THE DRUG PROBLEM

A New View Using the General Semantics Approach

Martin H. Levinson

Greenwood
PUBLISHING GROUP

THE DRUG PROBLEM

This page intentionally left blank

THE DRUG PROBLEM

A New View Using the General Semantics Approach

Martin H. Levinson

Foreword by Paul Dennithorne Johnston

PRAEGER

Westport, Connecticut
London

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Levinson, Martin H., 1946–
The drug problem : a new view using the general semantics approach / Martin H. Levinson ; foreword by Paul Dennithorne Johnston.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0–275–96129–X (alk. paper)
1. Drug abuse—United States. 2. Drug abuse—United States—Prevention. 3. Semantics. I. Title.
HV5825.L4444 2002
362.29'0973—dc21 2002022470

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

Copyright © 2002 by Martin H. Levinson

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, by any process or technique, without the express written consent of the publisher.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2002022470
ISBN: 0–275–96129–X

First published in 2002

Praeger Publishers, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881
An imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.
www.praeger.com

Printed in the United States of America

The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48–1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

To those who seek answers to difficult questions

This page intentionally left blank

CONTENTS

Foreword by Paul Dennithorne Johnston ix

Acknowledgments xi

Introduction 1

PART I—A General Semantics Perspective on American Drug History and Policy

1. Dating America's Response to Drugs: An Historical Overview 9

2. Indexing Drugs for More Effective Drug Policy 35

PART II—General Semantics Approaches to Drug Legalization and the Use of Drugs in Literary Creativity

3. An "Extensional" Approach to Drug Legalization 65

4. The Quest for Instant Enlightenment: Drugs and Literary Creativity 75

PART III—A General Semantics Analysis of Treatment and Prevention

5. A Multi-Valued Analysis of Drug Addiction and Treatment 95

6. For Effective Drug Prevention, Compare the Map to the Territory 117

PART IV—General Semantics Applications in Drug Prevention

7. General Semantics in the Supervision and Staff Development of Drug Prevention Specialists 139

8. A General Semantics Approach to Reducing Student Alienation 151

APPENDIXES

Appendix 1: Time-Binding 10,000 Years of Psychoactive Drug Use 167

Appendix 2: Et Cetera—A Resource and Referral Guide 189

Appendix 3: A Select Annotated Bibliography of General Semantics 193

Index 195

Foreword

What can we do about the drug problem? It seems almost impossible to obtain fact-based guidance. From many directions, conflicting opinions assail us on definitions of the problem and on possible solutions.

One argument says "addiction is a disease" and addicts need treatment. Another says "addicts are morally corrupt" so punish the criminals. The dispute about drug policy often involves emotion and rhetoric rather than facts.

Media images add to the disarray. Dark gothic stereotypes of lawbreakers, gangs, addicts, dealers, and evil drug lords reinforce the fear of a society on the brink of ruin. Some groups use these extreme views to justify the claim that desperate times need desperate means.

Sadly, we have come to accept the war metaphor as valid, and in many cases as the only way to frame and solve the problem. As we invest more resources in the war on drugs we overlook other positive, reality-based methods that work and fail to seek new alternatives.

In *The Drug Problem: A New View Using the General Semantics Approach*, Dr. Martin H. Levinson challenges our assumptions about the drug problem in America. He questions our definitions and our narrow approach in the search for a remedy. He demonstrates that we can act effectively to prevent young people from damaging their lives with drugs and alcohol. Dr. Levinson directs a program in New York City recognized for its success in doing just that.

Dr. Levinson has devoted his career to drug education and prevention. For his doctorate, he conducted a controlled study of junior high-school student alienation. For many years he has supervised a drug education and prevention program for students in New York City. He operates in the field; he and his staff know which methods work and which do not. They see the results of their efforts reflected in the quality of life of each student client.

Dr. Levinson holds that to reduce the drug problem, we must use rational scientific thinking. To understand a complex problem linked to wider social issues, we need to avoid the compartmentalizing that leads to entrenched arguments for a single cause or cure. Dr. Levinson asks many questions. He also guides us to ask questions that will provide useful answers. He views the solution as a *process*, in which we remain sensitive to ongoing changes, and to new possibilities. He wants us to keep on asking questions.

To give us perspective over time, he includes an illuminating history of drug legalization and changing social attitudes over the last century.

