

Welcome to the book *Essays, Literary, Moral and Philosophical* (1798), the tobacco chapter only, pp 261-270, by Dr. Benjamin Rush.

Tobacco pushers and their accessories conceal the breadth of [tobacco effects](#), the enormity of the tobacco holocaust, and the long record of documentation.

The concealment process is called the "[tobacco taboo](#)." Other pertinent words are "censorship" and "disinformation."

Here is the text by Dr. Benjamin Rush (1745-1813) of an early exposé (1798) of [tobacco dangers](#). It cites facts you don't normally ever see, due to the "[tobacco taboo](#)."

The phrase "[tobacco taboo](#)" is the term for the pro-tobacco censorship policy—to not report most facts about tobacco.

"It is not enough to know the past. It is necessary to understand it."—[Paul Claudel](#) (1868-1955).

Dr. Rush was one of the Founding Fathers, a signer of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, and Surgeon General under George Washington.

As you will see, information about [tobacco dangers](#) was already being circulated in 1798, 166 years before the famous 1964 Surgeon General Report. Be prepared.

Essays, Literary, Moral and Philosophical

by Benjamin Rush, M.D.

(Philadelphia: Thomas and William
Bradford, 1798, 2d ed, 1806)

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**Observations Upon the Influence of
 the Habitual Use of Tobacco
 Upon Health, Morals, and Property**

WERE it possible for a being who had resided upon our globe, to visit the inhabitants of a planet, where reason governed, and to tell them that a [vile weed](#) was in general use among the inhabitants of the globe he had left, which afforded no nourishment—that this weed was cultivated with immense care—that it was an important article of commerce—that the [want](#)[lack] of it produced [real misery](#)—that its taste was extremely nauseous, that it was unfriendly to [health](#) and [morals](#), and that its use was attended with a considerable [loss of time](#) and [property](#), the account would be thought incredible, and the author of it would probably be excluded from society, for relating a story of so improbable a nature.

In no one view, is it possible to contemplate the creature man in a more absurd and ridiculous light, than in, his [attachment](#) to [TOBACCO](#).

This weed is of a [stimulating nature](#) whether it be used in smoking, chewing, or in snuff. Like opium and spiritous liquors, it is sought for in all those cases where the body is debilitated *indirectly* by intemperance in eating, or by excessive application to study, or business, or *directly* by sedative passions of the mind, particularly by grief and fear. Persons after losing relations or friends by death, often resort to it. One of the greatest snuffers I ever knew, used it for the first time, in order [to console her](#) under a [presentiment she entertained](#), that she should die in childbed.

Fear creates a desire for Tobacco. Hence it is used in a greater quantity by sol-

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diers and sailors than by other classes of people. It is used most profusely by soldiers when they act as picket guards, or sentinels, and by sailors in stormy weather.

Ed. Note: [Click here for list of modern reasons for smoking.](#)

Persons labouring under that [state of madness \[depression\]](#) which is accompanied with a sense of misery, are much devoted to it, hence the [tenants of mad-houses](#) often accost their attendants and visitors, with petitions for [TOBACCO](#).

The [progress](#) of [habit](#) in the use of Tobacco is exactly the same as in the use of spiritous liquors. The slaves of it begin, by using it only after dinner—then during the whole afternoon and evening, afterwards, before dinner, then before breakfast, and finally during the whole night. I knew a lady who had passed through all these stages, who used to wake regularly two or three times every night to compose her system with fresh doses of snuff.

Again—the progress in the decay of the sensibility of the nose to the stimulus of snuff is analogous to the decay of the sensibility of the stomach, to the stimulus of spiritous liquors. It feels for a while the action of Rappee; next it requires Scotch snuff, afterwards Irish-black-guard—and finally it is affected only by a composition of Tobacco and ground glass. This mixture is to the nose, what Cayenne pepper and Jamaica spirits are to the stomachs of habitual dram drinkers.

The [appetite](#) for Tobacco is wholly artificial. No person was ever born with a relish for it. Even in those persons who are much attached to it, nature frequently recovers her disrelish to it. It ceases to be agreeable in every feble indisposition. This is so invariably true, that a

disrelish to it is often a sign of an approaching, and a return of the appetite for it, a sign of a departing fever.

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In considering the pernicious effects of [Tobacco](#), I shall begin agreeably to the order I have laid down, by taking notice of its influence upon health; and here I shall mention its effects not only upon the body, but upon the mind.

