

# "Everything these days is bad for you"

## countering the (silly) arguments of smokers

With the application of the new Code of Student Behavior comes a revival of smoking regulations that many non smokers would be glad to hear about.

Although at times there are more smokers than non smokers in classrooms and labs (including professors) the rules should still apply. Both fuming militants and smouldering cravens will still agree that it is an affront to the most basic of human rights, namely the pursuit and preservation of good health whenever a person should like to pursue or preserve it, for even a majority of people to pollute the earth's limited supply of clean air at the expense of the minority.

Enlightened groups are beginning to see this, yet as enlightenment grows, so does oppressing. Therefore *Gateway* wishes to assist the choking minority in its struggle by reprinting this article which first appeared in the *Manitoban*.

by Nick Smirnow  
of the *Manitoban*

Many smokers recognize the harmful and discomforting effects of smoking in the presence of others and will refrain from doing so.

But there are always an obstinate few who will not refrain. For the most part, these people are acting out of a basic disregard for others, although they will rarely admit it. Instead, they use a number of rationalizations to try to convince you logically that they have a perfect right to spew nicotine and tars into the air you have to breathe.

If you've majored in logic and have memorized the fallacies of argument, you will probably be able to show where the error in their reasoning lies. But most likely, you'll get stumped somewhere along the line, and only realize later what you should have said before.

There is simply no good argument for hurting other people without provocation.

There are, however, a small number of rationalizations which sound valid (though they aren't), and they are often used by smokers when their actions are challenged. It is useful to be familiar with these rationalizations and their deficiencies in order that they may be dealt with and properly refuted.

### Harmful irrelevancies

"Everything these days is bad for you," is one common smoker's reply to your request that your air space not be violated. Smokers will point to all kinds of statistics that indicate that a large number of foods, activities, and machines in our present society cause cancer, emphysema, or other ills.

This is a purely diversionary argument. Of course, we live in an irrational society where our health is not an important priority. That may be an argument for doing away with the profit motive, but it has little to do with smoking. However, the selfish attitude of the smoker who refuses to dirty your air may be likened to the attitude the drug manufacturers who do not

adequately test their products before marketing them.

This argument, basically says that two wrongs make a right.

### False trade-offs

The most common response from smokers when asked not to smoke in the presence of non-smokers, is the trade-off argument. The case is made that for them to stop smoking is as much an infringement of their rights as it is for the non-smoker to have to put up with the smoke.

"You have a right to like clean air, I have a right to like smoke."

"If you can ask me to stop smoking, I can ask you to stop breathing clean air."

"It bothers me as much not to smoke, as it bothers you when I do smoke."

### Alleged hypocrisy

In another common response, the smoker takes the offensive and charges you with hypocrisy.

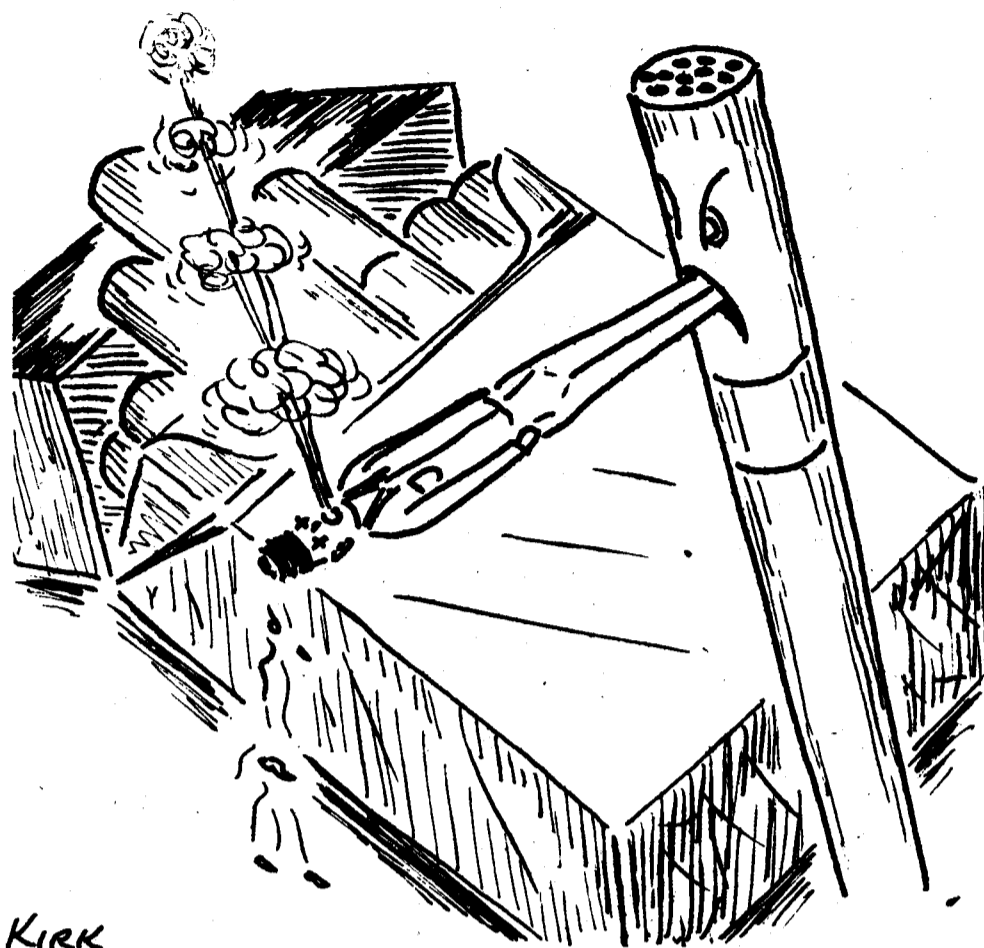
"A lot of things that you do pollute the air that I have to breathe, like heating your home, driving your car, etc."

