

The tyrant Cleisthenes held a competition to find the best man in Greece for his daughter Agariste. For a year, Greece's finest wrestled, horse raced, and were judged on their character, education, and manners. On the last day, they all competed by singing and speaking. As the alcohol flowed, Hippoclidides (who was one of the front runners) began to dance. His alcohol inspired dancing culminated in a table dance where he stood on his head and wiggled his feet about. At this, Cleisthenes said that he had danced his marriage away; Hippoclidides replied, "Hippoclidides doesn't give a damn." We are not told how he felt the next day.

Similar to millions of others, in addition to alcohol, at points in my life I've tried recreational drugs. Like our President, I admit it: I've inhaled. Most of the time, these pharmaceutical compounds only enhanced an experience, and for this reason have been a part of most religious traditions. They help break down mental and social barriers, and can help people see things clearer than they might otherwise. Other times, these compounds simply led to silly stories. For example, I once thought one of my friends was a dragon, and for the next few hours I said, "I know you're not a dragon but will you tell me you're not?" and every time she said she wasn't one I'd say, "That's just what a dragon would say." This became an inside joke, and for months we'd send each other pictures of dragons we came across.

However insightful the revelations or funny the stories, these drugs are drugs. They can cloud the mind at least as much as they can open it. Of all the ones I have taken, the worst by far is alcohol. I am not anti-alcohol, and have an ABC bartending certificate and am co-GM of a hashing kennel. Indeed, most of the time, I drink and have a good conversation or am merely over affectionate. At other times, I've turned to alcohol to not give a damn, for as Euripides says, "filled with that good gift, suffering mankind forgets its grief; from it/ comes sleep; with it oblivion of the troubles of the day." Also, however, I've drunk and done stupid shit, driven dangerously, passed out, nearly killed myself, and ruined more than one friendship. At one point in my life after a particularly bad break up, I was probably best described as a functional alcoholic. My days ended in the bottom of a bottle, and like Hippoclidides at the time I didn't care. I am not alone in this. People have ruined careers, died, or killed others. I had a front row seat in my neighbor's descent into alcoholism. Our earliest references to alcohol contain warnings of alcohol's chimeral nature. Gilgamesh's heart became happier, Odysseus spoke words better left unspoken; many have noted how alcohol can provoke the desire and take away the performance.

Unlike Hippoclidides, I now care and this is why I write this, for conversations are disinfecting sunlight in lonely and dark rooms. I support discussions towards a rational drug policy, especially the decriminalization of many recreational drugs (e.g., marijuana). I believe, however, that any rational drug conversation must also discuss our culture's casual embrace of alcohol. Part of the problem is that even our medical guides give us unreasonable advice; either that or nearly everyone I know is an alcoholic and scoff at notions that four beers in a sitting bespeaks a problem. Mocked advice isn't respected advice. I don't want more laws, I don't want more restrictions, I just want more honest discussion. When we can't talk, we suffer in silence. We need to admit the pros and cons. This essay is written as a step towards this discussion, and hopefully we can have more. Perhaps even over a cold one.

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