For a new approach to the drug problem, Dr. Levinson uses the discipline of general semantics, which provides a science-based methodology for defining the problem, formulating solutions, and tracking changes. The discipline cautions us not to separate the problem from its environment, and it provides the tools to prevent splitting the problem into isolated pieces that no longer interact with one another. It offers us a way of observing, recording, and articulating precisely, and thereby thinking clearly. Dr. Levinson illustrates these principles in case studies and examples. *The Drug Problem: A New View Using the General Semantics Approach* will serve as an invaluable handbook for policy-makers, educators, and those working in the field.

As you get to know the techniques of general semantics, you will find that you can apply them to other life-problems as well.

Paul Dennithorne Johnston
Executive Director, International Society for General Semantics
Managing Editor, *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*
Concord, California

Acknowledgments

Thank you: to Harry Maynard, whose course in how to improve your thinking and communicating ability at Cooper Union introduced me to the field of general semantics; to Jeremy Klein, the editor-in-chief of *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, and to Susan Presby Kodish, Bruce Kodish, and Robert Pula, of the Institute of General Semantics, for providing me with opportunities to sharpen my general semantics knowledge and writing skills; to my fellow drug prevention program directors, whose capable direction and leadership is reducing drug and violence problems in New York City public schools; to the PROJECT SHARE staff, a smart, idealistic, and hard-working group of drug prevention professionals; to Community School District 30 superintendent Dr. Angelo Gimondo, and my Board of Education colleagues, whose expertise has helped to make PROJECT SHARE a more effective program; to my associates on the Queens Borough President's Advisory Council on Alcoholism and Substance Abuse, for assisting me to understand the drug prevention and treatment needs of Queens county; to Judith Gold, my former boss, who set the PROJECT SHARE program on the "gold standard;" to my mother, Professor Risha Levinson, the first author in our family, and to my father, Gerald Levinson, for instilling in me a conviction that knowledge can make a difference in solving problems.

A special thank you to Paul Dennithorne Johnston, executive director of the International Society for General Semantics and managing editor of *ETC*, for excellent editing assistance and for writing the foreword to this book; and to Katherine Liepe-Levinson, my wife and fellow author, whose consistent support, advice, and encouragement sustained me in the completion of this project.

This page intentionally left blank

INTRODUCTION

The federal government estimates the economic cost to society from alcohol and illicit drug abuse at approximately $250 billion a year—the equivalent of $1,000 per person annually. When tobacco addiction is added to the mix, the costs of health care, work loss, disabilities, and law enforcement rise to an estimated at $428 billion per year (this includes work days lost, on-the-job accidents, traffic crashes, illnesses, law enforcement, and treatment costs).[1]

Drug abuse is expensive economically and, considering the waste of individual potential and misery it causes, it is expensive in human costs. Almost everyone agrees that more effective strategies and regulations are needed to reduce its negative effects. But, unfortunately, instead of effective strategies and regulations, what typically gets proposed are extreme approaches put forth by deeply committed partisans who employ radical rhetoric to further their particular agendas.

One frequently encounters this rhetoric in debates over legalizing drugs. For example, opponents of legalization commonly argue that drugs are inherently bad and that drug users are evil and immoral. To solve the drug problem, what is needed, they say, is to mount an aggressive war on drugs to punish and stigmatize drug users and anyone else involved with illegal substances. Supporters of legalization tend to make equally drastic arguments. They claim America's current drug policy has been a total and complete failure and that in a free country you can not interfere with a person's right to self-determination. If drug users want to "blow their minds" and wreck their lives with marijuana, cocaine, and heroin, it is no one's business but their own.

Such exaggerated characterizations contribute little to our understanding of the drug problem and may fool us into thinking it is a simple difficulty that can be easily analyzed and quickly solved. It is not that simple.

The drug problem is a multifaceted conundrum consisting of a variety of biological, psychological, social, economic, and political factors that influence individuals, families, and society in diverse ways. To effectively deal with such an intricate problem, a lot more is required than the indiscriminate use of reckless polemics and catchy slogans. What is needed are intelligently constructed policies, laws, and programs that take into account what we already know about the drug problem and sensibly go beyond it.

The purpose of this book is to help in the construction of such policies, laws, and programs and also to educate policy-makers, practitioners, and members of the general public about different aspects of the drug problem. To these ends, this volume proposes a viable new approach.

THE GENERAL SEMANTICS APPROACH

General semantics, a process-oriented, problem-solving system, helps individuals better evaluate and understand the world and therefore make more intelligent decisions. It was originally formulated by Alfred Korzybski, a Polish engineer and intellectual who came to the United States during World War I. Since then, many thinkers, educators, therapists, and other professionals have drawn on and contributed to the system.[2]

Korzybski based his system on the ideas and work of thinkers such as Alfred North Whitehead, Bertrand Russell, and Albert Einstein. He wanted to use the scientific method to explore and understand the importance of language as a shaper of perceptions and thoughts. He believed his system would help humanity avoid future conflicts by helping people improve their ability to examine their hidden assumptions and solve problems. With a better understanding of the thinking and evaluating process, he believed individuals would live happier and more productive lives, and those in public office would make more effective decisions.

