

## Daily Nebraskan

Since 1901

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### Put it out

#### Proposed smoking limits latest case of overgoverning

Anti-smokers in this state have reached a new level of fanaticism.

Such fanaticism isn't unfamiliar in Nebraska—refer to the same-sex marriage ban or the more recent consideration of a law that would expand minor in possession applicability. But with LB227, the state threatens to go too far (again).

The bill would prohibit smoking in all restaurants except those that carry licenses to sell alcohol. And even in those, it would only allow smoking in physically separated areas.

This restriction makes no sense. It is motivated by irrational anti-smoking interests. It infringes upon the rights of restaurant owners more than existing clean-air laws already do.

It cannot be denied, first of all, that non-smokers have to breathe the same air as smokers. Air is a common resource, and the pollution of common resources should be limited. Clean-air proponents are fond of claiming, "smoking is optional, breathing is not."

However, there is a world of difference between public spaces that a person, non-smoking or smoking, is required to occupy and public spaces that are entered into voluntarily.

To put it simply, dining is optional.

If a person does not want to patronize a restaurant where smoking is allowed for whatever reason, they do not have to patronize that restaurant. They are free to seek out any restaurant they wish.

Thus, the process of people choosing restaurants based on smoking preferences provides an economic pressure on restaurants.

Restaurants have already achieved an economic balance between smokers and non-smokers. Restaurants that cannot survive without the business of sensitive nonsmokers have changed to cater to them. People that want to smoke with meals go to restaurants where they may do so.

So what's the deal?

Why do state legislators feel that it's necessary to upset this balance by forcing restaurants that don't sell alcohol to prohibit smoking, when nonsmokers already don't patronize those restaurants and probably never will?

Proponents of the bill may point to similar experiments in California, claiming that the prohibition is "good for businesses."

But their evidence is suspect; business could have improved for any number of reasons unrelated to the passage of laws like LB227.

Further, is it "good for business" when you give government the tools to micro-manage and to make decisions that are appropriately left to restaurant owners?

Proponents might cite a "right to patronize," but no such right exists. A business must not be forced by its potential customers to cater to their individual preferences. That isn't the way business should work.

With no logical or philosophical backbone, the campaign for LB227 thus takes on a moralistic flavor. "Smoking is bad," its proponents claim with no further rational justification.

And while smoking is unhealthy, the choice of whether one smokes and whether one can open a restaurant where its patrons can smoke should be left to the individual, and the individual alone.

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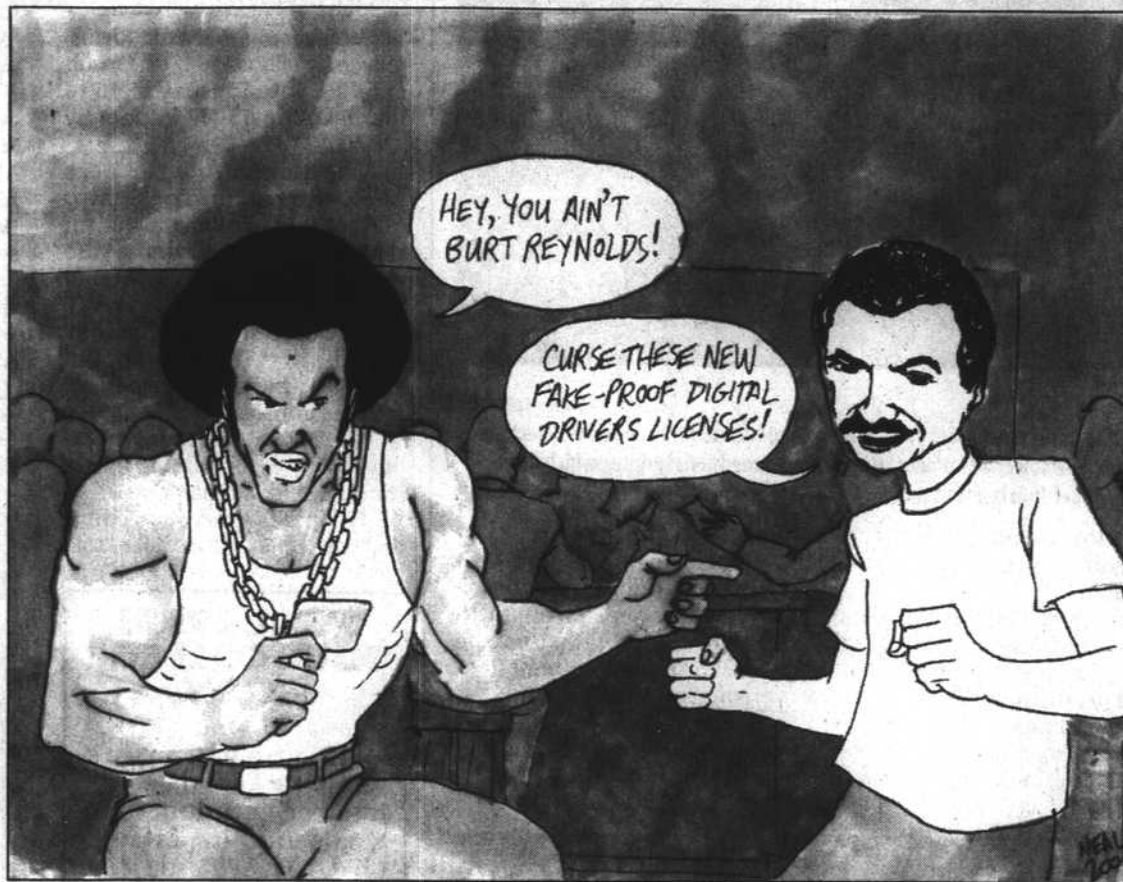
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Neal Obermeyer/DN

