

THE OBSERVER

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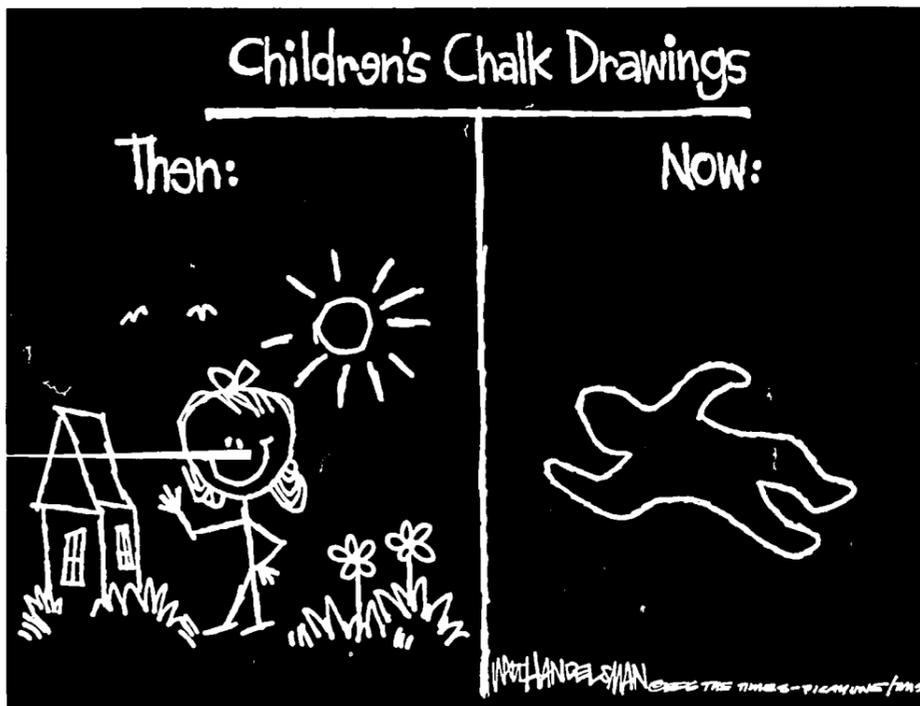
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AND IN THIS CORNER

Lawmakers must base abortion laws on scientific evidence

Yes, yet another column devoted to the ever-raging abortion debate. I think it's just fabulous the way this place celebrates Women's History Month.

I'm pro-choice. Not to be shocking, but by now I think this shouldn't come as much of a surprise.

Matthew Apple

One thing I insist upon defining is the difference between "pro-choice" and "pro-abortion." I do not encourage women to have abortions; I support their right to choose to have one. Some exuberant pro-lifers like to rant about America's "abortion culture," as if everyone who calls herself pro-choice likes to butcher infants just to spite the word of God -- or, in this case, the word of an elderly backwoods priest with an expensive hat.

There is no such thing as an "abortion culture." Any woman who actually enjoys having an abortion ought to have her head examined.

That out of the way, what I intend to do is explain why it is necessary that women have the right to choose abortion during the first trimester of pregnancy, as granted under the terms of Roe vs. Wade.

(Incidental aside: Roe vs. Wade allows individual states to determine the eligibility of women to have what are called "partial-birth abortions," which I find disgusting and abhorrent and which are most likely so expensive that only the wealthy can afford one. I concern myself here with the first three months, which is plenty of time for a woman to decide.)

According to the Roman Catholic

Church, the "purpose" of human sexuality is procreation. Hence, every time a married couple make love, they are expected to have a child. This is also why the Church condemns homosexual love -- because it does not produce children and is therefore "unnatural." The Church therefore believes that the concept of love is merely a tool to propagate the species ad infinitum. To the Church's way of thinking, every single aspect of love is "life," starting from the "potential" of each individual sex cell to become a fetus. Thus, since every sperm cell is a potential child in the eyes of God, and since God wants every single sperm cell to become a god-fearing Christian, it is immoral to use contraception or to masturbate.

(I wonder if I'm the first person to use the dirty "m" word in this newspaper. I wonder about the dirty "p" and "v" words.)

But is that what "life" is?

In the oft-cited Roe vs. Wade, the Justices state that the "viability" of a fetus -- its ability to survive outside the womb -- can only be determined by a

practicing physician. In other words, science, not religion, determines the existence of life. In the modern world, religion has no place in the law books. A person cannot help being influenced somehow by a system of moral beliefs, but mystical values per se which cannot be proven through reason or empirical evidence have no place in ruling society, especially in an ethnically and religiously diverse society such as the United States.

It may be that lawmakers devise laws which reflect certain religious values, but the laws will be of man's creation for the benefit of man, not the dogma of an elitist hierarchy passed down from "on high." Lawmakers have a duty to find a common ground for making just laws, and that common ground is science.