The system stresses precision in description, understanding the differences between the general and the specific, becoming aware of the dangers of overgeneralization, and discovering hidden assumptions underlying how we think and act. To achieve more precise use of language, the system uses tools and techniques called extensional devices, which will be described later in this chapter.

From the beginning Korzybski and his students considered general semantics a practical discipline, to be used by individuals, groups, and organizations to solve important problems. The first two popular books on the subject, *The Tyranny of Words* (1938) by Stuart Chase and *Language in Action* (1941) by S.I. Hayakawa (later titled *Language in Thought and Action*), reflected the practical approach as each author used general semantics to examine and assess the influence of lan-

guage on thought and behavior. Subsequent writers have employed general semantics to analyze and solve problems in a wide variety of fields. These include education,[3] communication,[4] negotiation,[5] management,[6] social science,[7] journalism,[8] and personal adjustment.[9] In addition, over the years, numerous articles on the benefits of general semantics have appeared in the *General Semantics Bulletin* and *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*[10] and more than 150 doctoral studies have demonstrated its efficacy. This is clearly an exceptionally pragmatic discipline with a proven record of obtaining good results in analyzing situations and solving problems.

Outline of the Book

This book contains eight chapters that are divided into four parts. Part I explores and discusses American drug history and policy through the general semantics devices of dating and indexing. Part II applies an innovative general semantics approach to the question of drug legalization and examines the subject of drugs and creativity from a general semantics perspective. Part III employs general semantics formulations to investigate the subjects of drug treatment and prevention. Finally, Part IV describes how the ideas and techniques of general semantics have been successfully utilized in drug prevention. The book also includes three appendixes. Appendix I offers a chronological overview of drug taking through human history. Appendix II provides a list of prevention, treatment, and information resources. And Appendix III presents a brief annotated bibliography of general semantics.

In order to benefit from the following descriptions of the contents of this book, it will help the reader to know some details of the general semantics tools called the "extensional devices." Extensional devices help ensure specificity and precision, and they help prevent careless thinking coming from vague definitions, overgeneralizations, unquestioned assumptions, and so on. The devices include the following:

Dating: involves attaching dates to our evaluations to remind us that change occurs over time—for example, the drug problem (2002) is not the drug problem (1902), cars (of the 1990s) are not automobiles (of the 1930s), John Doe (today) is not John Doe (yesterday).

Indexing: is an idea, based on the use of mathematical subscripts (e.g., x_1, x_2, x_3, etc.), that involves examining parts of a larger category. Indexing can help reveal information about specific items and be a way to detect differences that might make a difference among items (e.g., illegal drug 1 [marijuana] is different than illegal drug 2 [heroin], liberal 1 is not liberal 2, conservative 1 is not conservative 2).

Etc.: is used to indicate that we cannot know or say all about anything. There is always more to be known, more to be said.

Quotes and hyphens: using single quotes around words suggests such words need to be evaluated with care (e.g., 'mind,' 'thoughts,' 'feelings'); hyphens are used to suggest the interrelatedness of complex entities (e.g., space-time, neuro-linguistic, psycho-biological).

Part I—A General Semantics Perspective on American Drug History and Policy

Chapter 1, "Dating America's Response to Drugs: An Historical Overview," employs the general semantics device of dating to provide an historical overview of drug use in America. This chapter shows there is important knowledge to be gained in studying how America has dealt with drug issues in the past and that drug problems are never just about drugs but involve complex interactions among drugs, users, and society.

Chapter 2, "Indexing Drugs for More Effective Drug Policy," utilizes the general semantics device of indexing to analyze and discuss five specific drugs (alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, heroin, and tobacco) with regard to their benefits, costs, and the current policy that regulates them. Policy recommendations are also presented.

Part II—General Semantics Approaches to Drug Legalization and the Use of Drugs in Literary Creativity

Chapter 3, "An 'Extensional' Approach to Drug Legalization," uses general semantics extensional questions to examine specific areas that would need to be addressed to construct a detailed legalization proposal.

Chapter 4, "The Quest for Instant Enlightenment: Drugs and Literary Creativity," explores the effects that mind-expanding drugs had on certain nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers and the effects of these drugs on society. A general semantics perspective on taking drugs for creativity is included as well.

