“Smoking is a custom loathsome to the eye, hateful to the nose, harmful to the brain, dangerous to the lungs, and in the black, stinking fume thereof nearest resembling the horrible Stygian smoke of the pit that is bottomless.”
Source: James I of England, “A Counterblaste to Tobacco”.

“Smoke! Smoke! Smoke! (That Cigarette)”
Source: Song written by Merle Travis for Tex Williams, a national hit in 1947. It includes the lyric “Puff, Puff, Puff, And if you smoke yourself to death”.

These quotes, along with terms like “cancer stick”, “poison sausage”, “little white slaver”, “smoker’s cough”, and “nicotine fit”, are often used by tobacco apologists, witnesses and lawyers in an attempt to prove that everyone—well, except tobacco CEOs—has always known that tobacco was “bad for you” and addictive.

But it’s not as if James or even Tex were scientists; nor were theirs the only voices being heard in society. And just because an idea is heard, it doesn’t perform mean that it is believed or given weight. This argument is a bit like saying people always knew extraterrestrial life was hidden behind comets (citing Marshall Applewhite), or that alligators prowled the sewers (apparently labour pains); “evil breathing at the mouth of children” (halitosis); worms; toothache; and old, new, and venomous wounds, lockjaw, and cancer.

Nicolás Monardes (Spanish, ca. 1512–1588); John Frampton (British, active 1577–96), translator, “Joyfull newes out of the newe founde worlde, part II” London: William Norton, 1577.

“There is an herb called uppowoc, which sows itself. In the West Indies it has several names, according to the different places where it grows and is used, but the Spaniards generally call it tobacco. Its leaves are dried, made into powder, and then smoked by being sucked through clay pipes into the stomach and head. The fumes purge superfluous phlegm and gross humors from the body by opening all the pores and passages. Thus its use not only preserves the body, but if there are any obstructions it breaks them up. By this means the natives keep in excellent health, without many of the grievous diseases which often afflict us in England.

“This uppowoc is so highly valued by them that they think their gods are delighted with it. Sometimes they make holy fires and cast the powder into them as a sacrifice. If there is a storm on the waters, they throw it up into the air and into the water to pacify their gods. Also, when they set up a new weir for fish, they pour...
uppowoc into it. And if they escape from danger, they also throw the powder up into the air. This is always done with strange gestures and stamping, clapping of hands, holding hands up, and staring up into the heavens. During this performance they chatter strange words and utter meaningless noises.

"While we were there we used to suck in the smoke as they did, and now that we are back in England we still do so. We have found many rare and wonderful proofs of the uppowoc's virtues, which would themselves require a volume to relate. There is sufficient evidence in the fact that it is used by so many men and women of great calling, as well as by some learned physicians."


* * *

"Into the woods thenceforth in haste shee went, To seeke for hearties that mote him remedy; For she of hearties had great intendiment, Taught of the Nymphe which from her infancy Her noursed had in trew nobility: There, whether yet divine Tobacco were, Or Panachea, or Polygony, She fownd, and brought it to her patient deare Who al this while lay bleding out his hart-blood scare."

Belphebe includes tobacco with other medicinal herbs gathered to heal Timais (Book III, Canto VI, 32). This is the earliest poetical allusion to tobacco in English literature. Spenser, E. Fairy Queen, 1590.

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"The first book in the English language devoted to the subject of tobacco was anonymously published in 1595, by Anthony Chute. It has the simple title "Tabacco" and contains an illustration of an Englishman smoking a clay pipe. In this little work for laymen, the author earnestly urged smokers not to abuse the kindly weed, upheld its medicinal uses, and suggested that physicians were trying to keep smoking a secret among themselves. The reason was, he said, that a moderate use of the pipe was of such value in preserving health that it was likely to make physicians unnecessary!"


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"The Vertues of Tobacco"

In 1614, William Barclay touted tobacco's medicinal qualities. Source: Barclay, W. Nepenthes, or the Virtues of Tabacco, Edinburgh, 1614.

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"This day, much against my Will, I did in Drury-lane see two or three houses marked with a red cross upon the doors, and 'Lord have mercy upon us' writ there—which was a sad sight to me, being the first of that kind that to my remembrance I ever saw. It put me into an ill conception of myself and my smell, so that I was forced to buy some roll-tobacco to smell and to chew, which took away the apprehension."

