

The cover features several stylized, light green leaf motifs scattered across the background. Each motif consists of a short stem with two leaves pointing upwards and to the right.

PREVENTING ALCOHOL ABUSE

Alcohol, Culture, and Control

David J. Hanson

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Alcohol, Culture, and Control

David J. Hanson

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To

Carol and Cynthia

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Preface

This book reflects the influence of my mentor, Dr. Ephraim H. Mizruchi of Syracuse University, who has had a major impact on my intellectual development. Also more important than she probably realizes has been the long and very fruitful alcohol research collaboration that Dr. Ruth C. Engs of Indiana University and I share.

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Introduction

Alcoholic beverages play important roles in enhancing life among peoples around the world and have done so throughout history. Most societies use alcohol with few problems, although in some the consequences of drinking are viewed as a cause of public concern. The cross-cultural evidence indicates that drinking abuse will be low in any group in which drinking customs, values and sanctions are clear, agreed upon by all, consistent with other customs of the group and characterized by prescriptions for moderate drinking and proscriptions against immoderate drinking (Blacker, 1966, p. 68). While prohibition in the United States and elsewhere has proven to be a failure, the simplistic prohibitionist impulse is found today in the controversial control-of-consumption approach, which seeks to increase abstinence and to reduce the average per capita consumption of alcohol. This is in spite of extensive evidence that the moderate consumption of alcohol is associated with the lower incidence of heart and other disease and with greater longevity. There is little evidence that control-of-consumption policies are effective in reducing heavy consumption or the problems associated with it. If these policies should prove to be effective in reducing consumption among moderate and light drinkers, this very success may have negative consequences for the vast majority of drinkers without any offsetting positive effect among the minority of drinkers who consume heavily. Such a trade-off is unacceptable. Therefore, understandings based on the cross-cultural and scientific evidence yield recommendations that the current control-of-consumption attack upon alcohol should be ended; that all attempts to stigmatize alcohol as a "dirty drug," as a poison, as inherently harmful, or as a substance to be abhorred and shunned should be ended; that governmental agencies formulate and implement policies that incorporate the concept of moderate or responsible drinking along with the choice of abstinence; that systematic efforts be made to clarify and emphasize the distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable drinking; that unacceptable drinking behaviors be

strongly sanctioned, both legally and socially; that parents be permitted to serve alcohol to their offspring of any age, not only at home, but in restaurants, parks, and other locations under their direct control and supervision; and that educational efforts encourage moderate use of alcohol among those who choose to drink.

The desire to manipulate and control the behavior of others seems endemic to humans. "Regardless of how often it fails or leads us in destructive directions, the search for simple solutions to complex problems seems endlessly appealing" (Lazar and Ford, 1977, p. 29). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the control-of-consumption program of questionable legislation to restrict the consumption of alcohol. Like the prohibitionists earlier in the century, whom they so closely resemble, the neo-drys of today are convinced that they have found the solution to reducing alcohol problems. Unfortunately, their simplistic approach is not only of questionable value but is potentially dangerous to the health and longevity of the typical drinker.

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- Lazar, Irving, Ford, John. Untitled reaction of review panel. In: Lauderdale, Michael L. *An Analysis of the Control Theory of Alcoholism*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 1977, pp. 29-34.

1

A Look Back

Alcohol is a valued product which has provided important functions for people throughout all history. From the earliest times to the present, alcohol has played an important role in religion and worship. Historically, alcoholic beverages have served as sources of needed nutrients and have been widely used for their medicinal, antiseptic, and analgesic properties. The role of such beverages as pleasing thirst quenchers is obvious and they play an important role in enhancing the enjoyment and quality of life. They can be a social lubricant, can facilitate relaxation, can provide pharmacological pleasure, and can increase the pleasure of eating. Thus, while alcohol has always been misused by a minority of drinkers, it has clearly proved to be beneficial to most.

ANCIENT PERIOD

While no one knows when beverage alcohol was first used, it was presumably the result of a fortuitous accident that occurred at least tens of thousands of years ago. However, the discovery of late Stone Age beer jugs has established the fact that intentionally fermented beverages existed at least as early as the Neolithic period (cir. 10,000 B.C.) (Patrick, 1952, pp. 12-13), and it has been suggested that beer may have preceded bread as a staple (Braidwood et al., 1953; Katz and Voigt, 1987); wine clearly appeared as a finished product in Egyptian pictographs around 4,000 B.C. (Lucia, 1963a, p. 216). The earliest alcoholic beverages may have been made from berries or honey (Blum et al., 1969, p. 25; Roueché, 1960, p. 8; French, 1890, p. 3) and wine making may have originated in the wild grape regions of the Middle East. Oral tradition recorded in the Old Testament (Genesis 9:20) asserts that Noah planted a vineyard on Mt. Ararat in what is now Turkey. In Sumeria, beer and wine were used for medicinal purposes as early as 2,000 B.C. (Babor, 1986, p. 1).