

# ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF INTOXICANTS AND INTOXICATION

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# 1

## INTOXICATIONS AND THEIR MEANINGS<sup>1</sup>

*Craig Reinerman*

Intoxication was not born in sin. Animals apparently got high before human civilization (Siegel 1989; Rudgley 1993; Lenson 1995; Slingerland 2021). Humans fermented grapes and grain as soon as they figured out settled agriculture, perhaps before. History is strewn with luminaries who saw great value in periodically “drowning Apollonian reason in Dionysian abandon” (Lescage 2021). Drunkenness was a normal pleasure in popular celebrations from antiquity through the Middle Ages.

And yet, in much of the Western world since the end of the eighteenth century, intoxication has carried the presumption of guilt. If something bad happens and alcohol or other drugs are found in the vicinity, a “malevolence assumption” tends to kick in and a causal connection gets implied (Hamilton and Collins 1981:261; Gusfield 1996). Blaming booze, recurring drug scares and drug wars, and a lurking “tyranny of abstinence” (Jamison 2018:452) are all common in cultures that fear intoxication. The wellsprings and consequences of such fears are vital parts of the puzzle of intoxication’s complex history.

I begin this chapter by making the case that the concept of intoxication is too pinched to do justice to the multitude of altered states that are typically lumped under it. Intoxications vary far more widely than we think; some don’t even involve ingesting a toxin at all. I argue that intoxication is an unstable category with blurred boundaries. I then trace the fluctuating moral careers of common intoxicants to show how such boundaries have been drawn and redrawn. Based on these cases, I outline some tentative propositions about the characteristics and conditions that inform the cultural and legal status of intoxicants. The chapter closes with a Coda on the relationship between intoxicants and social change.

### A Troubled Category

The idea of “intoxication” is haunted by its genealogy. The root of “intoxication” is the Greek word “toxon,” for bow, the adjectival form meaning “of or for the bow,” which refers to the poison in which arrows were dipped during antiquity (as in the Latin “toxicum”).<sup>2</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) defines the noun “intoxication” as “1. the action of poisoning; administration of poison; killing by poison; the state of being poisoned.” The verb “intoxicate” means “to poison.” All variations of the term have poison in the first meaning. I suggest that the denotation of intoxication as a state of being poisoned constricts the

connotations available to us, unnecessarily narrowing the range of meanings of intoxication. This results in a shortage of names that conceptualize the much more prevalent altered states of consciousness that fall short of the extreme of poisoning, names that are not made to carry the baggage of intoxication's semantic history.

We need a lexicon with a wider aperture so that the phenomena we refer to with the term intoxication do not imply a false binary, drunk or sober, but rather capture the broad array of altered states in between. After all, milder varieties of intoxication are a quotidian cultural practice, with cocktails or cannabis commonly deployed as a means of shifting one's psychic gears, signaling the end of the workday and the beginning of leisure time (Walker 2017).

As alcohol was the earliest and most common means of achieving an altered state, the word "drunk" stood as the initial template for subsequent intoxications, literal and figurative ("drunk on power"). In 1981, Levine compiled the rich "vocabulary of drunkenness." He reported that Benjamin Franklin found 228 terms for drunk in 1737, and that the *Dictionary of American Slang* listed 353 such terms, noting that "the concept having the most slang synonyms is 'drunk'" (1981:1038). Curiously, most such terms connote the destruction of ordinary consciousness – bombed, blitzed, hammered, shit-faced, wrecked – without implying there's anything wrong with that. For most of Western history, the term "drunk" did not necessarily carry a negative connotation. Early ascetic Protestants helped link drunkenness to poison by using the term "intoxication" to stigmatize drinking as transgressive. Since then, the word intoxication has come to cover a multitude of sins.

Marking off the territory of intoxication as a province of meaning is a tricky endeavor; its boundaries are a good deal more blurry than we usually imagine. Intoxications vary along numerous continua: in their duration, their intensity, and their degree of transgressivity. There are distinct types, depths, registers, and shades of altered state, to say nothing of the diverse meanings attached to these by different groups at different times. There is a wide expanse of terrain between a beer after work and an alcoholic blackout, or between "a little buzz" and "totally wasted." Intoxications or high states are context-specific. The same quantum of drink yields different behavioral effects at a wake than at a wedding. The experience of MDMA or ecstasy is different at a dance club than during a couple's romantic evening at home by the fire.

