in the schools and in the propaganda of the many pro-drug pressure groups that now exist.[48]

In 1998 83 per 1000 had used some Class A drug in the previous year. This had risen to 92 per 1000 in the year 2000. The use of any Class A drug in the previous month had risen from 34 to 48 per 1000.

In the year 2000, nearly half of all 16 to 29 year olds (440 per 1000), had used cannabis at some time, nearly a quarter of them had used it in the previous year (220 per 1000), and more than one in ten had used it in the previous month (140 per 1000).

By the mid-1990s non-medical, so-called 'recreational' drug use was more prevalent among white English youth than among either blacks, Indians, Pakistanis or Bangladeshis.[49] Between 1994 and 2000 the biggest rise in drug use, as measured by the use of any illicit drug in the past year, was among the young Indians, where the proportion nearly doubled, from 70 per 1000 16-19-year-old Indians to 120 per thousand 16-19-year-old Indians. The proportion of 16 to 29 year olds who had used drugs increased for all ethnic groups—with the notable exception of the Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, the Muslims.

Intoxicating one's foes is an age-old tactic.

> Who knows not Circe,
> The daughter of the Sun, whose charmèd cup
> Whoever tasted lost his upright shape,
> And downward fell into a grovelling swine?[50]

During the nineteenth century Britain was not entirely disinterested when opium weakened China's resistance to colonial conquest. Mao explicitly used drugs to demotivate the Americans in Vietnam, conscious that he was using the weapon of his country's old oppressors against them. During the Cold War the Czechs in particular

were active in using illicit drugs to undermine the West's culture of law-abidingness and to demoralise and degrade young people in capitalist societies, as a form of chemical warfare in which the enemy obligingly pays for his own toxins: that was their theory and their intention, at any rate.[51]

Societies that depend to any degree upon popular consent, beyond the threat posed from the populace to any government whatsoever of riot, popular terror, and insurrection, have been the exception in history. Historically, too, peaceful and prosperous societies based on responsible citizenship have been short-lived. As we are members of an association devoted to good citizenship and named after a statesman and general who saved the Roman republic from a foreign invader, it is not inappropriate to close with something another Roman patriot said as civil wars brought the republic to an end. Viewing the decline of commonwealth into imperial dictatorship Cicero remarks on the brevity and truth of the lines, 'Ancient morality and the men of old/Fixed firm the Roman state'. His generation, he wrote, received the virtues that made the republic possible like a picture that already had almost faded away with age. Instead of restoring its colours, they had not bothered themselves to preserve even its general shape and bare outlines. The austere morality of the Roman citizen was passing away. Who was to be called to account for this disaster, Cicero asks. He answers, we ourselves, for we retained the name of commonwealth and citizen when, not through any misfortune but through our own laxity, whether of goodwill or misdemeanour, the reality of both community and duty slipped into oblivion.[52]

Notes

[1] *Le Monde*, 13 November 2001.
[2] *Sunday Times*, 4 November 2001.
[3] A version of this alleged incident appeared in the *Daily Express*, 16 November 2001.
[4] Hugo, V., *Les Misérables* (1862), Ware, Herts.: Wordsworth, 1994, vol. I, p. 328.
[5] Trevelyan, G.M., *English Social History: survey of six centuries from Chaucer to Queen Victoria* (1942), London: Penguin, 1986, p. 356.
[6] Trevelyan, *English Social History*, 1986, p. 329.
[7] Trevelyan, *English Social History*, 1986, p. 358.
[8] 24 G. II, c. 40. Trevelyan, *English Social History*, 1986, p. 356.
[9] George, *London Life in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 24-38.
[10] Trevelyan, *English Social History*, 1986, p. 582. In another connection, the device of the ribbon on the breast has been imitated in our day to advertise the opposite message, that the conduct in question is not to be condemned as bad, and that what is bad is any criticism of it.
[11] Trevelyan, *English Social History*, 1986, pp. 582-84.
[12] Rowntree, B.S., *Poverty and Progress: a second social survey of York*, London: Longmans, Green, 1941, p. 473.
[13] Rowntree, *Poverty and Progress*, 1941, p. 372.
[14] Rowntree, *Poverty and Progress*, 1941, pp. 370-71.
[15] Rowntree, *Poverty and Progress*, 1941, pp. 468-69.
[16] Trevelyan, *English Social History*, 1986, p. 583.
[17] Young, J., *The Drugtakers*, London: Paladin, 1971.
[18] Wolfe, T., *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, 1968.
[19] 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest', 1976. (The book dates from 1963.)

