

Opinion

The fallacy of consent

This summer a number of events have taken place that have caused great division in our country as well as at Texas A&M.

Mike Foorde
Guest Columnist

Among the most controversial were the Meese Commission's Report on Pornography, the Supreme Court's upholding of the Georgia sodomy law and the crack-down on the use and production of illegal drugs. Whereas most conservatives applauded these actions, many so-called "enlightened" individuals screamed and hollered that George Orwell's prophecy — that the government will regulate what goes on between consenting people — was coming true.

Actions like these just caused the blood of the ACLU and the People for the American Way to boil because they seem to think that "whatever goes on between people is nobody's business." Now picture if you would that last statement on the wall of a police vice squad's room. Ludicrous? Read on.

When you quiz average liberals on the issue of consent, they seem to agree with the ACLU in principle, but they also have a number of stipulations on who can consent and under what circumstances. For instance, liberals pretty well agree that children are unable to consent responsibly. That is why they are, at least, against child pornography and pedophilia. Thank God for that, but when individuals become adults, then they should, with impunity, be able to make their own moral choices.

Sounds reasonable, but I am reminded that our prisons are filled with adults who "consented" to do heinous crimes, so age doesn't have much to do with it. It is not as though there is a marvelous metamorphosis in our characters as we reach eighteen years of age.

"Society," they go on to argue, "no longer considers homosexuality as deviant," thereby justifying consenting men or women engaging in immoral acts. This is a popular view, but if society determines what is right and wrong, I am reminded that not 50 years ago, German society decided that Jews were a nuisance and therefore expendable. Now whether tacitly or outright, there is no doubt that they consented to the death of more than six million people. So much for majority rules.

"Well as long as they are not hurting anybody, and it's in the privacy of their own homes it's OK." This might be acceptable if it were the case. Unfortunately, it rarely is, ever, is the case that what people do in private doesn't spill over and affect the public. Law enforcement officials have known for a long time that even though rapists read their pornography in the privacy of their own homes, it tends to influence their public behavior.

The same holds true for people who use prostitutes, drugs or engage in a variety of other illegal activities. Invariably, society always is burdened in one way or another by those who engage in such activities. The venereal disease and AIDS scare are classic examples of private affairs rapidly becoming dangerously public affairs. Many corporations also are cracking down on employees who use illegal drugs whether in the workplace or at home because it adversely regulates their performance at work.

"If people consent to destroy themselves, that is their own business, not yours, and not the government's." This is also a popular view, but a departure from the traditional view. There always have been laws against suicide and other self-harm measures because, at one time, we were a people who really held to the sanctity of life. Again, though, it is often the case that people do what is wrong at the expense of others.

For example, do you not find it ironic that the homosexual community is outraged at the government's attempt to regulate their activities, but it turns right around and demands that the government put up millions of dollars for AIDS research? How funny that we don't want the government to tell us about our sexual habits, but then we expect them to support our illegitimate children to the tune of 70 billion dollars — to say nothing about the people who have the nerve to ask the government to fund their abortions!

"But if people consent . . ." Consent is not the issue. If I wanted to commit suicide but was too chicken to pull the trigger, and I convinced a friend to blow my brains out, he still would be guilty of murder, even though we both consented to the act. The rightness or wrongness of the act in question is the issue, not whether we consented to do it. So what role does government play?

More than three hundred years ago, John Locke wrote in his book *Lex Rex*, that "no sovereign or government is above the laws of God. With this premise the colonists began a revolution and built a nation that we call the United States of America. They drew up a constitution that guaranteed individuals the rights afforded them by God with the understanding that for society to survive and function well individually and collectively, we would all have to abide reasonably by the law of God. The Bible tells us that "righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people." Everybody wants a better society, but will we collectively and individually consent to uphold what is right?

Mike Foorde is a senior education major and the president of the A&M chapter of Americans for Biblical Government.



"I JUST DON'T THINK I HAVE THE RIGHT TO INTERFERE WITH ANYONE'S DOMESTIC SQUABBLES."

Using preventive scare tactics may encourage drug 'crisis'

When my friends and I were in the eighth grade, the most influential person in our lives was our school softball coach. He was a genial man, gifted in dealing with boys, and we listened intently to what he had to say. One day he told us about drugs, specifically marijuana. He said that if we smoked it just once we would be hooked for life.



Richard Cohen

The coach was misinformed. When I got to college I met people who smoked marijuana and did not become addicted. And of those people, none that I knew later turned to heroin. Many in my generation therefore concluded that everything that they had been told about drugs was wrong. Like the coach, we too were misinformed.

