

Letters To The Editor (continued)

I am accustomed to being able to dismiss opinions from the political "right" because they are so seldom well presented or carefully thought out. (I ignore those same flaws when they come from people to the left of center, of course. That's easy.) But, like his professional counterpart, George Will, Michael Kitchen does not let me off so easily; he has thought out his position, and he represents it carefully and well. He gives me cause to think, a meaty and well constructed argument to come to grips with. I can take him seriously, instead of responding with a bored yawn. His argument is worthy of my disagreement.

It's also worthy of my qualified agreement; or at least my compromise. Freedom of the press may be the most immediate and urgent issue here, but it's not the only one. I have been thinking about my stand on abortion, and because Mr. Kitchen's letter prompted me to pull my thoughts together, this may be the place to voice them.

Most of my positions and points of view arise from convenience, and this is true of almost everyone. I look for, and find, underlying consistencies that will justify their sometimes capricious foundations; and when I cannot find such consistencies, I tell myself that consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds. One such consistency is that between feminism and humanism. (Yes, Michael, secular humanism raises its ugly head.) Feminism feels humanistic to me, as a way of life, as the foundation of much of my belief system. I was, after all, a humanist before I was a feminist, and it's therefore important to me that my feminism be humanist.

Only occasionally do my feminist positions strike me as contrived in their claim to humanist (or humanistic) status. But abortion causes me some gut uneasiness on exactly this point. I value human life. I am not fanatic about the sanctity of life for its own urgent biological sake — that is, I can advocate euthanasia and refrain from condemning suicide, which I could not do if I valued

life above all else and with no qualifications. It seems to me humane to consider the quality of life when it's opposed to the mere fact of life. But I'm not able to tuck away my stand on abortion quite so neatly as that formulation suggests.

Mine is a position of convenience on this subject. I can call that convenience "necessity," if I stretch the meaning of the latter term, and that's what I do. It seems that feminists keep quiet, even to each other, about this inevitable kink in our otherwise humane positions. Feminism's positions are indeed life-affirming for the most part: we tend to be for gun control, against capital punishment, against the proliferation of nuclear weapons, for civil liberties. There is much talk among us about the patriarchal order that squelches life, affirms death, and rationalizes its own legal decisions. There's an irony here, and the feminist community has refrained from addressing it. Perhaps our restraint comes from a legitimate fear that to express reservations would be to arm the position that opposes us. That's a risk I'm running here, and I'm very aware of it. But that possibility had better not keep me or mine from a critical self-evaluation.

I do believe that if women do not have control over their own bodies—and that includes, most crucially, the issue of control over child-bearing—they have virtually no chance of functional equality with men, now or ever. Isn't it, though, ironic that in the pursuit of that control, a humanistic ideology must espouse the elimination of lives that we find, for whatever damned good reasons, inconvenient? I am aware of how feminism tries to address this irony, because this is exactly how I address it: we say we are concerned with the quality of life, rather than the brute fact of it; we say that too many babies in a world already full of too many babies is actually anti-humanistic; we say that the blind affirmation of the rights of potential human life often constitutes a gross violation of the rights of the actual liv-

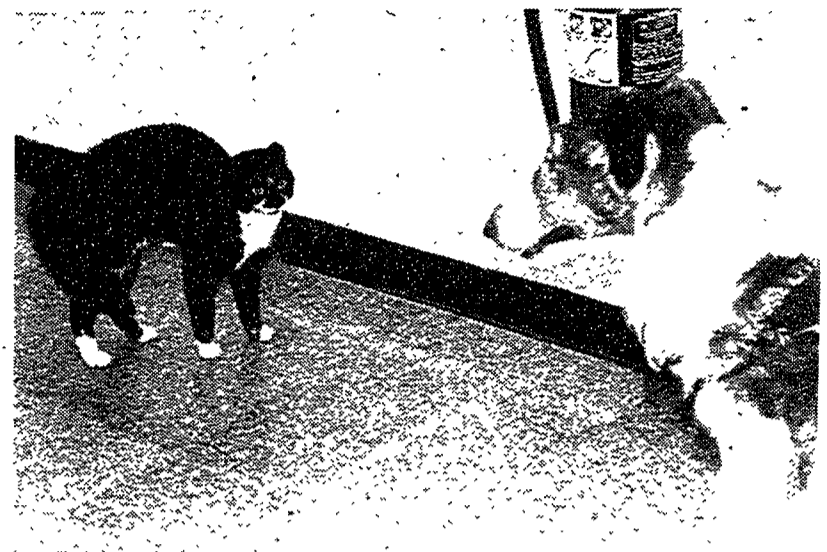
ing being that bears it—and bears it and bears it.

Yet, isn't there something arbitrary about the point at which feminism places the beginning of human life? We place it at birth, and our radical affirmation of the quality of life for grown women sometimes brutally precludes our consideration of that ten-fingered, fully limbed, large-brained fetus in the womb.

I can, as I have said, mangle this problem into conformity with the humanism I claim to value so highly—but I do so at a cost. I do better by my sense of truth when I admit to myself that my position is deeply problematic, and, yes, inconsistent. I do better to admit that it is simply more important to me to espouse the rights of women, my special interest group, my oppressed "minority," than it is to espouse the rights of unborn, if recognizably human, fetuses. And I'd better not kid myself that there's no problem here. There is.

