

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Wars not waged for prestige

Dear Editor:

As a person who strongly believes that there comes a time to grow up and assume a responsible position in both society and the workforce, I am not familiar with Notre Dame's Creative Writing graduate program. However, after reading Matthew Apple's petulant bratty temper-tantrum directed against virtually every benefit and privilege that this society has given to him ["Columbus and his Supporters - the Eurocentric Savages," *Observer*, Nov. 14, 1995], I am convinced that the Creative Writing graduate program does not teach its students to present consistent arguments. I am also disturbed by Apple's utter lack of tolerance and empathy for other individuals. During his tantrum, Apple acknowledged that the Iroquoian-speaking peoples were exposed to the horrors of combat long before Christopher Columbus was even born. Apple then implied that this Iroquoian warfare was justified because, among other things, "it was the principle means by which young men acquired personal prestige and won a respected place for themselves as adult members of society."

If Apple wants to believe that personal prestige is an acceptable reason for a society to wage war, then he is certainly entitled to do so. However, it is wholly inconsistent for him to then condemn the U.S. government's heartbreaking - but necessary - decision to wage the Civil War as simply an undertaking designed "to keep [the United States'] brainless, hormonally rabid youths occupied." As a third-year law student, I

wouldn't dare attempt to match intellectual wits against someone in the Creative Writing graduate program; however, I cannot help but believe that the U.S. government's decision to wage a civil war in order to (1) protect the Union from secession and (2) abolish the abhorrent institution of slavery was more logical than a decision to wage war simply for personal prestige. (Prestige that was, in Iroquoian society, apparently reserved for males only. I suppose that I am not "multi-cultured" enough to recognize the gender equity there.) Unfortunately, the inconsistency evident in Apple's petulant little tirade is not surprising. Apple's sheltered world of graduate-level Creative Writing has obviously prevented him from learning that it is not possible to "have it both ways."

Apple's hateful, and elitist, characterization of all men and women who have served in the U.S. military as "brainless" and "hormonally rabid" should also be addressed. Currently, there are over 700,000 men and women in the U.S. military. While depicting all of these individuals as less intelligent and less virtuous is apparently good for Apple's psyche, the gross stereotyping of over one-half million people (many of whom were simply not afforded the same economic and educational opportunities that were given to Apple) betrays an elitist attitude that is unbecoming of a graduate student. Apple would be well advised to devote his energy to more charitable and productive endeavors - such as tutoring Cristiane Likely.

JOHN DAY

3rd year law student

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## Moral relativism obstructs cultural dialogue

Dear Editor:

Matthew Apple subscribes to both moral relativism and moral absolutism in his recent column about the Columbus murals. His statements seem to reflect the contradictions inherent in many multicultural arguments.

Early in his essay Matthew (I feel I'm on a first name basis with anyone in the Notre Dame family) offers a cultural explanation for the existence of human sacrifice among the Native Americans. He implies (or at least gives the reader ample opportunity to infer) that people of European descent should not view such practices as savage or absolutely wrong; how dare we judge their culture by our standards?

However, a few paragraphs later Matthew argues that Westerners "could learn a few things" about environmentalism and feminism from the Huron? But what could we possibly learn? Since there are no absolutes in issues of morality, why is a culture which reveres women and Nature better than one which does not? If multiculturalism prohibits the condemnation of certain Native American practices, it also proscribes the praise of others. Therefore, Matthew's admiration of the Huron seems to belie his earlier commitments to multiculturalism and moral relativism.

Extreme multiculturalism and moral relativism obstruct meaningful dialogue between different peoples and retard the moral evolution of a culture. If we are terrified to label anything (in another culture or in our own) as "good" or "bad," then we as a people cannot identify the shortcomings in our society and appreciate the beauty of other nations. Ironically, indiscriminating views of culture and morality can become the best defenders of ethnocentricity and the status quo: don't try to learn from other cultures and make your culture better, because "better" does not exist. Yet at the foundations of both Christianity and liberalism lies the belief that we can make our world more noble, more just, more kind. May we never sacrifice this hope to the gods of relativism and multiculturalism.

CHARLIE MCCOY

Graduate student in mathematics

## 'Right Reason' contradicts its own terms

Dear Editor:

A student paper calling itself "Right Reason" has recently published its inaugural issue here. Its editor is Mr. Dan Maloney, one of my fellow philosophy graduate students. Mr. Maloney will not take offense, I am sure, if I take this opportunity to point out a rather serious contradiction in the aims of this publication, as stated in his piece on page two.

Right Reason is to be an orthodox paper. This means, according to Mr. Maloney, that it will adhere strictly to the teachings of the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church. My understanding of this is somewhat as follows: Right Reason will be the champion of a strict Tridentine ecclesiology, according to which the Church is kept free from error in its moral teaching by the mystical presence of the Holy Spirit.