1. It impairs the appetite. Where it does not produce this effect,
2. It prevents the early and complete digestion of the food, and thereby induces distressing, and incurable diseases not only of the stomach, but of the whole body. This effect of Tobacco is the result of the waste of the saliva in chewing, and smoking; or of the Tobacco insinuating itself into the stomach, when used in chewing, or snuffing.— I once lost a young man of 17 years of age, of a [pulmonary consumption](#), whose disorder was brought on by the intemperate use of cigars.
3. It produces many of those diseases which are supposed to be seated in the [nerves](#). The late [Sir John Pringle](#) [1707-1782] was subject in the evening of his life to tremors [[ataxia](#)] in his hands. In his last visit to France [1770's], a few years before he died [1782], in company with Dr. [Benjamin] Franklin [1706-1790], he was requested by the Doctor to observe, that the same disorder was very common among those people of fashion who were great snuffers. Sir John was led by this [[statistical observation](#)] remark to suspect that his tremors were occasioned by snuff which he took in large quantities. He immediately left off taking it, and soon afterwards recovered the perfect use of his hands.

Ed. Note: [Sir John Pringle](#) had obtained his doctorate at Leiden University. He was a physician, and soon, after 1734, a professor. By 1742, he was being appointed surgeon-general (modern term) in various British armies, and "in 1766 was made a baronet."

His writings include *Observations on the Nature and Cure of Hospital and Jail Fevers* (1750); and *Observations on the Diseases of the Army in Camp and Garrison* (1752). Physicians were well aware of the significance of [statistical observations](#).

In 1772, Pringle was elected [President of the Royal Society for the Promotion of Natural Knowledge](#) and served until 1778.

He is "regarded as the founder of modern military medicine."—"Pringle, Sir John," [22 Encyclopædia Britannica 349](#) (11th ed, Cambridge University Press, 1911).

He was [active against scurvy](#). A plant is named after him ([Details](#)).

I have seen head-ache, vertigo, and epilepsy produced by the use of tobacco.

A Physician in Connecticut has remarked that it has in several instances produced palsy and apoplexy; and Dr. Tissot ascribes sudden death in one instance, to the excessive use of it in smoking.

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4. A citizen of Philadelphia lost all his teeth by drawing the [hot smoke](#) of Tobacco into his mouth by means of a short pipe, and I have been informed of a [cancer](#) on the lip, which terminated fatally from the same cause, in a farmer in Northumberland county in this state.

The acrid nature of the [particulate] matter which is mixed with the smoke of the Tobacco may easily be discovered by the taste or smell of a pipe stem that has been in use for two or three weeks.

5. Tobacco when used in the form of snuff seldom fails of impairing the voice by obstructing the nose. It moreover imparts to the complexion a disagreeable dusky colour.

I have thus briefly enumerated the morbid effects of [Tobacco](#) upon the human body. It remains under this head to mention, that the want of it is a source of [\[withdrawal symptoms\]](#) [uneasiness](#) more distressing than many bodily disorders. This uneasiness in persons who have long been accustomed to the use of Tobacco has in some instances produced an agitation of mind that has bordered upon distraction.

- Colonel [Aaron] Burr informed me that the greatest complaints, dissatisfaction and suffering that he heard the soldiers who accompanied General Arnold in his march from Boston to Quebec through the wilderness, in the year 1775, were from the [want \[lack\]](#) of Tobacco. This was the more remarkable, as they were so destitute of provisions as to be obliged to kill, and eat their dogs.

- The Persians, we are told by travellers, expatriate themselves, when they are forbidden the use of Tobacco, in order to enjoy it in a foreign country.

These facts will not surprise those persons who have been accustomed to view our appetites when perverted to such things as artificial and disagreeable, to be much more ungovernable than the appetite for things that are originally natural and agreeable.

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But the use of Tobacco has been known to produce a more serious effect upon the mind than the [\[withdrawal syndrome\]](#) [distress](#) that has been mentioned. Sir John Pringle's memory was impaired by snuff. This was proved by his recovering the perfect exercise of it after he left off taking snuff agreeably to the [\[1770's\] advice of his friend Dr. \[Benjamin\] Franklin](#) [1706-1790].

Dr. Masillac informed me that his father lost his memory at forty years of age by the excessive use of snuff. He took for several years two ounces of it every day.

Ed. Note: See data on [brain damage](#) and [Alzheimer's Disease](#).

In answer to these observations upon the morbid [\[brain damage\]](#) effects of [Tobacco](#), it [has been said](#),

- 1. That it possesses many medical virtues. I grant it [in 1798, not nowadays], and the facts which establish its [then-alleged] utility in medicine furnish us with additional arguments against the *habitual* use of it. How feeble would be the effects of opium and bark [then medicines] upon the body, if they constituted a part of the condiments of our daily food;— While I admit the efficacy of tobacco as a medicine, I cannot help adding that some of the diseases, or symptoms of diseases which it relieves [e.g., [withdrawal symptoms](#)], are evidently induced by the [habit of using it](#). Thus a dram of ardent spirits suspends, for a while, a vomiting and tremors of the hands, but who does not know that those complaints, are the effects of the intemperate and habitual use of spiritous liquors?