Other contributors to this handbook ably document culturally specific repertoires of intoxication. Such repertoires become thinkable and articulable within specific conjunctures of time/space/culture (MacAndrew and Edgerton 1969; Alasuutari 1992; Withington 2014). Learning more of their histories will enrich our understanding of the phenomena we refer to as intoxication. What structural forces and historical exigencies have shaped the systems of thought and genres of discourse that have produced and reproduced "intoxication" as a recognizable realm of meaning? For all the ink that has been spilled on intoxication over the centuries, its topography remains sketchy, perhaps rightly so.

"Intoxication," then, is a category that invites interrogation. The World Health Organization defines it as "a condition that follows the administration of a psychoactive substance and results in disturbances in consciousness, cognition perception, judgment, affect, or behavior" (2020). If we leave aside the pejorative term "disturbances," the core idea in this definition is an altered state of consciousness. But *altered compared to what?* Compared to ordinary waking consciousness without having ingested a psychoactive drug, the WHO implies. This definition has some limitations.

The distinction between altered/not-altered consciousness is most legible at opposite ends of a continuum. In many places for much of history, ordinary waking consciousness did not necessarily mean "drug-free." In parts of medieval Europe, beer-laden porridge was

consumed for breakfast. A petition against brandy submitted to the English Parliament in 1673 argued that “all labor[ing] people (the greater part of the Kingdom)” need, deserve, and indeed benefit from “a pot of ale or a flagon of strong beer,” which they drank “every morning and evening” (Schivelbusch 1992:159). Contrary to the mythical imagery of abstemious Puritans, colonial Americans carried rum, hard cider, and whiskey into their fields and shops for work breaks (Levine 2014) and consumed far more alcohol per capita than modern Americans (Levine and Reinerman 1991:468). Frederick the Great of Prussia felt that coffee drinking among his soldiers “must be prevented” because beer was so superior for purposes of bonding and morale (Slingerland 2021:135). In past centuries, widespread diseases, fevers, injuries, backaches, and tooth decay routinely put people in pain, in response to which they invented consciousness-altering potions containing alcohol or opium for pain relief. If a substantial proportion of the population was in some sort of altered state for a substantial proportion of the time, then at least moderate varieties of what is called intoxication were not considered aberrant.

The tobacco industry worked tirelessly to normalize smoking so that it was until recently considered just part of everyday life. Recall the ash trays that once graced all restaurant tables and were built into every automobile and airplane seat. By taking a 100 or more drags across their day, smokers alter their consciousness by mobilizing neurotransmitters to “fine-tune their arousal and mood state” to fit their situations (Krogh 1991:51). True, smoking tobacco does not lead to the crazed abandon conventionally associated with the term intoxication, but this does not change the fact that it is a drug-induced alteration of consciousness – a difference of degree, not of kind.

The same may be said for the tens of millions who take Prozac and other serotonin-based anti-depressants. Millions more (mostly Americans) ingest amphetamine-type drugs such as Ritalin to soothe attention deficit disorders and improve their ability to focus and function. These practices are considered medical treatment rather than intoxication, but they, too, entail the use of psychoactive drugs to alter consciousness and thus occupy a point on the same continuum as more extreme and obvious forms of intoxication. So, by asking “altered compared to what?” I am suggesting that the category of intoxication itself, as well as the comparative states of consciousness against which it is defined, are moving targets – variegated, permeable, and ultimately unstable.

The word intoxication is misleading in a second sense: there are common varieties of experience and behavior that bear the marks of intoxication and yet involve no “toxin” at all. Years ago on a visit to the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, I saw his early masterpiece, “The Potato Eaters.” Unlike the blazing colors of his more well-known work, this is a dark portrait of peasants huddled around a small table over a pot of potatoes in their low-ceiling shack. A few days later, I visited Delft and stopped at the fourteenth-century church in which the great Golden Age painter Johannes Vermeer is buried. As I sat in a back pew taking it all in, it occurred to me that medieval ancestors of Van Gogh’s potato eaters could have been congregants in that church, and I tried to imagine what such people must have felt entering it for the first time:

The grand tower lofting high above graceful stone arches; sunlight streaming kaleidoscopically through stained-glass windows, colors cascading across the stone floor. Alter boys carrying candles in a solemn procession of costumed clergy spraying drops of holy water onto the bowed heads of the faithful. The air tinged with incense. Reverent silence broken only by the choir sending hymns and Gregorian chants wafting through the nave and by the priest’s Latin incantations. Listening to tales from the Bible, kneeling with others to pray, ingesting the body and blood of Christ from implements of gold. All of it concocting a majesty

unlike anything else in the peasant world, inducing a state of awe. All their senses mobilized to bring alive the divine, to glimpse God, I'd wager those early potato eaters found themselves in an altered state, intoxicated by the sights and sounds of the spiritual sublime. Compared to their lives of trudging labor in turbulent times,<sup>3</sup> they needed no drug for it all to feel positively psychedelic, *avant la lettre*.<sup>4</sup>

