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head on

'higher' education

The Gateway has asked E. E. Daniel, professor of pharmacology, and K. A. Yonge, professor of psychiatry, to meet head on in a discussion of the non-medical use of drugs, particularly marijuana and hashish.

Dr. Daniel's argument appears below, Dr. Yonge's views will be published Tuesday.

by E. E. Daniel

The question of the legalization of the use of marijuana, and the provision of an appropriate mechanism for its sale and quality control, has related to it questions which are scientific, sociological, moral, as well as philosophical in nature.

Scientifically, it must be clear that much remains to be learned about the effects of marijuana, especially its long-term effects; as much remains to be learned about the effects of other socially available drugs such as alcohol and the constituents of tobacco. However, the available evidence suggests that the short-term effects of moderate use of marijuana or hashish are not serious in terms of damage to the individual. Some regulation must probably be provided, to make sure that impaired driving and other actions which might conceivably occur by individuals smoking or using hashish, produce minimal damage to society as a whole.

Even the long-term effects of marijuana or hashish do not seem to be very serious in terms of physical damage, though there is a claim of an apathetic syndrome associated with its extensive use in a few individuals.

It is worth noting at this point, that similar and much more damaging effects can be produced by a wide variety of drugs, some of which are freely available (such as alcohol and constituents of tobacco), and some of which are almost as freely available by prescription from the medical profession.

In any case, the nature of the apathetic syndrome--whether it is an effect of consumption of marijuana or hashish-- has not been determined.



The above points lead to questions of sociological import. What are the consequences of making the use of a compound such as marijuana illegal, when a large segment of society obviously considers this law unjust and unbalanced in comparison to the regulation of other substances such as alcohol? What about the learning of contempt for the law? What about the setting apart of a group in society as a subculture, and its consequences? What about the imprisonment of some individuals for the possession or use of marijuana? These and many more questions could be raised, which suggest that the present system is sociologically harmful.

This in turn raises a moral question, and a philosophical one: To what extent has society the right to regulate the actions of individuals? My own philosophy is that regulation should be minimal, and clearly must achieve a balance between protecting society and its interests, and protecting the rights of individuals to do as they please, and even to harm themselves. The great bosom of society should not smother individual variation--and cannot, even if it tries.

On this basis, there is clearly no reason for continuing to make the possession and use of marijuana illegal. I am not certain, in view of this, that there is any basis for prohibition of trafficking; in fact, it would be desirable if use and possession are legal, to have some government control over quality and cost. Also, it would be desirable to gain revenue from the sale of this, especially if this revenue were to be devoted to further study of the effects and of the sociological and other causes of drug dependence.

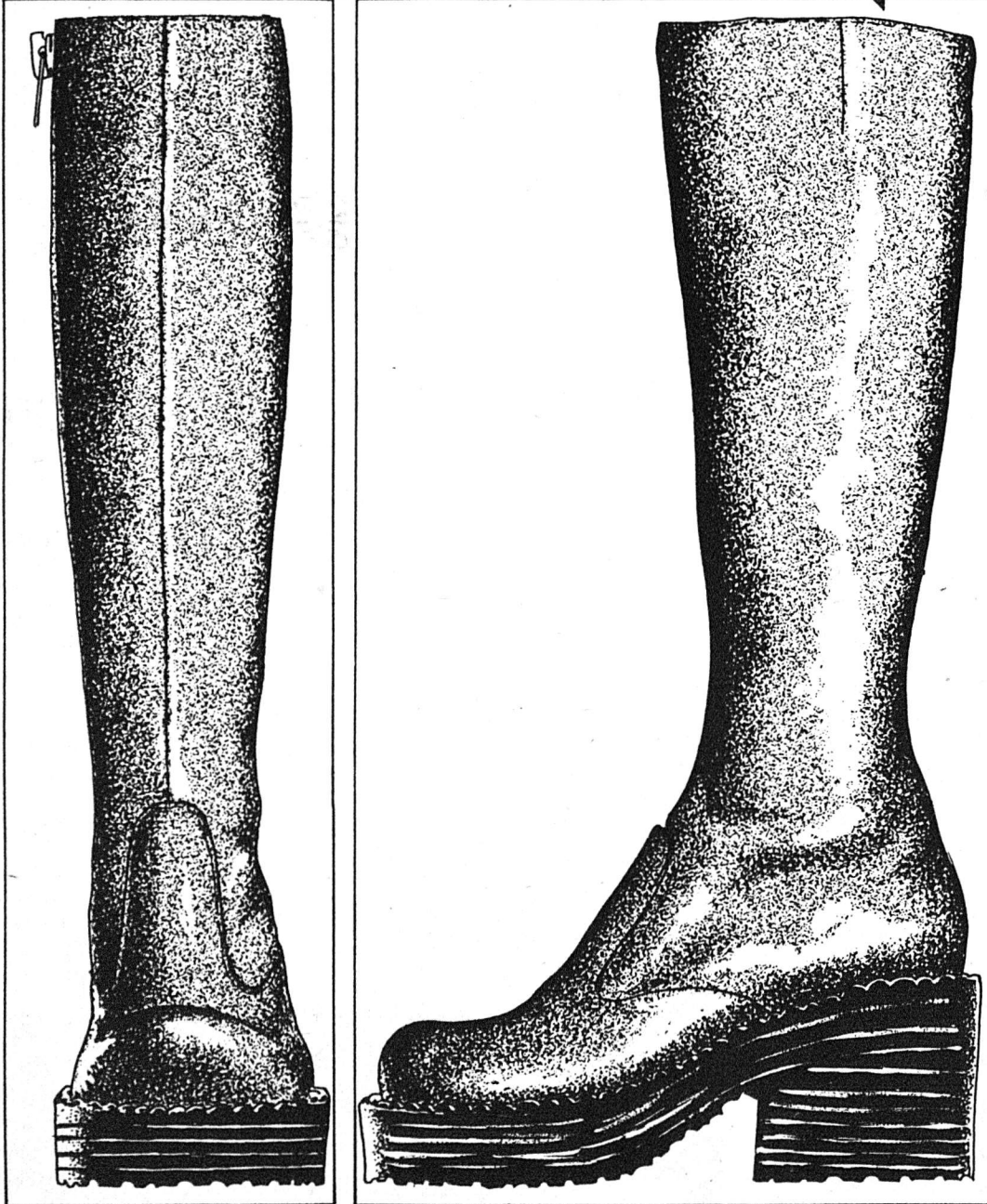
It is interesting to note that society and governments derive a tremendous profit from the sale of alcohol and tobacco, but devote little or none of these profits to further study of the understanding of the dependence of users on these substances, or on the consequences of this.

My conclusion is that on scientific, sociological, and moral grounds, the continued prohibition of the use and possession of marijuana and hashish cannot be defended. Similarly, if this is accepted, I believe that the prohibition of trafficking cannot be accepted, and that this should become a government-controlled monopoly.

There is finally the possibility, which has not been mentioned up to now, that in selected instances marijuana might be of therapeutic use. This can never be evaluated under the present circumstances.

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