This is another two wrongs make a right argument, but it also has a more basic fault.

Again, the smoker may have a good argument for improved mass transit, or for reduction of our power consumption and should be encouraged to follow up on this concern over our common environment.

But the only valid way this argument applies to your request to the smoker to refrain from smoking in your presence is, as before, by assuming two wrongs make a right.

The smoker might have a point if you were driving your car in his or her living room, or sending the exhaust from your furnace directly into your classroom, or if you were arguing that no one should smoke *anywhere*, even when no one else is affected.



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### Invalid extrapolation

"The color of your clothes bothers me. Do I have the right to ask you to remove them?" This one is a favourite the smoker extrapolates the non-smoker's argument to what is apparently a ridiculous extreme.

The problem with it is that two kinds of "offence" are equated when they shouldn't be. The smoker's hypothetical dislike of your clothes, hair style, manner of speech, etc. is a psychological one. What the non-smoker is complaining about is a demonstrable

assault, exceptions are not made on the grounds that the victim was outnumbered by the attackers.

The very purpose of laws, theoretically at least, is to prevent the powerful from exploiting the weak.

When confronted by this argument from democracy you have some options. First attempt to ascertain whether all of the smokers in the room agree that the minority has no right to clean air. (Don't assume that because someone smokes, (s)he is incapable of recognizing the validity of your argument.)

If, however, the might

reasoning is that two things are being equated when they are totally different. A right to breathe the atmosphere to which our bodies have successfully adapted for millions of years, and which ensures optimum physical and mental health is one thing. A "right" to befoul that atmosphere for other people is quite another.

In fact, to call the latter a right is rather absurd it amounts to a right to trample on other people's rights.

We rightly do not accept an argument that claims that the right to befoul an atmosphere that other people need, is of equal weight as the right to use that atmosphere.

Smokers are infringing on the rights of others, non-smokers are simply insisting on their own rights. And when the conflict is stated in terms of conflicting rights, clearly the right to clean air takes precedence over the right to smoke.

We do not grant psychopathic mass murders that their "right" to sadistic enjoyment is of equal weight as their victims' right to live. And we take the appropriate action. We ensure that they are removed from places where they can do harm, and if we live in an enlightened and humane society, they are helped to recognize other people's right to life and health.

Smokers should also be banned from places where they can do harm. There is of course, less urgency involved, since one can afford to take the time to try to reason (you only lose several minutes of your life) something that is more risky with a psychopath (you might lose all of it.)

Smokers are lucky in one respect: that their dependency differs qualitatively from that of the mass murderer it is possible for them to satisfy their dependency without hurting others. They need only do it in a well isolated or a well ventilated place.

But to ban smoking period would be as unwise and as unworkable as prohibition. Legislation on personal habits and morality, is next to impossible to enforce.

### Dogged determination

(ENS) - A 74-year old English noblewoman last week went to a leading British cigarette manufacturer and volunteered to chain smoke for three years and then be killed so her organs could be examined for damage.

The offer by Lady Parker came as the latest measure in her campaign to save beagle dogs used by the company to test cigarettes. The ICI research firm uses beagles to smoke up to 30 cigarettes a day in ex-

periments designed to test safer forms of cigarettes.

Lady Parker had already delivered 300,000 signatures protesting the tests, collected by a children's crusade. The director of the firm responded that he could not be influenced by children's emotions.

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### Might makes right

There is one argument non-smokers may find difficult to counter this is the argument of superior numbers. "There are more smokers than non-smokers in the room."

This is sometimes convincing, not because it is based on a democratic principle, as it first appears to be, but because it is essentially an argument from force - might makes right.

Simply because in an accidental grouping of people, the majority decide to attack the minority does not justify the attack. When we pass laws against murder, rape, or

performs right argument is accepted by a large number of the people present, you may as well not waste your breath on further argument with them.

It is time to either suffer the air as they choose to render it, to make an exit, or to counter with force of your own, preferably the legislative kind.

These are the common wordings, all of which are designed to do one thing. They play on the non-smoker's desire that everyone respect everyone else's rights. The illusion is created of a stand-off between two equally valid rights the smoker's right to smoke, and the non-smokers right to clean air, and of course, in the face of this stand-off, the recommended action is no action whatever.

Which means simply that the smoker keeps smoking and the non-smoker keeps choking. The problem with this bit of