Moving from the sacred to the profane, consider the pandemonium surrounding the arrival of The Beatles in the USA in the 1960s. Thousands of teenagers screamed and jumped in uncontrollable spasms, some to the point of passing out, before a single song was played. News reports framed this as a worrying new form of mass hysteria, but before The Beatles, there was similar mania around Elvis Presley and before him among fans of Frank Sinatra. Neither alcohol nor other drugs were necessary for these altered states. Subsequent rock concerts famously involved plenty of drug use, but anyone who has attended a live concert of a favorite band can attest to the contagious eruption of an altered state of pleasure in being with thousands of others moved by the same music, with or without intoxicants.<sup>5</sup> When Dizzy Gillespie and Louis Armstrong brought American jazz to Africa for the first time in the 1950s, audiences were literally ecstatic. When, after decades in exile and Soviet suppression, Vladimir Horowitz returned to the USSR to play Rachmaninoff and Tchaikovsky, he was mobbed by admirers. His concerts sold out in minutes. Hundreds stood in silence squeezed together in the back of the concert hall, some in tears, overwhelmed to be in the presence of such beauty, such genius. The Cold War context added an extra measure of meaning, but the intoxicant producing those altered states was music.

Gambling casinos are designed without windows to ensure their patrons focus on the flashing lights, the flying dice, the whirring roulette wheels, the quick clicking of the cards, and the drama of big money won and lost in a blink. Hard-core gamblers describe ups and downs of adrenaline in a language of addiction that is similar to the accounts of crack cocaine users (cf. Waldorf et al. 1991:103–126; DeCaria et al. 1998). Commodities markets and stock exchanges from "Tulipmania" in seventeenth-century Holland to contemporary Wall Street also flicker with the speculative possibility of fast riches and often produce the same sort of affective roller coaster of risk, rush, and ruin. Computer games and virtual reality devices are engineered to maintain their grip on participants with their own genre of attentional intoxication.

Beyond religious rituals, rock concerts, casinos, whirling Dervishes and other dance-induced trances,<sup>6</sup> there is the frenzied elation found in ordinary sporting spectacles. American and global versions of football have in common tens of thousands of fans screaming in fevered states of ecstasy (or agony) about moves on the field barely visible from most stadium seats. Certainly, beer is often involved, but I submit that no drug is necessary for the intense intoxications sparked by a goal, a touchdown, a 9<sup>th</sup>-inning home run, a game-winning 3-point basket at the buzzer, or any hard-fought home team victory. And like some other intoxications, sporting events, too, are occasionally followed by violence.

I offer these examples to suggest that there are many modes of intoxication in which the "toxin" involved is not a drug ingested but rather one produced internally by the alchemical-cultural interaction of self and situation. If, therefore, it is neither a psychoactive substance nor the mere fact of altered consciousness that define the meaning province of intoxication, then what does? If intoxications are so varied and common, and may not even entail intoxicants, then how is it that the use of certain consciousness-altering chemicals has come to define what we mean by "intoxication," and to carry such moral freight? More than molecules are involved.

## **The Undulating Moral Careers of Intoxicants**

*As regards drink, I can only say that in Dublin, during the Depression when I was growing up, drunkenness was not regarded as a social disgrace. To get enough to eat was regarded as an accomplishment. To get drunk was a victory.*

*— Brendan Behan*

While intoxication in one form or another has been ubiquitous across time and space, different intoxicants have had distinct moral careers, including some vertiginous shifts in how they are perceived by various publics and defined by governments. Certain intoxicants have been feared and punished, others accepted or even esteemed. Most interesting are those that have moved from one status to the other and sometimes back again, for these make visible the brushstrokes of their social construction.

Writing of the sixteenth-century Mediterranean world, historian Fernand Braudel found “lands of wine and vineyards” (1972:236) where wine was understood more as food than intoxicant and considered an intrinsic part of family meals. He noted that for centuries, wine had been an essential “provision,” stored in cellars for the winter along with firewood and grains. “Throughout the Mediterranean the grape harvest was an occasion for merrymaking and license, a time of madness,” he wrote. This form of intoxication entailed “various abuses” and some authorities tried stern measures to suppress such “pagan customs,” but Braudel offered no evidence these ever succeeded. “Is there any way of fighting the combination of summer and new wine, of preventing collective revelry?” (1972:256–259).