## Golden apples and nectar

To be "nobody-but-yourself," as e.e. cummings says in "A Poet's Advice," flies in the face of the demands and expectations of the world around you. It's a world that, he says again, "is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else."

It's hard, heartbreaking work and can become a kind of protracted martyrdom.

"The World" stands in antithesis—as the old-time preachers used to say—to the Soul.

And since the World is made of people, it follows that not every person—in fact precious few of us—really has a soul to speak of. Not so far as I can tell.

It's the ultimate elitism, no doubt, to separate humanity into two species, only one of which is truly sentient.

It would also be grossly inaccurate.

There are actually at least three species of humanity, only one of which is truly sentient.

These are dogs, golems, and gods—and only the last have souls.

The dogs are so-called because they are nothing more, really, than talking animals.

They have, of course, a "point of view," a "frame of reference."

But they are like the *camera obscura*, passively receiving, reflecting, like the moon, a borrowed light.

They are the billiard balls on the great green table of cause and effect.

Golems, rather, exist in a twilight between the dogs and the gods, and many of them are created (lifted from the merely "doggy") by association with some god or another.

Like Frankenstein's monster, they think they are alive, or want to be, and they strain against the inanimate clay that imprisons and wholly comprises them. Sleepers struggling to awake.

Sometimes, I really believe, a lightning bolt from somewhere jolts them into genuine contemplation of themselves and they arise, put off their clay and become, in their inwardness, truly like gods.

Naturally, only the gods have souls.

To be a god is to have tasted of the fruit of the tree of (self) knowledge. To know one's self as a self. To know what being "a self" means.

It is to carry one's soul like a candle flame, protecting it against the hurricane.

People with souls are very, very few—and they know it.

I, of course, am one of them.

Proclaiming yourself a god is ridiculous; "those who speak, do not know."



Mark Baldrige

But to be a god, to know oneself a god, is to be well acquainted with the ridiculous.

It is itself a kind of foolishness, a stubborn insistence on making one's own way, taking a narrow path in distinction to the wide way of the World.

How does one become a god?

First, one has to sense that godhood is possible. It's helpful to have associated, in childhood or otherwise, with a real live god.

To grow a soul, one must first see a soul growing, even if only in the writings or other artifacts of godhood.

Jesus says, "Do you not know ye are gods?" trying to jump-start the divinity in the audience.

And I'd go along with Him in assuming that the seeds of godhood lie dormant in many, most, even all people.

I can already hear some dog a'howling, "Who'd want to be a god if you got to be like *this* A-Hole?"

But that's not the case, as should be obvious.

It's a matter of becoming more like yourself, in fact, and less like me or anyone else.

Gods are like each other only in their incorruptible sense of themselves.

A second necessary step can be taken toward godhood:

One must *want* to be a god. This is the "hunger and thirst" kind of desire, a panting after the divine within oneself.