In times of plague, smoking tobacco was thought to have a protective effect. During London's Great Plague (1665-66), smoking was made compulsory at Eton to ward off infection. The practice has been noted since at least 1614.


* * *

"Whatever Aristotle and the whole body of philosophers may say, there’s nothing comparable to tobacco: ‘tis the reigning passion of your better sort of people, and he who lives without tobacco deserves not to live; it not only exhilarates and purges human brains; it also trains the mind to virtue, and by this one learns to become well bred. Don’t you see plainly, from the time one takes it, in what an obliging manner one uses it with all the world, and how one is delighted to give it right and left wherever one comes? One doesn’t even wait to be asked for it, but anticipates people’s wishes; so true it is that tobacco inspires all who take it with sentiments of honor and virtue."

Source: Moliere, "Don Juan", 1665.

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"My Lady Nicotine"


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"Rides like an Arab, Smokes like a Zouave . . . Enfant de L’armee, Femme de la Fume, Soldat de la France."

Passages describing Cigarette, the waif heroine of Under Two Flags. Source: Ouida (Louise de la Ramee) "Under Two Flags", 1894.

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"It is an admitted fact that a disease of the visual acuity—tobacco amblyopia—is contracted by smokers. Allowing that such incidental evils may arise from even comparatively moderate indulgence in tobacco, they are after all as nothing compared to the vast aggregate of gentle exhilaration, soothing, and social comfort, extracted from Virginia weed."


* * *

"The removal of tobacco from the Pharmacopoeia was the price that had to be
paid to get the support of tobacco state legislators for the Food and Drug Act of 1906. The elimination of the word tobacco automatically removed the leaf from FDA supervision."

The definition of a drug, for FDA legislation, included medicines and preparations listed in US Pharmacopeia or National Formulary. The 1914 interpretation advised that tobacco be included only when used to cure, mitigate, or prevent disease. Source: Smoking and politics: policymaking and the Federal bureaucracy, Fritschler, A Lee. 1969, page 37.

* * *

“That the claims of those who inveigh against tobacco are wholly without foundation has been proved time and again by famous chemists, physicians, toxicologists, physiologists, and experts of every nation and clime.”


* * *

“A dispassionate review of the [scientific] findings compels the conclusion that the cigarette is tobacco in its mildest form, and that tobacco, used moderately by people in normal health, does not appreciably impair either the mental efficiency or the physical condition.”


* * *

“Don’t smoke’ is advice hard for patients to swallow. May we suggest instead ‘Smoking Philip Morris?’ Tests showed three out of every four cases of smokers’ cough cleared on changing to Philip Morris. Why not observe the results for yourself?”


* * *

“Smoke, drink, and get well”

Article by Dr William D Stroud, professor of cardiology at the UPhenn Graduate School of Medicine in Newsweek. 1946. Source: Stroud, W. Smoke, drink and get well, “Newsweek” 2 December 1946.

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“[M]ore can be said in behalf of smoking as a form of escape from tension than against it . . . [T]here does not seem to be any preponderance of evidence that would indicate the abolition of the use of tobacco as a substance contrary to the public health.”


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“A scientific perspective on the cigarette controversy”

April 14, 1954 TIRC booklet, which was mailed to over 200 000 people, including doctors, members of Congress and the news media. Source: State of Mississippi v The American Tobacco Company, et al. 1994.

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“Timothy V. Hartnett, chairman of the Tobacco Industry Research Committee, called the poll of doctors ‘biased, unscientific and filled with shortcomings’.”

In 1954, newspaper articles started getting the TIRC’s response appended. The above quote is from a June 7 front page article about an American Cancer Society meeting at which a poll found most cancer researchers, chest surgeons, and pathologists believing that smoking might lead to lung cancer. Source: White, L. Merchants of Death, William Morrow, 1988.

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“Why stop smoking? new, up-to-the-minute revelations on the smoking scares! new help . . new reassurance for smokers!”


* * *

“Tobacco—the world’s most popular plant”

1963 15 minute slide sound film released by the Tobacco Institute.