Concerning the actual right to choose, the very word "choice" carries moral obligations. If one cannot choose one's actions, one cannot be held morally accountable for the results. Where there is no choice, the concepts of right and wrong have no meaning. If lawmakers

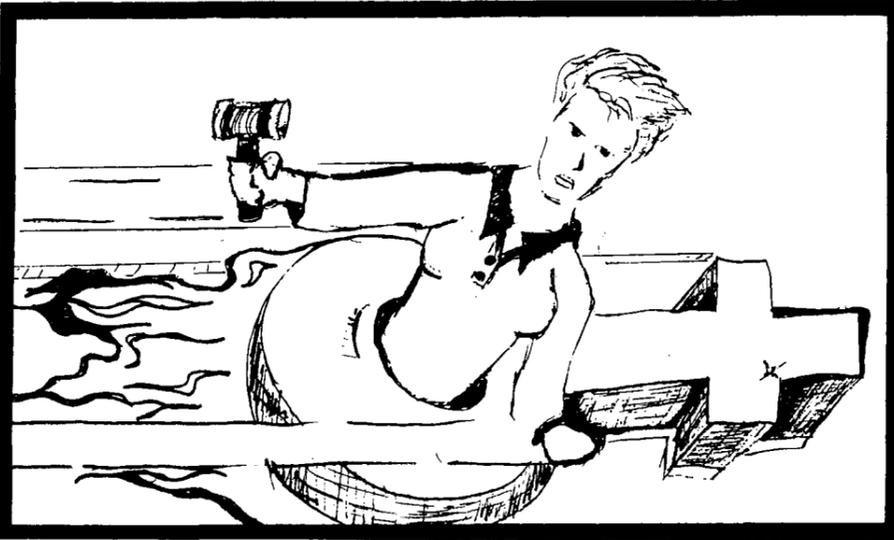
deny choice and force women to be nothing but sexual receptacles, abortion will cease to be a moral issue. Where there is no choice, there is no responsibility.

'In other words, science, not religion, determines the existence of life. In the modern world, religion has no place in the law books.'

Obviously, contraception and adoption are alternatives, and, obviously, abstinence is the only one-hundred percent effective method of contraception. But women themselves must have the power to determine what happens to their bodies, and this goes for with whom they have relationships and whether or not they wish to keep their children.

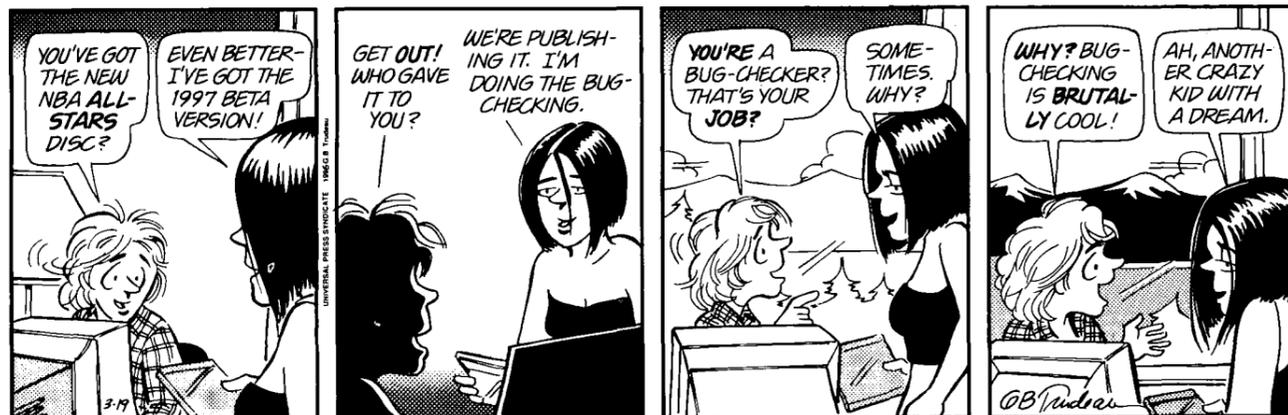
If I were to father a child, I would hope that my partner would ask my opinion, and I would hope that she would carry it to term, but ultimately it is the woman's choice. I cannot bear children. I will never endure morning sickness or kicks to the uterual wall or agonizing labor contractions or excruciatingly painful birth surgery. Who am I to tell a woman what to do with her body?

Matthew Apple is a creative graduate student at Notre Dame whose column appears every other week. Contact him at matthew.t.apple.1@nd.edu or <http://www.nd.edu/~mapple>.



DOONESBURY

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Your friend is the man who knows all about you, and still likes you."

—Elbert Hubbard