Yet, preventing just that sort of revelry was what American anti-alcohol activists set out to do in the early nineteenth century. Their self-proclaimed temperance crusade was then the largest and longest social movement in the USA and culminated in national alcohol Prohibition in 1919. The crusaders blamed booze for a long list of personal and public problems, as if immediate intoxication and eventual ruin were inevitable consequences of drinking. Troubles associated with drink came to be defined as more threatening in a context of wrenching social change – the transformation of an agrarian to an industrial market economy, a civil war over slavery, large-scale immigration, urbanization, and class conflict (Sellers 1991). Gusfield (1963) described the “status politics” around alcohol in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century USA as a battle between native-born, middle-class Protestants, mostly from small towns, and immigrant, working-class Catholics who lived mostly in cities. On the surface, it was “dry” vs. “wet,” but the broader question animating the conflict was which groups would be dominant and whose values would stand as the law of the land.

Tobacco was the largest export in early colonial America, but its spread in England was initially greeted with royal condemnation. At the start of the seventeenth century, King James demonized this genre of intoxication as religiously offensive, casting tobacco users as immoral “fume suckers.” But despite attempts to ban its use, tobacco was vindicated, largely on financial grounds. The King discovered to his chagrin that his continued reign was dependent on tobacco tax revenues, and the commercial interests whose support he needed were keen to protect their profits from the European tobacco trade (Best 1979). Modern tobacco merchants marketed their wares relentlessly, expanding the spaces in which tobacco could be smoked. By inventing cigarettes and later providing free matchbooks with each pack, they made smoking easy to do almost anywhere.

But following the 1964 U.S. Surgeon General’s report documenting the deleterious health effects of smoking, a powerful anti-smoking movement began to reverse the tobacco industry’s strategy. Anti-smoking activists argued forcefully on public health grounds for

restricting the spheres in which smoking is allowed. They won various partial prohibitions and huge lawsuits. In the USA and increasingly other Western countries, the movement has de-normalized and re-stigmatized smoking, cutting its prevalence in half.

The moral career of cannabis provides a contrasting case. Cannabis was consumed and used as a medicine for centuries in parts of Asia and Africa. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was commonly prescribed in medicines in the USA, listed in the *Pharmacopoeia* and the *United States Dispensatory* (Grinspoon and Bakalar 1997). But in the 1930s it was condemned as immoral and dangerous by the Bureau of Narcotics. In a report to the League of Nations, for example, the Bureau's director, Harry Anslinger, claimed that marijuana had "toxic effects," including "willful violence" and "complete loss of judgment and restraint." "Cannabis acts quickly and effectively to cut off inhibitions," which he took as a self-evident evil. He invoked racist fears, citing unsourced "estimates" that "fifty percent of the violent crimes committed in districts occupied by Mexicans, Turks, Filipinos, Greeks, Spaniards, Latin-Americans and Negroes, may be traced to the abuse of marijuana." Anslinger quoted a narcotics officer: "Marihuana has a worse effect than heroin. It gives men the lust to kill, unreasonably, without motive – for the sheer sake of murder itself" (League of Nations 1934; cited in Bonnie and Whitebread 1974:146–147).

The result of Anslinger's moral entrepreneurship was the "Reefer Madness" era in which the Marijuana Tax Act of 1937 first criminalized cannabis under federal law (Becker 1963). As marijuana use spread across U.S. college campuses in the 1960s, however, the argument against it shape-shifted. Earlier claims that marijuana caused crime and violence proved false, and for users, cutting off inhibitions and loss of restraint was the point. So then anti-drug forces claimed that marijuana caused an "a-motivational syndrome" that sapped users of ambition (Himmelstein 1983).

Marijuana remained a potent political symbol, associated with the counterculture and the anti-war movement and attacked by conservatives for that reason (Baum 2016, 1996). In 1970, President Nixon signed the Comprehensive Drug Control Act, which classified marijuana as a Schedule I narcotic, defined as a drug having "no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse," neither of which turned out to be true. He soon declared "drugs" to be "public enemy #1," formally launching the War on Drugs. Lifetime prevalence of cannabis consumption, however, continued to spread from small subcultures like Beatniks and jazz musicians c. 1950 to nearly half the adult population by 2000 (SAMHSA 2012). But with the rise of the New Right and the election of Reagan in 1980, the War on Drugs expanded exponentially (Reinerman and Levine 1997:36–46), including the arrest of millions of Americans for marijuana possession, disproportionately people of color (see, e.g., King and Mauer 2005; Levine and Small 2008; Alexander 2010).

