

**FENTANYL, INC.: HOW ROGUE CHEMISTS
ARE CREATING THE DEADLIEST WAVE
OF THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC**

(BEN WESTHOFF)

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Fentanyl, Inc. updates Sam Quinones's seminal 2015 *Dreamland*, about the American opioid epidemic, focusing on the synthetic opioid fentanyl, the use of which has exploded in the past five years. No doubt, increasing drug use is a very important topic for the future of America. Unfortunately, Ben Westhoff's book covers it in a disorganized and blinkered fashion, where the author shrinks from obvious conclusions. The title itself shows the problem. It implies some fictional central entity controls the fentanyl trade, and points the finger at imaginary "rogue chemists." A much more accurate title would be *Fentanyl: How the Chinese and the Mexicans Are Deliberately Killing Americans*.

Drug overdose deaths in America topped 100,000 last year—a fifty percent increase since 2017, the last year data were available for this book. Most, more than eighty percent, of those were fentanyl. A million people have died from illegal drug overdoses in the past twenty years in the United States, far more than the 600,000 who have died of AIDS, originally and more accurately called GRID, in forty years. Unlike GRID, fighting which has received hundreds of billions of dollars of funding, drug overdose deaths today are mostly ignored by our ruling classes, because they primarily are deaths of white people, poor white people, for whom they have nothing but contempt and hatred. They openly wish such untouchables would die, so nothing is done about these deaths (and it is certainly probable that some in the regime actually assist the fentanyl trade so more carriers of white privilege will die). This explains why our elites shrieked with horror when J. D. Vance recently dared to say that Ohio voters cared more about opioid deaths than Ukraine; such blasphemy offended their religion of anti-whiteness, and more notably made them afraid, especially when Vance handily won his primary for Senate.

Fentanyl is an extremely powerful synthetic opioid (that is, a drug that acts on the brain in a similar way to opium, but is not derived from botanical precursors, as are morphine, heroin, etc.). It was first

synthesized in 1959 and quickly became a widely-used anesthetic (though whether it is a necessary anesthetic is apparently disputed). Fentanyl is only one of numerous synthetic opioids, a few of which are used in medicine, but most of which have never been synthesized in legitimate commerce, and whose synthesis was only described in dusty scientific journals, forgotten until recently. The opioid trade, until a few years ago, was therefore dominated by botanical derivatives, not synthetics.

As everyone has heard, not because our elites say anything about it but because most normal people are affected by it in some way, the illegal use of opioids has increased dramatically in the United States over the past two decades. This was the result of over prescription driven by greed, along with new marketing techniques developed by Mexicans (as *Dreamland* narrates very well). Fentanyl didn't get added to the American drug mix because there wasn't enough supply of other opioids. Rather, the prime driver was that it produces an extremely desirable high, more intense than, say, heroin. You need to remember that addicts are not like you and me—many chase ever-better highs as the only activity that matters to them in life, and are willing to risk totally unpredictable effects, as well as death, to get those highs. Their cost-benefit calculus is not ours. Demand for fentanyl, once end users were widely exposed to it at reasonable prices, was high. From the supply side, fentanyl is cheap to produce (especially when its sources became laboratory synthesis, often using those long-forgotten scientific papers, rather than diverting medical fentanyl). It is also a flexible product for a supplier, because not only can it be sold straight, it can be added to a wide range of other drugs to increase the high, producing Frankenstein drugs that, again, addicts seek out, consequences be damned.

Before the late 2010s, fentanyl (and “analogues,” as close chemical relations with similar effects are known, and which I'm lumping together with fentanyl for purposes of today's discussion) occasionally popped up around the world, typically causing several overdose deaths (because a tiny amount of fentanyl will kill you, and most people don't really know what and how much they're taking), but then disappearing as fly-by-night chemists closed up shop after one batch. The first place fentanyl became a major problem, of all places, was Estonia in 2000, apparently due to the Taliban banning opium production. This bit of trivia highlights a key factor differentiating fentanyl use across

countries (and all drug use, for that matter)—local culture. After all, the Taliban's action affected all opium users, but only in Estonia, at that time, did fentanyl catch on as a substitute. Why, exactly? Who knows?

The facts of fentanyl are enough for a long article, not a book, so Westhoff pads out the book with a large amount of information about tangentially-related drugs. Some of the narrative is interesting enough. Some is not, and it is all disorganized. The book needs an editor—Westhoff repeats the same information often, and makes more than one bizarre statement, such as that a scientist in the 1940s was “undoubtedly a genius,” because he could quote Homer in Ancient Greek. The author is apparently unaware that so could most educated men of the time. Ignoring those problems, which are distracting but not fatal, we take a winding road through MDMA (Ecstasy), the first global synthetic recreational drug; the brief legalization of psychedelics in New Zealand; synthetic cannabinoids (e.g., “bath salts”); the rise and fall of LSD; various tearjerking personal stories of people tied in some way to opioids, from users to dealers to cops; distribution through the internet (with much overwrought talk of the Dark Web, an all-purpose bogeymen); and other related topics. It takes us 150 pages to get to anything substantive about fentanyl, and then, it's all about China, which is as it should be.