* * *

“Perhaps the last word should be left to the doughtiest unbeliever of all. In Western Germany, the secretary general of the International Association for Scientific Tobacco Research, Dr H Aschenbrenner, suggests that before reports on smoking and health are taken seriously, those making the reports should have psychiatric certification that they are not suffering from pyrophobia (fear of fire). Twenty-five years’ research by his organization, says Dr Aschenbrenner, have proven that tobacco antagonism often springs from a morbid (and often unconscious) pyrophobia—a phenomenon whose many manifestations include suppressed fear of the ‘big fire’ or atom bomb.”


* * *

“To Smoke or not to smoke—that is still the question”

January 1968 True Magazine article by Stanley Frank, a widely read sportswriter.

“Cigarette cancer link is bunk”

A similar article in the National Enquirer, written by “Charles Golden”; the real author was Frank.

Two million reprints of the True Magazine article were distributed to physicians, scientists, journalists, government officials, and other opinion leaders with a small card which stated, “As a leader in your profession and community, you will be interested in reading this story from the January issue of True Magazine about one of today’s controversial issues.” The cost for this was said by Brown and Williamson, Philip Morris and RJ Reynolds. It was subsequently disclosed that
author Frank had been paid $500 by Joseph Field, a public relations professional working for Brown and Williamson, to write the article. Source: Whelan, E. A Smoke gun: how the tobacco industry gets away—with murder, George F Stickley Co, 1984.

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“This book is for Rose Tinker Mallan, my lovely non-smoking wife, who worries with renewed emphasis every time she reads another scare headline in the newspapers linking cigarette smoking with disease.”
Dedication for “It is safe to smoke” by Lloyd Mallan, Hawthorn Books, 1968.

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“After 15 years of trying, nobody has induced lung cancer in animals with cigarette smoke . . . We believe that the anti-cigarette theory is a bum rap.”

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“The more cigarettes a person says he smokes, the more likely he is to be checked by his physician for lung cancer. Thus, cigarette smoking may be contributing more to the diagnosis of lung cancer than to the disease, said Dr Feinstein of Yale University.”


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But all that is past now, isn’t it? Bygones! After all, the Philip Morris site clearly states:

“There is an overwhelming medical and scientific consensus that cigarette smoking causes lung cancer, heart disease, emphysema and other serious diseases in smokers . . . There is no “safe” cigarette. These are and have been the messages of public health authorities worldwide. Smokers and potential smokers should rely on these messages in making all smoking-related decisions . . . Cigarette smoking is addictive, as that term is most commonly used today.”


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Koppel: “If I say to you Steve Parrish, right now, tell me is nicotine addictive, you will have no trouble saying yes, is that correct?”
Mr Parrish: “I will have no trouble saying what exactly is on our Web site, that under the definition that’s commonly used today, it absolutely is . . .”

Koppel: “All right, you were good nine years ago. You’re even better today.”

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Szymanczyk: “The company’s position is that there is an overwhelming scientific and medical consensus that smoking causes lung cancer and emphysema and other diseases.”
Rosenblatt: “Has Philip Morris ever said on its Web site or anywhere else that we as a company agree with that consensus?”

Szymanczyk: “We have not.”

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 “[I] gave up smoking on the quack’s advice a few months ago . . . It proved wrong.”
Philip Morris CEO Geoffrey Bible, to the Sydney Morning Herald, which points out Bible has not gone back to smoking. Hale, B. Big Mo’s snack attack cuts tobacco drag, “Sydney Morning Herald” 2000 June 28.

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Question: “Did plaintiff’s smoking constitute a substantial factor in the cause of his lung cancer?”
Answer: “No.”

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“It appeared] the jury accepted the defense contention that bathtub refinishing is more likely a cause of lung cancer than 30 years of smoking Salens.”

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“[It appeared] the jury accepted the defense contention that bathtub refinishing is more likely a cause of lung cancer than 30 years of smoking Salens.”


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For years, these were the only two articles on smoking and health I could find in Rupert Murdoch’s wildly pro-Philip Morris New York Post. Had you been a reader of the Post throughout the PM board member Murdoch’s stewardship, you might be forgiven for thinking that tobacco is, indeed, good for you!