The consequences were tragic. Not only did some of that generation turn to cocaine, thinking that its dangers, like those of marijuana, were vastly exaggerated, but they became role models for younger kids. Drugs were extolled in song and incorporated into the anti-establishment revolt triggered by the Vietnam War.

Now some of those erstwhile skeptics are dead or wrecked and the model they set for others was, to be charitable, criminal. They were as dumb about drugs as the generation that preceded them.

But that pattern is being repeated.

Along with the current panic about a "drug crisis," has come the revival of old canards. Distinctions are not being made. Some anti-drug activists talk about marijuana, cocaine and heroin (and even alcohol and tobacco) as if they were one in the same — equally addictive, equally dangerous. When it comes to cocaine, death by overdose is cited as if it is common occurrence when such experts as Dr. Norman Zinberg of Harvard say it is not. Cocaine users apparently know that. Not two weeks after coke killed Maryland University basketball star Len Bias, Cleveland Browns running back Don Rogers died a similar death. Clearly, Rogers — like many cocaine users — thought Bias' death was a fluke.

Now the Reagan administration and House Democrats, both politically opportunistic, are gearing up for a new campaign against drugs. Whatever the administration does — and Nancy Reagan's efforts already have been valuable — it will be counterproductive if the old scare tactics are revived. Some of what already is being said falls into that category — the equating, say, of marijuana with cocaine or arguing that it leads, as day follows night, to heroin addiction. Marijuana is bad enough as it is. No exaggerations are necessary.

The danger is that once again kids might think they have been lied to. A kid who is told that marijuana is both the equivalent of and an inevitable stepping-stone to heroin, might just learn that it is not. And if he has been lied to about marijuana, then he might conclude that he has been lied to about other drugs. If he finds out that marijuana usually is not addictive (for some,

apparently it is), might he not conclude the same thing about cocaine (it almost always is)? And if lots of people are taking coke and not dying, is it wise to tell kids that death is a certain consequence of usage? The ordinary consequences are horrible enough.

American society has often resorted to wholesale remedies in dealing with the harmful pursuit of pleasure. Once, we coped with alcohol abuse by prohibiting that drug completely. It didn't work and so reality became the mother of sophistication. We distinguish between a single beer and a pint of gin, although we recognize that some people start with one and wind up with the other. Still, most of us don't.

The analogy between alcohol and illegal drugs is an inexact one since the recreational use of wine will not necessarily have the same awful consequences that the recreational use of cocaine almost always has. But the point is that we recognize gradations of danger and don't tell kids something they will discover is false — that a glass of wine (marijuana) at dinner surely will lead to a pint of gin (heroin) for breakfast.

One generation learned by experience that pushers are helped by well-meaning adults peddling scare stories. The dangers of drugs are real enough and need no embellishment. But if the new anti-drug campaign, as welcome as it is, falls into the hands of opportunistic politicians, the lessons of a generation that learned the hard way about drugs will be lost. That generation, once mindlessly infatuated with drugs, has much to answer for. At the least, its answers should be truthful.

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Suspending 'weed rights' greater danger than smoke

Comes now the National Academy of Sciences with a report that reminds us that every now and then scientists tend to forget that human beings aren't squeaky wheels or guinea pigs. What the learned academy recommends is that cigarette smoking be forbidden in airplanes.



William F. Buckley Jr.

I wish that everyone in the whole world (my wife included) would stop smoking. Perhaps someday they will, however unlikely this is. But in the meantime we need to remind ourselves of what smoking is, and what smoking does for, as well as to, some people. There are an estimated 37 million ex-cigarette smokers in America, but, strange to say, many of them appear not to remember how it was in the good-bad old days.

I kicked the habit at age 26, but even so I remember what smoking did to me. In the Army,