This repression, along with growing scientific evidence of the relative safety and medical utility of cannabis, sparked a growing drug policy reform movement. Between 1996 and 2020, the movement succeeded in getting 36 states to pass medical marijuana laws and 18 states and the District of Columbia to legalize adult use. There is now a burgeoning cannabis industry in many states, providing tens of thousands of jobs and millions in tax revenues (Yakowicz 2021). For the first time, the U.S. Congress is considering re-scheduling and even legalization (Edmondson 2020), moving the USA toward the Netherlands, Portugal, Switzerland, Uruguay, Canada, and other nations in the moral vindication of cannabis (*The Economist* 2021).

Troy Duster describes a "remarkable transformation in the moral interpretation of narcotics usage." In the late nineteenth century, opiate addiction was roughly eight times more prevalent than now. The addicted population was predominantly white middle-class women,



most remaining unnoticed or considered patients. These included "the most respectable citizens ... pillars of middle-class morality." Opiate use was a matter between patients and their doctors. As Duster notes, "It was acknowledged in medical journals that a morphine addict would not be detected as an addict so long as he maintained his supply" (1970:9). But that supply began to dry up after the Harrison Narcotic Act of 1914, the first federal law against opiates. As the addict population began to shift, from mostly "respectable" middle-aged, middle-class women in 1900 to more "disreputable" young, working-class males in 1920, opiate addiction was reinterpreted. Medical journals wrote of two classes of addicts: "physical, mental and moral defectives, the tramps, hoboes, idlers, irresponsibles, criminals ... These are the drug fiends" in whom "morphine addiction is a vice." Others were "good citizens who have become addicted ... innocently," who were "victims" (Swaine 1918:611, in Duster 1970:11).

Armed with the Harrison Act, agents from the new Bureau of Narcotics pursued a policy of criminalization. They prosecuted a series of cases that resulted in Supreme Court decisions interpreting the Harrison Act narrowly, so that "legitimate medical use" could no longer mean maintaining opiate-dependent patients. They forced the closure of 44 morphine maintenance clinics and began arresting physicians who prescribed opiates for their patients (see, e.g., Waldorf et al. 1974). This choked off legal supplies and set up a self-fulfilling prophecy in which "drug fiends" were pushed into a growing criminal underworld (Duster 1970; Musto 1987). Opiates were criminalized not on the basis of pharmacology or addictive liability but rather on who was seen as their primary consumers.

At the same time in England, the spread of cocaine use stoked a moral panic on similar logic. British cultural historian Marek Kohn summarized it this way:

Strongly associated with women – prostitutes, actresses, nightclub dancers, 'flappers' – [cocaine] was at the center of a discourse that used anxiety about delinquent drug use as a means of articulating deeper fears about the transformations Britain was undergoing; particularly those involving female emancipation, pleasure, morality, and perceived threats from the outside world, symbolized by drug-dealing 'men of color.' The drug panic was a spasm of reaction, as Britain struggled to come to terms with modernity... [p]art of a moral sea change, which embraced the pursuit of pleasure for its own sake.

As with alcohol, cannabis, and opiates in the USA, Kohn notes that in England, "cocaine was damned by the company it kept." The Dangerous Drugs Act of 1920 was animated by anxieties about "the jazz craze ... This, the British apprehensively realized, was the sound of the new world; chaotic, Dionysian, American, African, and altogether Other" (1999:105–106; 118–119).

Lastly, the class of intoxicants known as psychedelics has had its own checkered career. Some psychedelic substances like peyote, psilocybin mushrooms, and ayahuasca have been part of longstanding indigenous rituals in Central and South America (Rudgley 1995). LSD was discovered in the course of pharmaceutical research and initially thought to have potential in psychotherapy. The CIA soon explored its potential as a chemical weapon. But LSD, too, was damned by the company it kept. It was criminalized after being linked to Timothy Leary, Aldous Huxley, and other counterculture figures who advocated psychedelic intoxications for pleasure and exploration of the mind (Stevens 1987).