Part III—A General Semantics Analysis of Treatment and Prevention

Chapter 5, "A Multi-Valued Analysis of Drug Addiction and Treatment," applies a general semantics multi-valued approach to examining the subjects of drug addiction and treatment. This chapter also furnishes the latest information on addiction and treatment theory.

Chapter 6, "For Effective Drug Prevention, Compare the Map to the Territory," uses a general semantics analogy to investigate unsuccessful drug prevention models and a successful model. A drug prevention program that uses the successful model is discussed in detail.

Part IV—General Semantics Applications in Drug Prevention

Chapter 7, "General Semantics in the Supervision and Staff Development of Drug Prevention Specialists," describes how general semantics ideas and techniques have helped improve supervision and staff development of school-based drug prevention specialists.

Chapter 8, "A General Semantics Approach to Reducing Student Alienation," examines a drug prevention study that successfully used general semantics techniques and formulations to significantly reduce student alienation—an important at-risk factor for drug abuse.

Appendixes

Appendix 1, "Time-Binding 10,000 Years of Psychoactive Drug Use," provides a chronological overview of drug taking in human history.

Appendix 2, "Et Cetera: A Selected Resource Guide," lists prevention, treatment, and information resources.

Appendix 3, "A Select Annotated Bibliography of General Semantics," presents useful sources on general semantics.

NOTES

1. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), "Overview of Grant Funding Opportunities," *Snapshot* 1, no. 1 (Feb. 2000): 6.

2. Some of these individuals are listed in Notes 3–9. Past speakers at Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lectures have included luminaries such as Ashley Montagu, Buckminster Fuller, Abraham Maslow, Jacob Bronowski, and Gregory Bateson.

3. Neil Postman, *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School* (New York: Knopf, 1995).

4. Irving J. Lee, *Language Habits in Human Affairs* (New York: Harper, 1941).

5. Gerard I. Nierenberg, *The Art of Negotiating* (New York: Cornerstone, 1968).

6. Alfred Fleishman, *Common Sense Management* (Concord, CA: International Society for General Semantics, 1984).

7. William J. Williams, *General Semantics and the Social Sciences* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1972).

8. John C. Merrill, *Journalism Ethics: Philosophical Foundations for News Media* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

9. Wendell Johnson, *People in Quandaries* (New York: Harper, 1946). Albert Ellis, the originator of rational-emotive behavior therapy (REBT), also used the ideas of general semantics. He revised two of his most popular books, Albert Ellis and Robert A. Harper, *A New Guide to Rational Living* (North Hollywood, CA: Wilshire, 1975), and Albert Ellis, *How to Live a With a Neurotic* (North Hollywood, CA: Wilshire, 1975), using a general semantics formulation.

10. The *General Semantics Bulletin* is published by the Institute of General Semantics (86 85 Street, Brooklyn, NY 11209). *ETC* is published by the International Society for General Semantics (POB 728, Concord, CA 94522).

This page intentionally left blank

PART I

A GENERAL SEMANTICS PERSPECTIVE ON AMERICAN DRUG HISTORY AND POLICY

This page intentionally left blank

CHAPTER 1

Dating America's Response to Drugs: An Historical Overview

"Dating" is a general semantics technique that involves appending dates to our evaluations of people, objects, and situations as a reminder that change occurs over time—John Doe (2000) is not John Doe (2001), the economy (of the 1990s) is not the economy (of the 1980s)—and that to better understand people, objects, and situations in the present, which can be useful in making predictions about them in the future, it can help to look back at their past.

This chapter will use the dating technique to provide a better understanding of how and why American attitudes and policies toward illegal drugs have changed in the last two centuries. Specifically, America's response to drugs will be dated and analyzed over five distinct time periods with respect to the following substances: heroin, cocaine, marijuana, opium, morphine, LSD, amphetamines, and barbiturates.

As we date and examine the nation's response to drugs, it will become evident that the drug problem in America has never been just about drugs. Rather, it has always involved complex interactions among drugs, users, and society. It will also become clear that these interactions have produced identifiable themes and patterns. For example, (1) many potent psychoactive drugs that eventually became illegal were first marketed and promoted to the general public by reputable drug manufacturers; (2) in every era politics has substantially impacted on the development and the interpretation of drug laws; (3) law enforcement and medicine have constantly competed to influence drug policy; (4) scapegoating particular groups has been a favorite tactic to promote drug regulation; (5) strong personalities and pressure groups have played major roles in advancing regulatory agendas; (6) drug prevention and treatment methods have