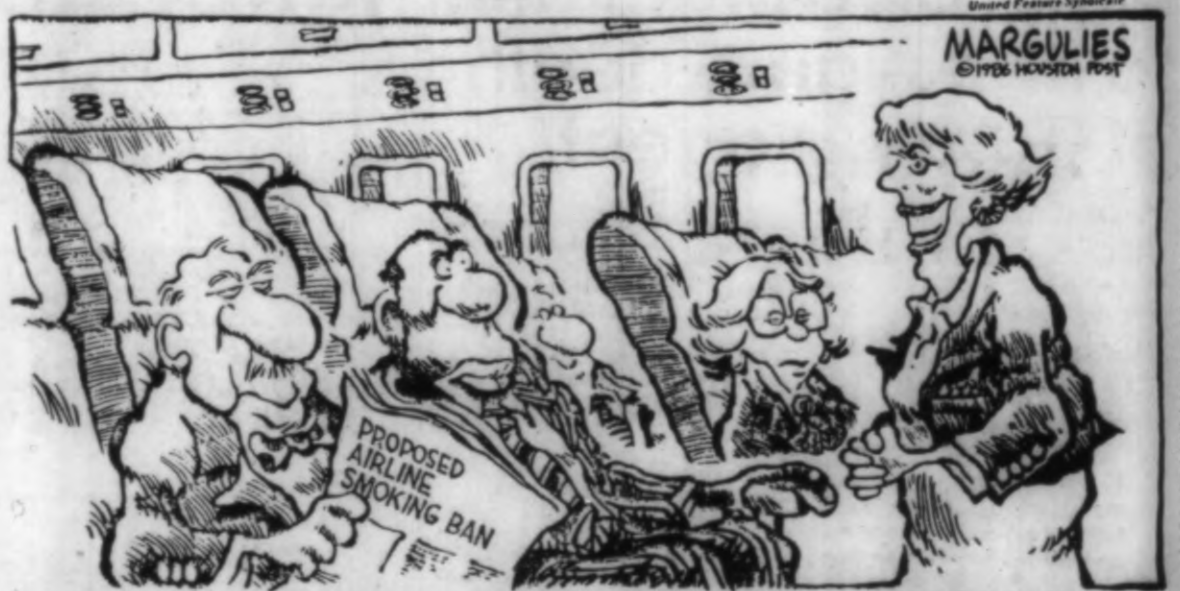
five seconds after reveille, a cigarette was in my mouth. At college during Lent I gave up smoking until sundown. I would find myself, notwithstanding an overbearing academic and extracurricular schedule, two or three times a week at a movie house at about 4 p.m. Why? Because my generation had been trained not to smoke at movies: It was illegal to do so, and long years of habit quieted the itch in the lung while Greta Garbo or Humphrey Bogart distracted us from our pain. But when the movie was over — the sun was down, and I could resume smoking.

The purpose of this autobiographical exercise is to remind our scientists, so many of them removed from the traffic of human experience, that one of the reasons we so much deplore cigarette smoking is that it is an addiction. The doctors tell us that if smokers could be persuaded to limit themselves to 10 cigarettes per day, the human system could absorb the poison.

Unhappily, even knowing this to be the case, the overwhelming majority of our smokers exceed this limit by a factor of 100, 200, 300, 400 — 500 percent, and more. It is one thing to deplore that they should do so, quite another calmly to inform them that effective the first day of next month they are to give up smoking on a seven-hour flight from New York to Anchorage. You simply cannot do that to people who are smokers, not without turning airplane travel into torture.

When the news was given that the academy was going to make that recommendation, there were interviews taken on the streets, and many rejoiced. One woman said on television, "It's about time!" But that is to express a distaste for smoking, which is perfectly legitimate. One harbors a distaste for many things — some people don't like dogs, cats, obesity, bad grammar, film violence, film non-violence . . . But the American protocol permits us to be our potty little selves.

On what reasoning do the scientists rely? Well, they tell you, air circulation inside an airplane isn't sufficient to contain the smoke within the narrow area of the smoker, and therefore some of it drifts out to annoy passengers, and to damage, poten-



"KINDLY OBSERVE NO-SMOKING ABOARD MEAL SERVICE, WITH YOUR CHOICE OF TOFU-BURGER OR BEAN SPROUT SALAD WILL BEGIN SHORTLY. MEANWHILE, SIT BACK AND ENJOY OUR FEATURE FILMS 'THE JANE FONDA WORKOUT' AND 'RICHARD SIMMONS' FITNESS ROUTINE'."

tially, flight personnel. The first problem is rather easily coped with: Those with high allergy to smoke can recommend seats far removed from the smokers' section. As for the flight attendants, the study by the academy is not likely to document a noxious impact on the health of passengers by passing through an area in which people are smoking 15 days per month, for three four hours. It is likely that the same people expose themselves to the same concentration of smoke at restaurants, playing bridge or poker with their friends, or indeed inhaling their spouses' smoke or, for that matter, smoking themselves.

It is when the third reason for forbidding smoking is cited that skepticism gives way to cynicism. That reason is to diminish the danger of fire on

board an airplane. The statistics are not handy, but if the honorable scientists can come up with a single fatality caused by someone having set a tobacco fire to a commercial airliner, I hope they will feature this in their report.

Me, I would rather once in a lifetime (in a far advanced lifetime — of perpetual flying, I have yet to see a fire aboard a plane) be aboard a plane during a little shoot-out with a cigarette-caused fire in the corner of a cushion than be on every flight with 50 or 100 haunted souls choking for a snort of the weed and taking out their ill humor on friendly folk like thee and me.

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