Under official stigma, scientific research on the therapeutic potential of LSD and other psychedelics ground to a halt for decades, but is now having a renaissance. Giffort (2020) documents how scientists "performed" their expertise so as to construct "boundaries of

credibility” to distance their research on the therapeutic potentials of LSD from the “messianic” approach of Leary et al. Drug policy reformers pushed for new studies which eventually showed what was suspected long ago: psychedelics hold real promise in the treatment of PTSD, depression, trauma, addiction, and in end-of-life care (Tullis 2021). Scientific and public opinions are shifting (Pollan 2018). Johns Hopkins University has established the Center for Psychedelic and Consciousness Research where controlled trials have shown favorable results. The Netherlands allows the sale of psilocybin mushrooms. In 2020, Washington, DC, voters passed a law to de-criminalize them and Oregon voters legalized their medical use (Chang 2020; Smith 2021). Pharmaceutical companies are busy planning.

### Controlling Intoxicants: Common Themes

Intoxicants have seen shifts in their moral-legal status under different political, economic, and cultural conditions. It follows that there is nothing natural or inevitable about the label attached to an intoxicant at any point, a historical fact that should confer some humility about drug controls. Beyond this, however, the examples above all have unique features that make generalization difficult. In each case, such shifts seem to be the result of a contingent conjuncture of actors, institutions, and contexts, so it seems best to speak a language of likelihoods and tendencies. Mark Twain famously quipped that “history doesn’t repeat itself but it does often rhyme.” Are there at least “rhymes” to be found across the histories of intoxicants, themes that are marbled through these cases?

Let me suggest five recurring themes. First, intoxicants and forms of intoxication are usually bound up with symbolic and identity interests that shape their uses, effects, and meanings. For example, Alasuutari’s case studies of working-class drinking in Finnish taverns identify a “cultural grammar” in which drunkenness is a purposively transgressive expression of desire for personal freedom, beyond all self- or social control (1992:5). Rosenzweig makes a related case for the centrality of drinking and saloons in creating autonomous spaces in American working-class culture (1983). The use of cannabis and other illicit drugs was embraced as a badge of honor among members of the 1960s counterculture, a symbol of resistance to the established order that was central to their identity. That such intoxications had an *oppositional valence* is an important part of why defenders of the social order feared and tried to suppress them, which, in turn, often helped suffuse them with still greater transgressive value for their adherents.

Second, whether a form of intoxication is seen as problematic is contingent on many things, not least whose consciousness is being altered and in front of whom. Narratives of “irresponsibility” and “danger” stick to some groups more easily than others; certain groups are depicted as prone to drug abuse, others to abstinence. The more disreputable the users of an intoxicant in terms of class, ethnicity, status, and power, the more likely that form of intoxication is to be defined as dangerous by the state. Conversely, the higher the status of the intoxicated – the more cultural capital they have, the greater their ability to conceal or recover from problematic use and resist stigma – the lower the likelihood that their intoxication will be deemed dangerous. In some cases, there is a tendency toward *reciprocal demonization*: an intoxicant is thought dangerous in part because it is associated with a “dangerous class,” and that class is thought dangerous in part because they ingest a “dangerous drug” (Himmelstein 1978).

Third, and corollary to the above, altered states or intoxications that help people transgress or loosen the grip of social control are more likely to be feared and defined as deviant or criminal. Conversely, intoxications that help people adapt to or function more smoothly

within the existing social order are less likely to be defined as deviant or criminal. High states that cut against the dominant cultural grain tend to invite sanctions. Guardians of that culture worry that under the influence, the structure of social control and social order will break down, and that intoxicated individuals will slip beyond customary constraints. Slaves might cast off their chains. Workers could break the bounds of their class position to confront their "betters." Youth might rebel against their parents' world. Sober citizens in the public square can't predict what an intoxicated person will say or do, disrupting what Goffman (1983) called the interaction order. By contrast, chemically managing one's troubles with Valium, Prozac, Ritalin, or methadone tends to be supported by organized medicine and the state.

Fourth, the moral vindication of a stigmatized intoxicant is more likely if there is a constellation of businesses, an "industry," to claim that the production and distribution of the intoxicant are legitimate forms of commerce. The histories of alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, and pharmaceutical drugs suggest that industries that create jobs, profits, and taxes are better able to mitigate evidence of health harms associated with their products. Industry lobbyists have always found ways to get their views across to policy makers so as to prevent, forestall, or weaken laws to eliminate or regulate their products. This seems most obvious with the tobacco and pharmaceutical industries, but the theme has broader salience. In the Netherlands, for example, representatives from the retail cannabis industry are treated like any other business group and invited to testify in Parliament regarding regulations that affect them. The same is increasingly true in many states in the USA.

