



Nicotine Addition

Your last cigarette

Two friends are sitting at a bar smoking, one on either side of me. I don't smoke, but I am breathing in their smoke. I protest, and they respond they have a right to smoke, and further they tell me that they are "addicted", that they are thereby deprived of free will to act against their addiction. They would, of course, quit if they had the freedom of choice, but they are helpless in face of their genetic predisposition, *and therefore not responsible for their actions*. Medical science supports this notion and psychologists have given us the *label* of "addictive personality type", to make it official.

I've devised a way to measure my friend's addictions and to test their theory on the absence of free will. I've built in my basement a vertical glass capsule large enough to house a human being seated on an ordinary padded chair. The capsule is climate controlled and designed with equipment to carefully balance oxygen and carbon dioxide along with lesser natural atmospheric gasses into a perfect healthful environment for humans. I lure my smoky friends into my basement with the promise of cartons of brand-named cigarettes for only \$10, something no diehard addict could resist. Then I strap them into the capsule seat while promising them a free pack of fags. They greedily allow me to fasten the heart and lung monitoring sensors to their heads and bodies. Once they are sealed in the capsule, the monitoring system measures their heartbeat and breathing and makes adjustments to the atmospheric regulators to maintain equilibrium. That done, the regulators are locked in place.

At this point, I give them a pack of cigarettes with the warning that in this carefully contained environment, the effects of smoking are magnified a thousand-fold. In fact, for every cigarette they smoke, approximately 12% of the oxygen in the system will be replaced permanently with carbon dioxide. With each additional cigarette, it will become increasingly difficult to breathe. After five cigarettes, their lungs will begin to hurt with each new breath. Should they manage to get through ten cigarettes, they will probably suffocate. I then measure the mean time between cigarettes and the total time to expire. I wonder if I will have any friends left at the end of this.

The only difference between my machine and what my friends are doing to themselves every day by smoking, is that I am compressing the timeline. Most of them will kill themselves in time either by coating their lungs with tar or planting an unwelcome particle in their lungs to grow like a grain of sand in an oyster grows into a pearl, only not so pretty.

Gene Ziegler, Chandler Arizona, December 2003