Damn few people really want to be gods.

Even if we were talking about the "flying around with lightning for a hairdo" sort of gods we'd find hardly any takers.

It seems "hardly human"—a testament to the impoverished notions of humanity current among the humanoids.

A final ingredient in this godly gumbo is an absolute devotion to one's own godliness.

This can be mistaken for selfishness or arrogance and it may well be so.

(Gods, as you must have noticed, are perfectly capable of all the deadly sins: "I, the Lord your God, am a Jealous God.")

But at all costs, those who have souls must fight to preserve them.

Social pressures, the demands of job or family, even morality and religion can make claims on the Soul, leeching its divine energy to empower a pallid, lifeless matrix.

Godhood demands sacrifice of those who would be gods. The fact that they sacrifice on the altar of their own self doesn't make it any less a sacrifice. Sometimes it is one's only begotten son (or cherished beliefs or life's work) that comes under the obsidian knife.

It is hard. And what is it for? Our Sadducean assumption is that, even among the gods, there is nothing left over to rise from the grave.

Once you're dead, it's far too late to rise from the dead.

Come the end of time we will none of us sit up with dirt in our faces.

But the mere absence of an afterlife is no excuse for refusing to live *now*, today, in *this* life.

To rise out of the grave of numbing habit, to be resurrected from the tomb of received wisdom, to throw off the shroud of a socially acceptable self-negation—that is what it means to live as a god.

It's the only life worthy of the name.



Shaun Ballarin/DN

## Mother's own quiet good-bye

I stood on the stage in my too-tight rental tux, a bit awestruck by the whole scene.



Josh Knaub

A few steps in front of me was my 30-minute-from-married former roommate. Nothing short of a falling satellite bouncing off his head would have broken his enraptured gaze.

The music he had picked played in its full symphonic glory, but he didn't hear. He looked blissfully down the aisle and out the door, past where I could see without leaving my place. The music shifted, causing the entire room to shift with it. Then she stepped into view.

Every head followed her progress until she stopped just short of the steps leading to where I stood. Every eye stopped with her.

But no one saw her. They were too busy looking past her, looking at the young girl in the white dress. Too caught up in the once-in-a-lifetime moment the girl and the young man were sharing to bother looking at the strength and the sorrow and the joy in this mother's face.

But I watched. I watched as the words that were probably never spoken sang out louder than the orchestral climax, making the whole scene surreal.

The two, the girl and the woman, stood there for an eternal moment as the man of God welcomed the guests and spoke of commitment and blessed union and how a man shall leave his mother and...

The woman stood, holding her daughter's arm, as if alone. Her shoulders squared, her head high, the friends and family gathered in the seats behind her would have seen a pillar of strength had they taken notice.

But her eyes, safely hidden from the seated guests, betrayed her. Her tears welled up until a single, tiny drop escaped and poured down unhindered by stoic hands gently cupped around an unnoticed elbow. She cried in solitude, cried in remembrance.

Remembrance of bringing home her youngest daughter, of caring for precious Emily through 21 years. Remembrance of how small the girl was when her daddy went to join his father. Remembrance of the introduction to her daughter's Navy man, barely a man at all.

Mother and daughter had not always had an easy relationship. Though they loved each other deeply, they had also disagreed deeply.

But now that she had gone away to school, Emily would ask for advice. And the planning of the big day had shown that both would work for the other's happiness.

Still, her tear washed down. Down the grooves that joy had worn on her face, reminding her how happy it made her to be standing straight and tall while a daughter of hers took a new name. Of how good it was to see the light in precious Emily's eyes every time she spoke of her young officer.

Now the man who had brought her little girl such happiness would be joined with her forever. Her youngest daughter would give her her first son. "And who gives this woman to be married to this man," came the question from the man of God.

Who gives this girl to move to California and then follow her husband wherever the government wills him to go? Who gives this youngest child to be separated from her family for better or for worse? Who gives precious Emily to the life she has chosen for herself?

"I do," came the unwavering reply. The guests heard, but before the words were spoken their minds were racing onward to the sermon or the kiss or the reception.

And, her part finished, the woman wiped her tears with a now unoccupied hand, turned and silently walked to her seat.

Still, her tear washed down. Down the grooves that joy had worn on her face, reminding her how happy it made her to be standing straight and tall while a daughter of hers took a new name.