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Colombia: The Political Psychology of Fusarium Oxysporum

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Abstract. This article presents a brief outline of caveats associated with the employment of fusarium oxysporum to eradicate coca and opium poppy production. These caveats are based on an analysis developed by Dr. Archie Dickey, an environmental biologist at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Prescott, Arizona, USA.

The use of the fungal herbicide, fusarium oxysporum, to eradicate coca and opium poppy production is one action described in the \$1.3-million United States (US) aid package to Colombia that was signed by US President Clinton in July 2000. Based on psychological sets of eradication at all costs and eradication as perceptual impediment to perceiving costs, one might well support such an action. Based on a psychological set of contrasting benefits of reducing the amount of raw product for illicit drugs in a specific geographical location with the material costs of the program, of the likely consequence of inducing greater production in other geographical areas, and of potential biomedical and environmental threats, one might not support such an action.

The various biomedical and environmental threats--based on the delivery mode of dropping the herbicide from thousands of feet above coca and poppy fields--seem to be as follows. (1) Some tropical species of coca plants are just being researched for their possible medical benefits--benefits that would be lost if these plants were eradicated. (2) The fungus might "host jump" to other native or agricultural plants and cause significant ecological and/or agricultural damage. (3) Toxic sequelae to humans such as skin lesions, nail infections, ear infections, ulcers, and circulatory, alimentary, gastrointestinal, and reproductive dysfunctions might occur depending on whether the species contains the same toxins found in other members of the genus and on whether and when the species would mutate. (4) Dispersal of fusarium also might cause toxic outbreaks in livestock.

Beyond material cost, a mere induction of where illicit drug raw product occurs, and various biomedical and environmental threats, one should consider the moral and ethical implications of fusarium use towards the raw products of illicit drugs. The free will, choice, and intention to use illicit drugs on the part of drug consumers have everything to do with whether such interdiction would even be functionally indicated. Are we not left with mild and perfunctory action towards consumers--becoming even more perfunctory as social class of consumers increases--and much more serious action towards growers--becoming even more serious as social class of growers decreases? And does there not come a point where an attempt at prevention of free will, choice, and intention fails before both a deontological and consequential analysis of what is Good? (See DeJong, W., & Wallack, L. (1999). A critical perspective on the drug czar's antidrug media campaign. *Journal of Health Communication*, 4, 155-160; Golden, T. (July 6, 2000). Fungus considered as a tool to kill coca in Colombia. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Hall, N. W., & Zigler, E. (1997). Drug-abuse prevention efforts for young children: A review and critique of existing programs. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 67, 134-143; Lewis, D. C., Duncan, D. F., & Clifford, P. R. (1997). Analyzing drug policy. *Journal of Primary Prevention*, 17, 351-361; Oppenheimer, E. (1997). Cambodia: A challenge for drug abuse prevention. *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy*, 4, 155-172; Robbins, J. (July 18, 2000). Drug War Awaits Attack of

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Killer Fungus. The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com>.) (Keywords: Coca, Colombia, Dickey, Fusarium, Opium Poppy.)