Finally, laws and policies designed to control intoxicants are inextricably part of the matrix of problems associated with their use. Drug laws and policies influence both the social settings in which intoxicants are ingested and the psychology of those ingesting them (Zinberg 1984). These, in turn, bear upon the patterns of use and the behavioral consequences thought to flow from them. Alcohol prohibition was designed to eliminate drinking but gave rise to bathtub gin, speakeasies, increased consumption of liquor, organized crime, and so many other negative consequences that some key prohibitionists soon reversed course and pushed for its repeal (McGirr 2016). Elimination of legal supplies of opiates after 1914 helped create the black market and criminal drug subculture.

It is still taken as common sense that certain intoxicants cause crime, disease, and overdose deaths, but such claims are partly self-fulfilling. A substantial portion of "drug-related crime" is caused as much by the dehumanizing "funnel" of narrowing options (Rosenbaum 1981) shaped by prohibition as by addiction *per se*. The spread of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C among people who inject drugs stems from syringe sharing, which has more to do with the criminalized context of use than with drugs themselves. Overdose deaths are largely a function of the lack of potency labeling and quality controls in illicit markets. In short, the dangers citizens have been led to fear most about illicit intoxicants are as much the predictable effects of drug *policy* as the effects of drugs. In this sense, punishment-based prohibitions tend to be self-ontologizing; they helped create the conditions under which intoxicant use is more likely to be problematic, and thus helped create the consequences that appear to confirm the need for prohibition.

### ***CODA: Politics and Pleasures***

The way we think about intoxicants and intoxication is evolving. Pleasure is a central goal of intoxicant use and a core reason for its persistence as a cultural practice. But all types of nation states have found it functional to draw *cordons sanitaires* around certain intoxicants

(Levine 2003) – as if to say “these forms of pleasure are just too dangerous to our health to allow.” The case histories summarized above suggest, however, that the *cordons* keep getting re-drawn. Such state actions have their own genealogies and logics, but they are *always* more than mere governmental responses to health risks (see, e.g., McGirr (2016) on the importance of state building in the war on alcohol; Frydl (2013) on the influence of foreign policy in drug wars; and Reinerman and Levine (1997) on the political functions of drug scares).

In his book about state formation in early modern Europe, Philip Gorski argues that the Protestant Reformation, Calvinism in particular, “unleashed a profound and far-reaching process of disciplining – a disciplinary revolution – that greatly enhanced the power of early modern states.” This led to “new mechanisms for the production of social and political order.” He shows how “the technology of observation – self-observation, mutual observation, hierarchical observation” created an “infrastructure of governance” whose object was the “control of behavior and the shaping of subjectivity.” This slowly resulted in “a more disciplined polity” with “more obedient and industrious subjects” (2003:x-xvi; cf. Elias 1978).

This disciplinary revolution began, however, in what historians call the “early modern” period (see, e.g., Burke 1978), and therein lies the rub; for modernity has turned out to be the cultural Big Bang in the universe of pleasure. New modes of discipline and governmentality notwithstanding, across centuries and continents Western modernity valorized pleasure seeking, legitimated the pursuit of pleasure as a basic right, and multiplied the means of pleasure. Colonialism combined with the industrial revolution spread, intensified, and accelerated this (Schivelbusch 1992; Walker 2017; Courtwright 2019). There have been ups and downs and tensions, but the general trend has been an erosion of norms against pleasure and an accumulation of norms allowing and even promoting it. This makes for a rough road for drug controls.

Historian David Courtwright shows that the trade in sugar, alcohol, opiates, tobacco, cocaine, cannabis, and other intoxicants that has been so central to modern market economies has a dark side he calls *limbic capitalism*:

Limbic capitalism refers to a technologically advanced but socially regressive business system in which global industries, often with the help of complicit governments and criminal organizations, encourage excessive consumption and addiction. They do so by targeting the limbic system, the part of the brain responsible for feeling and for quick reaction, as distinct from dispassionate thinking. ... It was a late development in a long historical process that saw the accelerating spread of novel pleasures and their twinned companions of vice and addiction. The pleasures, vices, and addictions most conspicuously associated with limbic capitalism were those of intoxication.

(2019:6)

The mass consumption culture that came into full flower after World War II and the extraordinary economic boom it helped spawn were rooted in the notion that human needs and wants could and should be met through the consumption of commodities – not saving and scrimping, making things and making do, as most people had to do during the Great Depression, but indulging the pleasures of consumption (Ewen 1976). The notion that intoxicants could somehow be kept separate from all this seems naïve.

