

THE OBSERVER

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■ AND IN THIS CORNER...

Throwing down the Gauntlet of debate

I have never started any of my columns with "Dear tight-ass authoritarian conservatives." Until now.

Needless to say, I am growing a tad tired of being addressed by my detractors "you left-leaning liberal pinko commie," or some such variant. I have therefore resolved to answer as many questions about myself as possible in this last Column of the semester, without resorting to naming names.

What I could do is sling some more mud, kind of the "fight mud with mud"

method of discourse Republicans like to use in the place of constructive debate. Unfortunately, as enjoyable as this may be, it does not promote intelligent discussion. I have honestly tried to be as

open as I can personally bear to be, albeit with a few minor slips due to my anxiousness to turn a cute phrase. However, it has not slipped my attention that the more I have insisted that people be open and tolerant, the more I am accused of being the exact opposite (which is something I still can't quite figure out-is it intolerant that I object to the idea of someone ramming their "objectivity" down my throat?)

Therefore I have the following to ask of anyone who wishes to take issue with anything discussed in my columns: by all means, go right ahead and disagree with what I say, but if you do, kindly stick to the issues. It is perfectly fine to say you have a different opinion regarding a philosophical stance such as, say, moral relativism (more on my moralistic views in future columns). On the other hand, claiming that I don't know anything about the real world

because I'm "simply" a writer is not much of an argument.

And if anyone chooses to question my Aslant on American history, please take your head out of your high school textbook first. To consider a small example, the War Between the States was not only not fought to "free the slaves," but in fact Abraham Lincoln had no intention of freeing the slaves when he was elected president. At the time, he didn't believe that it was his right to impose his morals upon a large section of the American populace. Lincoln only issued the Emancipation Proclamation because the North was losing the war and hoped that the freed slaves would join the Union Army.

As far as my "advantages" as a white man are concerned, let me give you a brief family history. My parents were the first ever in the entire history of their families to even go to college, let alone graduate. In every single census containing my family's names, my ancestors' occupations are listed "laborer." The prevailing attitude of the WASP hierarchy of the mid-19th century was that Irish Catholic immigrants were "uneducatable," an attitude which this century has been conveniently applied to Blacks, Hispanics, or any other minority group which has gradually risen to prominence in American society. Throughout my family's history, they were offered virtually no opportunities to better themselves up until the era of the Great Society, an era whose dramatic social programs are being systematically destroyed by Newt Gingrich's "Republican Revolution."

I am trying to dispel the upper-middle

class myth that the wealthy are educated and the poor are stupid. Despite the fact that my family has literally no money, not even enough to go on summer vacations or even buy a car built after 1988, despite the fact that I went to a crappy public high school, despite the fact that I still have no money and am forced to work at a mall and sell well-to-do parents presents for their 2.2 children so I can afford to eat on a regular basis, despite the fact that I currently owe a faceless corporation over \$20,000 and will most likely be in debt for the rest of my life, I am still here. I am here among the monetarily privileged because of my parents' encouragement, because of my friends' support, and because of my determination. And I am not the only one at Notre Dame who has taken this route.

If you want to argue with me, fine. You want to debate moral philosophy or history or current world affairs, fine. But don't try to publicly humiliate me or intimidate me, because, like most childish endeavors, it won't work. And don't ever get into a war of words with me using emotionally-loaded phrases, because you will lose. You think you can bandy a few disparaging, insubstantial jibes, or mock an entire degree program and its candidates, or brandish a libertarian facade to disguise a snide, intolerant, unicameral mind, or in general be smug, arrogant, condescending, self-righteous, and vicious and expect to get away with it?

Let me make a deal with all the blockheads out there. You refrain from calling me an ignorant socialist and pretend to be open-minded, and I'll stop calling you fascist conservatives and pretend I care. If there's anybody hiding in his own little sexist, racist, homophobic, neo-nazi world, it is definitely not me.

And before I get accused of being perpetually ironic or sarcastic, let me assure you all that regardless of what you may have been led to believe, every-

one who sends me an intelligent, conversational e-mail message will receive an intelligent, conversational response. I do not respond to verbal threats, dogmatic garbage, or personal insults. If anything, all you will do is give me an amused chuckle as I click the mouse button on the trash icon.

One short thought on the American Christmas season: I find it almost embarrassing that Americans have perfected the ritual of mass mall-shopping (giving credit where it's due, this was actually my roommate's comment, with which I happen to agree). This is somewhat of a Catch-22 for me, as my job depends upon successfully pandering to said masses. I do so with the knowledge that my own family cannot afford to shop in the store where I work, and that many of my presents this year, as in previous years, will be clothing donated by local area church-goers. I like to think that we don't get caught up in the "money-for-familial-love" trap of modern culture, that we actually celebrate a family holiday by being together under one roof and sharing a holiday meal. It doesn't always work out that way (with little kids, something disruptive happens almost like clockwork), but with fewer material presents each year, it gets closer and closer to that ideal. I often wonder if Christmas would truly be a holiday or a winter festival if nobody bought anything for their relatives.

One final word of advice to would-be or have-been abusers of the English Department: it is not wise to piss off a large group of writers. Live by the sword, die by the pen. It's your choice.

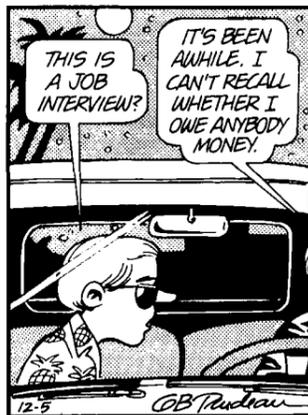
Happy Christmas, one and all.

Matthew Apple is one damn good Creative Writing student of many at Notre Dame. All reasonable discourses accepted liberally at matthew.t.apple.1@nd.edu.

Matt Apple

■ DOONESBURY

GARRY TRUDEAU



■ QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Things cannot always go your way. Learn to accept in silence the minor aggravations...so that those about you may not be annoyed with the dust and soot of your complaints."

—Sir William Osler