China has a huge chemical industry—about forty percent of world chemical production. This is not happenstance, but a part of Chinese industrial policy. The Chinese government directly subsidizes many chemical companies (of which China has hundreds of thousands), especially those tied to pharmaceuticals, correctly seeing them as a key component of global industrial dominance. As was briefly noted in America at the beginning of the Wuhan Plague, but then was quickly deliberately forgotten, most of the low profit drugs we use are made in China, along with most precursor chemicals for the high profit drugs on which American firms focus. The explicit goal of the Chinese is to shoulder out Americans in high profit drugs too, the sooner the better. We, on the other hand, have a shrinking chemical industry that avoids R&D and emphasizes extracting rents (like most American industry). We certainly have no industrial policy that will help us, in the near future, when we are totally at the mercy of the Chinese for our critical drugs.

A small part of this vast Chinese chemical industry makes synthetic drugs, including fentanyl (illegal in China) and fentanyl analogues (often not illegal in China). Another part makes chemicals used to synthesize fentanyl. Both drugs and chemicals are shipped abroad, usually completely openly, primarily to Mexico, where drug cartels complete the manufacturing, if necessary (with little fear of government interference, given Mexico is close to a failed state) and then ship massive quantities of drugs to America, using a network of immigrants, legal and illegal, where more Mexicans distribute them.

To his credit, after laying out the facts about China, Westhoff takes his book a step farther, actually travelling to China (to Wuhan, of all places) while posing as a buyer of drug precursor chemicals. This wasn't particularly safe, though I doubt it was as unsafe as he seems to think it was—he was meeting with a company operating openly with the oversight of the Chinese state, after all, not some goons afraid of being executed by Xi Jinping's henchmen for dealing drugs illegal in China. (He certainly didn't try to go undercover with a Mexican cartel.) This section of the book is quite interesting. Chipper young women, working sixty hours a week, market drugs and precursor chemicals all around the world, using all the latest communications tools, but careful to stay on the right side of Chinese law. Thus, they don't sell fentanyl itself, just analogues and chemicals. Most of their sales, as they are happy to admit, go to Mexico, but they also ship smaller amounts directly to Americans, usually finished drugs in falsified packaging. Opioids are only part of it; many other types of synthetic drugs, especially psychedelics, are also on offer. No surprise, the Chinese who run these operations are quite open that they know a great many Americans are dying as a result.

Westhoff spends page after page telling us he's not sure why the Chinese government allows this trade, when it's entirely obvious to any reader that the Chinese not only allow, but encourage, this trade—as a deliberate action to harm the United States (and incidentally make money). It's not clear if Westhoff is dumb or is playing dumb. He even quotes Chinese military officers who openly state that “drug warfare” is part of the ongoing war against the United States, but then, like a moron, wonders what it all means. Similar to a man whose wife is sleeping with half the men in town, but he can't or won't see it, Westhoff repeatedly floats bogus alternative explanations for behavior with a

simple explanation. Most of them contradict each other—he tells us maybe chemicals are just too hard for the Chinese to control, but then also that the Chinese are still angry about the British pushing opium on them, and this is a way to get back at the West. Or something. Maybe Westhoff's publisher didn't want to anger the real global hegemon, but most likely the reason for all this chaff is simply that Westhoff is afraid of directly criticizing the Chinese and the Mexicans, because then someone might call him raaaaaacccctist.

The truth, however, is obvious. The Chinese seek to harm America, as a strategic rival, and one way they can do so is by directly killing Americans and by more generally weakening the American social fabric. Thus, they encourage export, while at the same time vigorously and competently punishing the domestic sale and use of drugs. The Mexicans, junior and opportunistic partners in this effort, are eager to make money by selling drugs to the weak, yet rich, Americans (the Chinese similarly have contempt for the stupid and incompetent Americans who can't control their drug problem). And the American government won't take any aggressive action that might anger China or suggest more Mexicans bearing poisoned gifts are not better for us (although, to be fair, building the Wall wouldn't help much with fentanyl, given that supposedly a kilogram of fentanyl can kill half a million people, and it's easy to hide that amount).

So that's what's going on. There's a deeper question here, though. Why do Americans take drugs? This is something Westhoff doesn't really directly discuss, adopting a libertarian indifference to "life choices," but he captures the truth early on when talking about a drug-addicted Portland dominatrix. Americans, tens of millions of them, want to escape their crappy lives, which lack meaning in modernity. Drugs are a problem throughout the West, of course, because of this very widespread lack of meaning. The specifics vary by country, largely due to cultural factors, but also to physical factors (nobody else our size has the misfortune to be located next to Mexico). It is hard to say exactly why any set of drugs is fashionable in any country, or part of a country, but everyone can agree, people in the West ingest a lot of illegal drugs, because it allows them to forget. As Quinones quotes an addict in *Dreamland*, using opiates made him feel like "King of the World and President of Everything," rather than the dead-end loser he really was.