Of course, according to such an ecclesiology, much of what goes on at Notre Dame, especially in the department of Theology, should go out the window. As I am not an expert in such matters, I can only venture the opinion that few people in the department of Theology subscribe to such an ecclesiology, and so would have a different definition from Mr. Maloney of what counts as "orthodox." Be that as it may, the point stands that Mr. Maloney defines orthodoxy as strict adherence to the teaching of the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church.

Mr. Maloney also informs us, however, that Right Reason is also to be a conservative paper. He states that he sees no contradiction between orthodoxy as defined above, and conservatism. By conservatism Mr. Maloney means economic and political conservatism, that is, he means a commitment to free-market economics, reduction in social intervention by the government, reduction of taxes, etc. In short, the complete candy box of the new right.

However, in desiring to flog this second position, Mr. Maloney and his new paper run afoul of the first position

which they wished to flog: their so-called orthodoxy. Unfortunately for Mr. Maloney, the Catholic Church itself has pronounced against the economic policies of the new right, in very strong words. I quote from the encyclical "Quadragesimo Anno" by Pope Pius XI, issued in 1931:

"Just as the unity of human society cannot be founded on an opposition of classes, so also the right ordering of economic life cannot be left to a free competition of forces. For from this source, as from a poisoned spring, have originated and spread all the errors of individualist economic teaching. Destroying through forgetfulness or ignorance the social and moral character of economic life, it held that economic life must be considered and treated as altogether free from and independent of public authority, because in the market, i.e., in the free struggle of competitors, it would have a principle of self direction which governs it much more perfectly than would the intervention of any created intellect.

But free competition, while justified and certainly useful provided it is kept within certain limits, clearly cannot direct economic life—a truth which the outcome of the application in practice of the tenets of this evil individualistic spirit has more than sufficiently demonstrated. Therefore, it is most necessary that economic life be again subjected to and governed by a true and effective directing principle."

Mr. Maloney and his publication, therefore, are left with a choice. Right Reason may choose to be an orthodox publication, as it defines orthodoxy, and consequently give up its new right conservatism. Or it may choose to be a conservative publication, and so give up its claim to its own brand of orthodoxy. Choosing both would be self-contradiction.

I predict, however, that if a second issue of Right Reason does appear, it will choose neither of these options, and

will continue to present itself as both orthodox and conservative. Right Reason is free to be self-contradictory, if it so desires. The reason for this is that it is really neither an orthodox nor a conservative publication, but as Mr. Maloney states in his editorial, a libertarian one.

It is not conservative, because its founders assume that they may marry their narrow type of orthodoxy with their favorite political and economic policy (which happens to be new right conservatism), thereby producing their own doctrinal flavor. They make no attempt to defend their inclusion of conservatism on any grounds other than their mistaken assumption that it does not contradict their brand of orthodoxy. In other words, their conservatism is arrived at, not by rational insight into which political premises promote what is true or what is good, but by the principle of free and unhindered choice on the basis of personal preference. They are, after all, utter libertarians.

So Right Reason is not conservative except in a derivative sense. But why is it not orthodox? It is not orthodox, again, because its narrow version of orthodoxy is only made possible by the libertarian assumptions of the founders. It is an orthodoxy by decision. No attempt is made to justify their choice of Tridentine ecclesiology. No attempt is made to engage with those who may disagree with them, on the level of premises. One must either accept their ecclesiology, i.e. their premises, or reject it. Thus their orthodoxy is not so much orthodoxy, as what they themselves prefer, and choose to dignify with the term orthodoxy.

From a standpoint of extreme libertarianism, of course, arguments about premises serve no purpose. We are unable to come to any rational insight into the true or the good anyway, and the best that we can hope for is to clear a space for individual liberty, which of course means allowing our subjective

desires and preferences full reign. So the so-called orthodoxy of Right Reason, just as its so-called conservatism, is really nothing more than an extreme libertarianism.

It should be obvious to all that such a form of libertarianism is at root a deeply un-Christian doctrine. For one of the main ideas behind Christianity as a religion is that the Good is rational and knowable. Thus with a loss of faith in the Good as knowable and the ethical universe as rational, as in contemporary Europe, came a loss of faith in a religion which preaches an intelligible universe.

With all due respect, Mr. Maloney, I submit that your publication is guilty of the same narrow partisanship which you claim is destroying the fabric of American society.

You say that your country is becoming unmoored, that the states are barely united, and there is no 'unum' from 'pluribus'. But by its avowed policy of extreme libertarianism, its commitment to a philosophy according to which discussion of principles is useless, Right Reason is simply another fragment in this fragmented society, using bad rhetoric to flog its own position to the already converted, and hoping to win the unconvinced over to its camp through the techniques of persuasion.

Mr. Maloney, you are left with a choice more basic than the one which I outlined above, between conservatism and orthodoxy. You may continue to publish your paper as a partisan paper dedicated to the consequences of your chosen principles. Or you may begin to publish a paper which accepts articles regardless of their viewpoint, but which engage the reader on the level of a true discussion of political, economic and religious first principles. I hope that you choose the latter.

D. GREGORY MACISAAC

4th year graduate student

Philosophy