- 2. The advocates for Tobacco, tell us that smoking and snuff relieve that uneasiness which succeeds a plentiful meal. I admit that the stimulus of the Tobacco restores the system from the indirect weakness which is induced by intemperance in eating, but the [alleged] relief which is thus obtained, illy compensates for the waste of the saliva in smoking, at a time

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when it is most wanted, or for the mixture of a portion of the tobacco with the aliment in the stomach by means of snuffing. But why should we cure one evil by producing another? Would it not be much better to obviate the [\[alleged\]](#) necessity of using Tobacco by always eating a moderate meal?

Ed. Note: In "Alcohol and Tobacco," 250 *Littell's Living Age* 479 (1906), Robert B. Carter, M.D., [said likewise, eat moderately, at pp 483-484.](#)

The recollection of the remedy probably disposes to that intemperance in eating which produces the uneasiness that has been mentioned.

- 3. We are sometimes told that Tobacco is a preservative from contagious diseases. But many facts contradict this assertion. Mr. Howard informs us that it had no efficacy in checking the contagion of the plague, and repeated experience in Philadelphia has proved, that it is equally ineffectual in preserving those who use it, from the [Influenza](#) and Yellow Fever.
- 4. It has been further said that chewing and smoking Tobacco assist the intellectual operations. So do wine, and distilled spirits, but shall we upon that account, have recourse to those liquors when we wish to stimulate our thinking faculties [\[into abulia\]](#)? Tea and Coffee are to be preferred, when we wish to stimulate the mind.
- Mr. Pope recommends a trotting horse for the same purpose.
- Rousseau excited his invention by walking backwards and forwards in his room. I suspect that Tobacco is often used, rather to supply the *want* of ideas than to *collect*, or excite them.

The absence of sensation, whether of external impressions upon the body, or of the reaction of the mind in thought, is always accompanied with misery. The Indians afford a striking proof of this remark—hence they spend whole days and even weeks in smoking, in order to relieve themselves from the anguish which attends the inactivity and vacuum of their minds.

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We proceed next to mention the influence of the habitual use of [Tobacco](#) upon [morals](#).

- 1. One of the usual effects of smoking and chewing is thirst. This thirst cannot be allayed by water, for no sedative or even insipid liquor will be relished after the mouth and throat have been exposed to the stimulus of the smoke, or juice of Tobacco. A desire [of course](#) is [excited for strong drink](#), and these when taken between meals soon lead to intemperance and drunkenness. One of the greatest sots I ever knew, acquired a love for ardent spirits by swallowing cuds of Tobacco, which he did, to escape detection in the use of it, for he had contracted the habit of chewing, contrary to the advice and commands of his father. He died of a [Dropsy](#) under my care in the year 1780.
- 2. The use of [Tobacco](#), more especially in smoking, disposes to idleness, and idleness has been considered as the root of all evil. "An idle man's brain, (says the celebrated and original Mr. [John] Bunyan) "is the Devil's work shop."
- 3. The use of Tobacco is necessarily connected with the neglect of cleanliness. The influence of this neglect upon morals has been happily [\[thoroughly\]](#) pointed out in an extract from captain Cook's journal, which is published by Sir John Pringle [1707-1782] in one of his

Orations before the Royal Society of London.

- 4. Tobacco, more especially when used in [smoking](#), is generally [offensive](#) to those people who do not use it. To smoke in company under such circumstances, is a breach of good manners; now, manners have an influence upon morals. They may be considered as the out post of virtue. A habit of offending the senses of friends or strangers, by the use of

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Tobacco, cannot therefore be indulged with innocence. It produces a want [lack] of respect for our fellow creatures, and this always disposes to unkind and unjust behaviour towards them. Who ever knew a rude man completely, or uniformly moral?

Ed. Note: Examples: [Abulia](#) | [Abortion](#) | [Alcoholism](#)

[Crime](#) | [Divorce](#) | [SIDS](#) | [Lung Cancer](#) | [Psychopathy](#)

Rev. George Trask said [likewise in 1860](#).

Prof. Bernarr A. Macfadden said [likewise in 1924](#).

The Methodists forbad the use of Tobacco in the infancy of their society. The prohibition discovered a high and just sense of the self-denial, decency, and universal civility which are [required by the gospel](#).

What reception may we suppose would the [first century] apostles have met with, had they carried into the cities and houses to which they were sent, snuff-boxes, pipes, cigars, and bundles of cut, or rolls of hog, or pigtail Tobacco? Such a costly and offensive apparatus for gratifying their appetites, would have furnished solid objections to their persons and doctrines, and would have been a just cause for the clamours and contempt which were excited against them.