Strong countries, unlike America, keep their drug problems under control, both by using the law, but more importantly by using stigma. In China, Westhoff tells us (without ever drawing the obvious conclusions) “drug use is so taboo . . . that abusers’ own families sometimes turn them in to authorities. . . . [C]onsumption of psychoactive substances is highly stigmatized.” “Chinese children are taught that drug use will bring shame upon their families.” The Party has always taken an aggressive stance against drugs, where the death penalty is common for minor dealers. This is obvious, of course—the only way to control a social problem is a system of mutually-reinforcing social and legal punishments. When you refuse to have either, as is common in the West, you have no hope of controlling the problem.

What is to be done? Westhoff, predictably, offers stale and stupid ideas, which he calls, laughably, “A New Approach.” Certainly he rejects legal punishment and social opprobrium, a proven winning combination (though far from adequate to actually solve the problem here without a complete cultural and political renewal). No, he wants nice, clean centers where addicts can feed their habits (preferably receiving free drugs, like in Switzerland), along with other programs to enable and encourage more drug use, such as offering free testing at music festivals to reassure you that you’re actually buying the drugs you think you’re buying. He endorses emphasizing the “positives” of taking drugs, so as not to “overemphasize the negative effects” of drugs. The propaganda term for this facilitating approach is “harm reduction,” a term chosen to imply that anyone who disagrees wants harm, a typical modern dishonest rhetorical trick. In short, we need to “educate our way out of the problem.” Don’t you dare suggest that being an addict is a “moral failing”! Don’t you know that telling people to “just say no” never works? Don’t you know being a “prohibitionist” is evil and stupid, because “preventing the use of drugs is impossible”? And, certainly, don’t do anything to the Chinese and the Mexicans, who are just natural forces, like the wind or the water, not susceptible to any pushback from America.

Now, Westhoff is not wrong that the War on Drugs has been mostly a miserable failure, with costs much higher than benefits, including the expansion and militarization of the justice system, now being turned (but not for long) against the Right. And, to be sure, you can probably reduce overdose deaths, sometimes, by some of the methods he

suggests. But let's ignore Westhoff and think about how we could we go about actually effectively reducing fentanyl usage in America. Certainly, restoring meaning to those stripped of it by the combination of Left ideologues and greedy neoliberal corporate types, by destroying both of those, would fix the vast majority of the problem. But assuming we're not doing that today, and recognizing that some percentage of people is always attracted to drugs, what policies should we pursue?

Well, we could start by killing a lot of bad people. There was some pearl-clutching a few weeks back when it came out, or was claimed, that Donald Trump wanted to bomb Mexican drug lords. Why not? Julius Caesar would have strongly approved of that solution, and he was certainly effective at pacifying the Gauls. If we still had human intelligence, which we pretty much don't because our intelligence services are utterly incompetent (how's that Ukrainian proxy war going?), we could kill a lot of cartel leaders. No doubt, like cockroaches, more would replace the dead, so that'd be an ongoing process (and should be combined with discreet killings of responsible Chinese), but combine that with the Wall and deporting every illegal Mexican in America, using any and all force necessary, and not letting any new legal Mexicans in, we could substantially crimp the trade. Add hanging, on a greatly expedited process, every person caught dealing fentanyl in America, and we'd crimp it yet more.

We'd still have a drug problem, though, because drugs are indicative of a malfunctioning civilization, which is us. The Chinese and Mexicans didn't create our decay; they just take advantage of it. Thus, to take only one facet of this, the common thread in all the overdoses profiled of young people by Westhoff is a broken family. Allowing the Left to destroy the family was one of the West's fatal errors, but killing those guilty of selling drugs isn't going to fix the American family. Similarly, we need a culture of stigma, but you can't just mandate that, or a culture that offers meaning to every citizen.

On the other hand, we most definitely can mandate a lot more than we mandate now. I intend to write a longer piece on this, but politics is not downstream of culture. If anything, culture is downstream of politics. For example, as abortion is increasingly, and thankfully, criminalized, it will certainly become more culturally acceptable to bear children. We often see culture as the driver of the political only because the Left, since

1789, has seen and used culture as a means to political ends. But this is, like all Left actions, a corruption of right order. Culture is not, in fact, even downstream of politics in a society that is dominated by the Left. It is an extension of politics, indistinguishable from politics, because for the Left, everything is political, in pursuit of their diseased goals. But this is a historical anomaly, the solution for which is to eliminate any functioning Left.

In a well-run society, culture and politics should have little to do with each other. Culture should be tangential to politics, neither upstream nor downstream. If politics, that is, law, has to be used to dictate culture, the society is broken. We're not going to solve the drug problem, therefore, without a complete cultural renewal, which will be downstream, because of the dominance of the Left, of a political renewal. Anything we do until then is going to be merely a stopgap measure, which doesn't make it not worth doing—we just need to realize the strong Sisyphian element in all our present actions.