But, let me offer this last thought. Mr. Kitchen, none of the women's health workers I have met—and I know many—hold such simplistic viewpoints on this matter as you may imagine they do. Most of them are thoughtful people who do not regard abortion as an acceptable form of "birth control," any more than you do. A few of them might be dismayed by the kind of public admission I have just made, primarily because it would be so easy to misinterpret what I've said; most of them would probably agree that young women contemplating abortion should think about just these issues, among other equally important ones, before they make such a decision. Your letter causes me to respect your point of view, and to part with some of my dearly held preconceptions about the superficiality and thoughtlessness I so like to associate with the conservative mind. If you have some corresponding prejudices about the liberal mind, I hope my response can do something similar for you. There are people of good will on both sides of this issue. We ought to talk to each other more often.

Sincerely,
Diana Hume George,
Assoc. Prof. of English



Same old tired theme: Cat meets dog and it was love at first growl.

Student Response

"The Issue: Freedom Of The Press"

Dear Claire,

I would like to answer a letter that appeared in the October 28 issue of the "Collegian." The letter I am referring to is that of Mr. Michael Kitchen.

While I am opposed to the idea of abortion on moral and religious grounds, that is not the issue at hand. The issue that is being questioned, in my opinion, is that of "freedom of the press."

Abortion is legal in many states throughout the country. So the "Collegian" is in no way treading on soft ground by running this advertisement. It is not advertising an illegal action or endorsing a controversial side of an issue. What the "Collegian" is doing is running an ad in order to earn money to put out a quality paper for the students and faculty of Behrend College to enjoy.

As for alternative ads, you mentioned that might be part of a balance in the newspaper, it is not that easy, I am sure. None of these agencies you mentioned, Mr. Kitchen, have approached the "Collegian" with the intent of running an ad. There are numerous pro-life counseling centers and adoption agencies in the tri-state area. Rod Luery, the business manager of the "Collegian" is quite bogged down now with the solicitation of ads. He cannot possibly call every agency that would represent the opposing solution to unwanted pregnancy. His job as business manager, is to solicit ads that will help pay for the production of this newspaper. To properly do his job, he cannot turn down an ad that appears every week because one student is offended. I am assuming that you are the sole student offended by the ad because no other students have offered the same opinion to the editor or staff of the "Collegian."

I would like to suggest, respectively, that since you signed your letter as a "Collegian Reporter," that you might have the access to the same facilities as Mr. Luery. Therefore, you might be able to solicit ads from agencies you feel represent the other side of the issue. Then you may feel better about both possibilities being represented in the "Collegian" and the paper will benefit from the added income you have brought in.

In response to the charge that these clinics who place ads in the college newspapers "prey on young adults," I feel that is an ambiguous proposal. These young adults are supposed to be mature enough to live away from home and make dozens of other daily decisions that affect their lives. I am quite insulted that anyone might think I cannot make my own decisions about something as important as this would be in my life. I also feel that if any student is responsible enough to make the decision to act in a manner that would put him or her in such a situation, that student should be responsible enough to face the consequences and decisions that result from this action they readily chose.

As for the reason that the clinics place the ads, I am not sure you have read their reasoning correctly. I feel the reason they seek college newspapers is because they realize that the colleges are the place where their services are most often needed. And in response to your remark that colleges are not known for encouraging continence, colleges are not to encourage students' self-restraint. They are to educate and enrich lives so that the lives of others around them will also be enriched.

continued on page 4

EDITORIAL

Reagan's Policies Criticized

By Gerald Kelly

Mao Tse-tung once said, "Power comes out of the barrel of a gun." Ronald Reagan seems to believe that democracy does as well, if one accepts his assertion that the U.S. invasion of Grenada was to restore democracy to the Caribbean island.

The equally flimsy pretext for the invasion, the necessity to ensure the safety of American citizens on Grenada, was dismissed by none other than Reagan's ideological soul-mate, Margaret Thatcher. Mrs. Thatcher, in a British Broadcasting Corporation talk show, stated that the military operation was more likely to have endangered American civilians than to have protected them.

The Prime Minister of the island of Dominica, Mrs. Eugenia Charles, gave a third reason for the invasion — a letter from Grenada's governor-general, Sir Paul Scoon, requesting assistance from the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States. As there was no mention of this letter until after the invasion, one is inclined to doubt its existence, which, indeed, Mr. Denis Healy, the shadow foreign secretary of the opposition British Labour party, did, in a debate on Grenada in the House of Commons last week. This letter, along with the inclusion of a token force of 300 troops and police from various Caribbean nations, who were not even directly involved in the fighting, appears to be a very poor attempt to impart a thin veneer of legality to an obvious and flagrant violation of international law.

The invasion of Grenada is symptomatic of Ronald Reagan's ideological approach to foreign policy as a whole. The military government which seized power in Grenada was not a particularly pleasant one, but Mr. Reagan seems quite prepared to support brutal, oppressive military dictatorships elsewhere as long as they are "anti-communist," and "pro-western," and "committed to the ideals of democracy" — whatever that may be. It is time for Mr. Reagan to realize that gunboat diplomacy is no substitute for foreign policy; time to adopt a more pragmatic and realistic approach to world problems. It's time to stop trying to distract the American public from the hopeless inadequacies of his domestic policies by engaging in senseless military adventures.

Editorial Brief

By Marge Tomczak

Approximately 225 people from the Erie community were entertained by the performers in Michael Shedwick's Reptile World. Members of the show included a crocodile, alligator, boa constrictors and pythons, pit vipers, tortoises and lizards, including the world's only venomous lizards.

The traveling adventure show received rave reviews. And Mr. Shedwick called Behrend to say that our student activities staff was "the most professional staff I have worked with for many years."

Behrend should indeed be gratified to receive such a commendation from a professional.