[20] Butterworth, E. and Weir, D., *Social Problems of Modern Britain: an introductory Reader*, London: Fontana/Collins, 1972. .
[21] Butterworth and Weir, *Social Problems of Modern Britain*, 1972, p. 307. Young says that a fantasy crime wave does 'not necessarily' involve any actual increase in crime. What 'not necessarily' can mean in this context is totally obscure.
[22] Butterworth and Weir, *Social Problems of Modern Britain*, 1972, p. 300.
[23] Butterworth and Weir, *Social Problems of Modern Britain*, 1972, p. 307.
[24] For examples taken from education and civic safety, see Dennis, N., *The Uncertain Trumpet*, London: Civitas, 2001.
[25] The number of arrests of non-whites on cannabis charges increased from 260 to 686. Edwards and Busch, *Drug Problems in Britain*, 1981, p. 10. Were we to make the usual assumption that the police picked on non-whites and arrested them disproportionately to their numbers, then the conclusion would have to be that the rate of increase in usage in the white group was even more rapid than the arrest figures show.
[26] *Home Office Statistical Bulletin: Statistics of the Misuse of Drugs in the UK 1985*, London: Home Office, 25 September 1986.
[27] Corkery, J.M., *Home Office Statistical Bulletin: Drug Seizure and Offender Statistics, United Kingdom 1999*, London: Home Office, 2001. Found guilty of, cautioned or given a fiscal fine for, or dealt with by compounding.
[28] Report of the Departmental Committee on Drug Dependence (Rolleston), London: HMSO, 1926.
[29] Edwards, G., 'The background', in Edwards, G. and Busch, C. (eds.), *Drug Problems in Britain: a review of ten years*, London: Academic Press, 1981, p. 9. Griffith Edwards and Carol Busch were both at the Addiction Research Unit at the Institute of Psychiatry when they edited this book
[30] Berridge, V., 'Opium in historical perspective', *Lancet*, 2, 1977
[31] Lowes, P.D., *The Genesis of International Narcotics Control*, Geneva: Libraire Droz, 1966.
[32] Edwards and Busch, *Drug Problems in Britain*, 1981, p.8.
[33] Spear, H.B., 'The growth of heroin addiction in the United Kingdom', *British Journal of Addiction*, 64, 1969.
[34] Edwards and Busch, *Drug Problems in Britain*, 1981, pp. 9-10.The figures are for opiate addicts on the Home Office index.
[35] *Home Office Statistical Bulletin: Statistics of the Misuse of Drugs in the UK 1984*, London: Home Office, 3 September 1985. The figures are for narcotic drug addicts notified to the Home Office.
[36] Edwards and Busch, *Drug Problems in Britain*, 1981, pp. 9-10.
[37] *Home Office Statistical Bulletin 1984*, 1985.
[38] *Home Office Statistical Bulletin: Statistics of the Misuse of Drugs in the UK 1985*, London: Home Office, 25 September 1986.
[39] Corkery, *Home Office Statistical Bulletin*, 2001. Persons found guilty, cautioned, given a fiscal fine or dealt with by compounding.
[40] Cameron, 'Heroin addicts in a casualty department', *British Medical Journal*, 1, 1964.
[41] *Home Office Statistical Bulletin 1985*, 1986.
[42] Corkery, *Home Office Statistical Bulletin 1999*, 2001. Sentenced, cautioned, given a fiscal fine, or dealt with by compounding.

[43] Corkery, *Home Office Statistical Bulletin 1999*, 2001. 'Sentenced, cautioned or dealt with by compounding' only.
[44] Connell, P.H., 'What to do about pep pills', *New Society*, 20 February 1964. Connell, P.H., 'Amphetamine misuse', *British Journal of Addiction*, 60, 1964.
[45] Hawks, D., Mitcheson, M., Ogbourne, A. and Edwards, G, 'Abuse of methylamphetamine', *British Medical Journal*, 2, 1969.
[46] Sharp, C., Barker, P., Goulden, C., Ramsay, M. and Sandhi, A., 'Drug misuse declared in 2000: key results from the British Crime Survey', *Findings 149*, London: Home Office, 2001.
[47] Corkery, J.M.., *Home Office Statistical Bulletin: Drug Seizure and Offender Statistics: United Kingdom 1998*, London: Home Office, 2000.
[48] Boys, A. and others, *Cocaine Trends: a qualitative study of young people and cocaine use*, London: National Addiction Centre, 2001.
[49] The highest rate for all groups was among those defining themselves as being of 'mixed ethnicity'.
[50] Milton, *Comus*, 50-53.
[51] Douglass, J.D., *Red Cocaine: the origins of America's drug plague*, Atlanta, GA: Clarion House, 1990.
[52] Cicero, *De Republica*, 5, 1.