In not much more than a single generation, the USA experienced the repeal of alcohol prohibition, the end of the Depression, victory in World War II, the invention of television, the rise of mass marketing, a pharmaceutical revolution which established the idea that ingesting a pill could change consciousness and alleviate suffering, and the subsequent

spread of recreational drug use. The production and consumption of various pleasures became fundamental to postwar America and beyond. Citizens *as workers* are still encouraged to keep their noses to the grindstone and marshal self-control as disciplined neoliberal subjects, but the modern economy has come to depend on citizens *as consumers* loosening the grip of self-control and seeking pleasure (see Bell 1976; Lenson 1995; Reinerman and Levine 1997:334–344; Alexander 2008).

Alexander (2008) argues that capitalist globalization entails accelerating forms of social and cultural *dislocation* – from families of origin, from conventional work roles, from communities, traditions, and life-ways that orient us and give us a stable conception of self. Such anomie or normative disorientation loosens the bonds that anchor the self and thereby makes obsessive behaviors more likely and more destructive. Ironically, neoliberal societies then call for individuals to “take responsibility” for their own actions by means of the self-control that these same societies tend to undermine (Bell 1976). With rising precarity and cascading diasporas, Alexander shows, the regulation of the self and its desires has grown increasingly difficult for an increasing proportion of the population. This puts governments in the difficult position of constantly having to problematize and police one or another intoxicant.

It seems unlikely that the genies of consciousness alteration can be put back in their bottles. Intoxicants of various types have become technologies of the modern self. More people now see at least *periodic* intoxication as normative – not that literally everybody is getting high all the time but rather that the majority of people have enjoyed doing so and expect to again in the future, as do many people they know (Parker et al. 1998; Eisenbach-Stangel et al. 2009; Walker 2017).

*These people are no counterculture*, no deviant *déimonde* of beatniks, hippies, junkies or marginalized others. They are ordinary neighbors, workers, and parents – educated, employed, engaged citizens. They have the demographic bulk and the social capital to resist stigma. They are the constituency who have voted repeatedly for drug policy reform, i.e., for new ways of thinking about intoxicants and intoxication.

In his study of the 1960s counterculture, Bennett Berger observed that while they did not succeed in a revolutionary sense of upending the existing social order, they did have a significant impact on Western culture. He noticed a shift in sensibility he called “consciousness of induced consciousness”: “[O]ne of the basic achievements of the [Sixties] ‘generation’ may be a mind-set *aware* of the *induced* character of its own dissatisfied consciousness,” which left them “ready to reject those inductions for more promising ones deliberately chosen” (1981:197–210, original emphasis). As Berger knew, earlier strands of this awareness ran along crooked paths from the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the scientific revolution. But I think he was right that in the half-century since The Sixties, consciousness of the induced character of human consciousness has seeped from the counterculture out into the broader culture.

More people are now more aware that there are discoverable reasons why we feel as we do, that it is possible to feel otherwise, that our present consciousness is but one state of consciousness among many. As consciousness-altering technologies, intoxicants have been and remain an essential element in this shift in sensibility.

## Notes

- 1 The author gratefully acknowledges the helpful comments of Karen Bassi, Troy Duster, Harry Levine, Sheigla Murphy, Marsha Rosenbaum, Cathy Soussloff, and anonymous peer reviewers. All remaining flaws are the author’s doing.

- 2 I am grateful to Prof. Karen Bassi for this point.
- 3 Lawrence Weschler (2004:18) observed that the striking thing about Vermeer's paintings is that they portrayed an intimate, interior peace in the century when the European world outside was convulsed in religious and nationalist conflict. It is impossible to know the specific consequences of religious or spiritual intoxication as we imagine we do in the case of a barroom brawl. But people walked out of such churches into a world where bloody religious wars were fought for decades by people certain they had God on their side.
- 4 There are, of course, strong religious traditions in our own time in which this sort of altered state is common. Many church services in African-American communities include music, singing, swaying, the call-and-response and passionate preaching that kindle in participants a joyous altered state (Gates 2021). And millions have felt a transcendent exhilaration hearing the speech-sermons of Martin Luther King, Jr.
- 5 My example is positive, but Walter Benjamin (1936) among others called attention to the similar process by which politics was aestheticized in service of nationalistic war in fascist regimes. Mussolini and Hitler staged mass rallies in majestic settings designed to create awe and instill the rousing, empowering feeling of being part of something larger than oneself.
- 6 The reference is to the 1952 documentary film, "Trance and Dance in Bali," by Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, depicting Balinese achieving ecstatic altered states by means of dance.

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