

Placebos are better than nothing

My doctor, whose opinion I respect, thinks it's a serious mistake to legalize marijuana for any purpose. He mentions the lowering of IQ, among other drawbacks to using the product. I've never been able to figure out whether the lower IQ of marijuana users is a result or a cause of marijuana use.

Some people object to legalizing the product because it's an "entry" drug that paves the way for harder drugs. I've always thought cigarettes do that. Almost everyone who gets into drugs smokes tobacco.

I was lucky enough to avoid smoking until I was 20, and in the army. If I'd been 14 I would've persisted despite the horrible taste and sour stomach. Instead, I didn't feel the necessity to put up with it, so I gave up cigarette smoking after one pack. Dumb luck. No brains were involved.

Dumb luck probably explains my lack of marijuana smoking as well. I've never hung around folks who felt it important to proselytize me.

In fact, no one's ever offered me marijuana. Perhaps they thought I'd turn them in. Truth is, people may have smoked the stuff in front of me any number of times without my being aware of it. If I wanted to try it, chances are somebody would sell me oregano

and I couldn't tell the difference.

I've reached this stage of my life without having tried the stuff, without being able to recognize it for sure, and with no plans to try it in the future.

Nevertheless, I voted for Prop. 215. My doctor doesn't believe the medicinal qualities of marijuana have been proven. He's probably right. He says it lowers IQ. He's probably right. The proposition, like most initiatives, is badly written and too extreme. If it had gone through the legislative grinding stone some of the loose wording might have been tightened up, but that didn't happen.

It's also possible those who use it to help their glaucoma or their AIDS-induced nausea are being misled, or are foolish or shortsighted.

If I had AIDS and couldn't keep food down, and I was losing weight I badly needed, (now there would be an unusual experience for me), I wouldn't care if I was going against my doctor's

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opinion or not. I wouldn't wait for double-blind tests, 25 years of experience, or proof that the good feeling was not from the placebo effect.

As a matter of fact, if I was seriously ill or dying, I would welcome any placebo that worked for me. I have only one life. If a placebo makes the last days, weeks or months of that life more comfortable, fine. For millenia Indian shamans, patent medicine providers, and more modern pill dispensers have used the power of suggestion to create cures, partial or complete, where none really existed. If people are dying, does it matter whether they feel better from delusion or from real medicine that really works?

In the long run, we'll find that marijuana has shortcomings and there are other materials far better.

Few people depend on Ohlone shamans any more, but for the convinced believer, a medicine man is better than nothing.