

COMMENTARY

Editor in Chief:
 Michael J. Kleckner
 Managing Editor:
 Jessica Richelderfer
 Editorial Page Assistant:
 Salena De La Cruz

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Soul practice

"So, when does the soul leave the body?"

The question caught my friend Rachel by surprise. Then she laughed. Rachel had just told her college friends that she was going to law school. Years later, I'm graduating from one.

Introduce yourself as a law student, and people will conjure images of greedy, unethical lawyers. The high-powered criminal defense attorneys who get their clients off "scot-free." The big firm lawyers who help their bosses hide the facts about tobacco or stock options. The lawmakers and judges who shred our Bill of Rights.

How about the divorce lawyer? Or that old standby, the ambulance chaser. And the man who famously demurred, "I did not have sexual relations with that woman" — didn't he study law, too?

Hold on a minute, I could respond. Lawyers are not unethical. On the contrary, lawyers obey a very intricate system of ethical rules. They are extensions of their clients. You wouldn't want your lawyer to divulge your secrets, would you?

And don't these images contradict each other? After all, who hates the personal injury attorney more than big business? Don't we depend on those folks to hold responsible negligent drug makers, defective auto manufacturers, stingy insurance companies? On the other side, we need zealous corporate counsel to minimize liability and keep consumer costs down, right? The two sides fight, and the better side wins.

The trouble with this kind of response? It's as stereotypical as the lawyer caricatures. To a non-lawyer, the answer is the problem. No amount of rationalizing can relieve the disgust many Americans feel toward a legal system that treats ordinary people badly. If winning a case requires well-paid advocates, then people who lack wealth and sophistication will lose more often than they should.

Truth is, many law students feel the same way about the world they'll enter. We were undergraduates, once. We wanted to change the world. