

OPINION

Complaint a model of hypocrisy



**Write
Angles**

Pat Malach

If there's one thing students at the University are going to learn about in great detail here in Eugene, it's hypocrisy.

In an effort to change the world for the better, many well-intentioned people on campus consistently slide down the slippery slope of inconsistently applying their ideals and beliefs. In philosophy, it's called situational ethics, and it is generally viewed as a very negative moral attribute.

In a nutshell, situational ethics means people's beliefs and principles constantly change so that they are always the benefactor, never the loser.

It is often practiced by those of the politically correct philosophy. Admittedly, this phrase has been considerably overused and there is a definite backlash against it.

In this belief, however, there is one acceptable idea (it can be either liberal or conservative) — and all others should not be tolerated or heard. It embraces all positives and conveniently ignores all negatives.

The recent complaint about a racist statement made against Chinese students is a perfect example.

The person making the original statement labeled all Chinese people with one attribute. It was a broad generalization affecting an entire race of people. It was demeaning and degrading because it gave no credit to Chinese people as individuals.

However, this racist statement was not made by Peter Briggs. The racial statement in question belongs to Darrell Neet, a Westmoreland maintenance worker who said Chinese people are at a disadvantage in the system because they are too polite.

Briggs' response that Chinese people know how to work a system and "will walk all over you if you let them" was obviously deplorable. Hai-Yang Yuan, president of the Chinese Students and Scholars Association, was correct in his complaint that Briggs' sweeping

generalization is by all definitions a racist stereotype.

But Neet's stereotype was just as sweeping, narrow-minded and demeaning to Chinese people as individuals. What does Yuan have to say about Neet's comment? He reaffirms Neet's stereotype and adds to it by writing, "Politeness is one of our most treasured cultural values."

There you have it in writing: complete hypocrisy rearing its ugly head in the name of cultural sensitivity. A negative stereotype attributed to an entire group of people is a "racist remark." A patronizing stereotype attributed to an entire group of people is a "treasured cultural value."

If you view both statements on how they fit the definition of racism and stereotypes, they are identical. If you apply them in an arena of situational ethics, Neet gets a thanks while people call for Briggs to be fired.

It should be either one or the other, but not both. Either there are *some* traits that can be shared by every member of a culture, or there are *no* traits that are common to every member of a culture.

Most importantly, the deciding factor should not be whether the trait is negative or patronizing, which seems to be Yuan's criterion.

Let me say this again for the record, I am not justifying Briggs' statement. It was wrong. But the complaint that followed also poses some problems. And the situational criteria Yuan used in his complaint are not the only strains on the credibility of the action.

The original letter of complaint is loaded with the empty rhetoric popular with people stretching to prove a point.

In the letter, Yuan writes: "we feel that our culture is being raped and our dignity is being fractured by these racist remarks."

I'm sure Briggs would be amazed to discover he is such a

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powerful man that — sitting in his little office in Eugene, Ore. — he can commit rape against a 5,000-year-old culture of 1.3 billion people.

In fairness to Chinese people everywhere, I offer proof to dispel Yuan and Neet's racist stereotype about the politeness of every Chinese person.

I know of a University student, who happens to be Chinese, who could tell one person one thing and turn around and tell someone else something completely different. This manipulative individual certainly knew how to work a system, and he was probably capable walking all over you.

I also would dare to conclude that the Chinese hardliners who ordered the murder of students in Tiananmen Square were hardly being polite.

It's probably fairest to say that the Chinese culture is like all other groups of human beings. The culture probably includes many very polite people — and some rude ones. There are probably many kind-hearted Chinese folks — and some mean ones. There are probably happy Chinese people — and sad ones.

To be safe, rather than making sweeping generalizations — positive or negative — maybe we should take Martin Luther King Jr.'s advice and judge members of one of the grandest cultures on Earth by the content of their character, rather than the color of their skin.

Pat Malach is editor of the Emerald.



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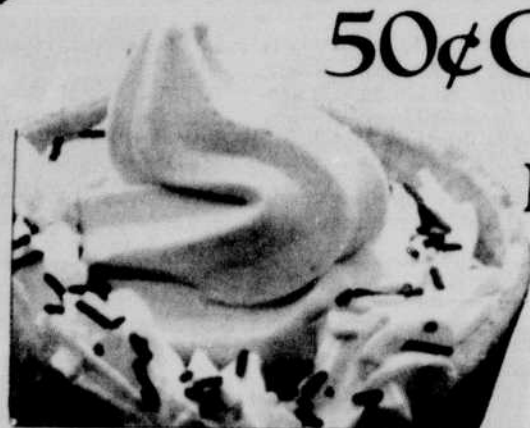
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THE FAR SIDE

By GARY LARSON

