Should Drugs Be Legalized? A Response to William Bennett

Ben Christensen

All drugs are different. Some drugs are seen as social drugs. Other drugs are able to make a person higher than the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas. In all, drugs are increasing in popularity. There are more drug users today than there were twenty years ago. Since drug use is becoming so widespread, people are beginning to wonder if drugs should be legalized.

William Bennett raises and answers this question in his essay “Should Drugs Be Legalized,” published in Readers Digest in 1990. Bennett is asking his audience, citizens of the United States, to keep fighting the drug war that our country is waging. He gives, then counters, four reasons that legalizers think that drugs should to legal. First, if drugs are legalized, there will not be any profit for drug dealers. Bennett counters this claim by saying that drug dealers will be able to undercut the price of the government shops and still make a huge profit. The second argument legalizers use is that legalization will eliminate the black market. Bennett says that some drugs are too dangerous to be sheltered by the law. This would create a black market for this drug. Legalizers also say that crime will be reduced if illegal drugs become legal. Bennett argues against this point by explaining that crime rates are highest when crack is cheapest. The last argument legalizers make is that drug users only harm themselves. Bennett easily counters this claim by giving examples of children who are abandoned or killed by drug-crazed parents. Although Bennett is very biased towards non-legalization, he counters the legalizers’ claims with relevant ideas. He shows the damage that drugs do to our society and effectively uses logos, ethos, and pathos to persuade his reader.
Bennett uses an argumentative tone in his essay as he tries to convince the reader that the war on drugs must be fought and not abandoned. He uses a very logical and very factual voice throughout his essay. Sentence lengths are varied, which keeps the sentences flowing nicely. He uses some slang words such as “shoot up,” “light up,” “get a fix,” and “tout.”

Bennett is extremely biased in his beliefs and it shows in his paper. Bennett directed the Office of National Drug Control Policy under President George Bush and was nicknamed “drug czar.” His job was to fight the drug war, not to try to get drugs legalized. He is only arguing the side for non-legalization. There are people who are like this in my life, believing that drugs should remain illegal. I also know people who lobby for the legalization of drugs. I do not have a strong opinion either way so I could write an essay on either side of this argument. In contrast, Bennett would not be able to write an essay for legalization. He is so strongly against legalization that he would not be able to write a convincing paper for the opposite point of view. His past has made him a reliable source for only the side that wants to keep drugs illegal. Although Bennett is biased, he creates a strong case for drugs remaining illegal.

If drugs are legalized, our society will suffer major consequences. I agree with Bennett when he says that we will lose “social currency” if drugs are no longer illegal. Families are destroyed when drugs become part of everyday life. My neighbor is a perfect example. The boy was always smart but he went through a time in his life where he was very socially awkward and he began smoking marijuana. He became very antisocial and moved across the country. A year later, he committed suicide. His pathway to death started with a gateway drug and may have involved the use of harder drugs. His family was torn apart by this tragedy. Not only was the life of one promising youth lost, but the lives of many, including my own, were changed because of drugs. Our society changes with drug use, though not always by death. Marriages fall apart and
families fight. Of all the currencies in the world, our social currency is the most valuable and should be the most protected.

Bennett is explaining all the main ideas against the legalizers’ claims. I agree with many of his points, such as how drug use will increase if drugs are legalized and how “crime is highest when crack is at its cheapest.” Bennett is trying to persuade the American people that drug legalization is not a good thing. He is very persuasive in his arguments, making it easy for the reader to agree with his points.

One reason why Bennett is so persuasive is that he effectively use logos, pathos, and ethos throughout his essay. Of the three, he uses logos the most to provide logical examples for why legalization of drugs would yield negative consequences. Bennett says that “Italy has the highest heroin-related deaths in western Europe” because they chose to legalize this drug for a while. Ethos is incorporated into this essay as well. Bennett gives quotes from many authoritative leaders he knew while he was director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. This gives him authority appeal which helps the reader believe that Bennett is a credible source for what he is talking about. Bennett also uses pathos to create an emotional appeal to the reader. He uses a good example when he is arguing the legalizers’ claim that drug users only harm themselves. He says that legalizers’ should see the thirty-six bullet wounds suffered by a child who got in the way of her mom’s drug-crazed boyfriend. This induces an emotional response in the reader and encourages the reader to agree with Bennett’s arguments.

In conclusion, Bennett argues one side of the battle to legalize drugs. He states claims by the legalizers and then counters those claims with his own examples and experience. Bennett gives logical ideas in his paper and shows how society would be damaged if drugs were legal.
Bennett also uses logos, ethos, and pathos to persuade the reader to keep fighting the drug war that continues with increasing intensity.

Work Cited