It is agreeable to observe that a regard to good manners, upon this subject, has at last awakened in some parts of the world. In England smoking is not permitted in taverns and coffee-houses until after 10 o'clock at night, and in France snuffing is becoming unfashionable and vulgar. How much is it to be lamented that while the use of Tobacco is declining in two of the most enlightened countries in Europe, it is becoming more general in America.

Who can see groups of boys of six or eight years old in our streets smoking cigars, without anticipating such a depreciation of our posterity in health and character, as can scarcely be contemplated at this distance of time without pain and horror!

Ed. Note: See [generational deterioration data re national decline](#).

It remains now that I briefly point out the influence of the use of tobacco upon time and property. Snuffing makes a great inroad upon time. A man who takes a pinch of snuff every

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fifteen minutes in four and twenty, (allowing him to consume not quite half a minute every time he uses his box,) will waste about five whole days of every year of his life in this useless, and [unwholesome](#) practice.

But when we add to the profitable use to which this time might have been applied, the

expences of Tobacco, pipes, snuff and spitting boxes—and of the injuries which are done to the clothing, during a whole life, the aggregate sum would probably amount to several hundred dollars. To a labouring man this would be a decent portion for a son or daughter, while the same sum, saved by a man in affluent circumstances, would have enabled him by a contribution to a public charity to have lessened a large portion of the ignorance, or misery of mankind.

In reviewing the account that has been given of the [disagreeable](#) and mischievous [effects](#) of [Tobacco](#), we are led to enquire, what are its uses upon our globe,—for we are assured that nothing, exists in vain. [Poison](#) is a relative term, and the most noxious plants have been discovered to afford sustenance to certain animals. But what animal besides man, will take Tobacco into its mouth? Horses, Cows, Sheep, Cats, Dogs, and even Hogs refuse to taste it. Flies, Mosquitoes, and the Moth are chased from our cloths by the smell of it. But let us not arraign the wisdom and economy of nature in the production of this plant. Modern Travellers have at last discovered that it constitutes the food of a solitary and filthy wild beast, well known in the deserts of Africa, by the name of the ROCK GOAT.

Ed. Note: [Denied by later travelers.](#)

I shall conclude these observations by relating an Anecdote of the late Dr. [Benjamin] Franklin [1706-1790]. A few months before his death, he declared to one of his friends that he had never used Tobacco in any way in the course of his long life, and that he was dis-

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posed to believe there was not much advantage to be derived from it, for that he had never met with a man who used it, who advised to follow his example.

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The early American physician (a signer of the Declaration of Independence, Surgeon General under George Washington, and [anti-tobacco](#) activist) "Benjamin Rush [1746-1813] serves as our prototype. His axiom was 'The science of medicine is related to everything' . . . psychiatry . . . chemistry, botany . . . crime and punishment . . . religion, philosophy, and . . . education," says Page Smith, Ph.D., *A People's History of the Young Republic, Vol 3, The Shaping of America* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co, 1980), p 431.

Dr. Rush was "against the habitual use of tobacco" because it (a) "led to a desire for [strong drink](#)," (b) "was injurious both to health and [morals](#)," (c) "is generally [offensive](#) to" nonsmokers, (d) "produces a want of respect for" nonsmokers, and (e) "always disposes to unkind and unjust behavior towards them," says James C. Coleman, Ph.D., *Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life*, 5th ed (Scott, Foresman & Co, 1976), pp 43 and 427.

The medical research process was already well-established by his time, details at [the medical causation analysis site](#).

Other Books by Dr. Rush

1. *Medical inquiries and observations* (Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1797)

2. *A syllabus of a course of lectures on the institutes of medicine*(Philadelphia: Thomas & Bradford, 1798)

3. *An inaugural dissertation on the morbid effects of opium upon the human body* (Philadelphia: Solomon W. Conrad, 1803)

4. *An inquiry into the effects of ardent spirits upon the human body and mind*(Philadelphia: Bartram, 1805)

5. *An inquiry into the various sources of the usual forms of summer & autumnal disease in the United States and the means of preventing them to which are added, facts intended to prove the yellow fever not to be contagious*(Philadelphia: J. Conrad, 1805)

6. *Medical inquiries and observations* (Philadelphia: J. Conrad, 1805)

7. [Defence of the Use of the Bible as a School-book](#) (Concord, N.H.: George Hough, 1806)

8. *Observations on the means of preserving the health of soldiers and sailors, and on the duties of the medical department of the army and navy with remarks on hospitals and their internal arrangement* (Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1808)

9. *A view of the physical, moral, and immoral effects of certain liquors upon the body and mind of man, and upon his condition in society* (Philadelphia: Thomas & William Bradford, 1808)

10. *An Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits upon the Human Body and Mind; with an Account of the Means of Preventing, and of the Remedies for Curing Them* (Philadelphia: Dobson, 1808)

11. *Medical Inquiries and Observations* (Philadelphia: Hopkins and Earle, 1809)

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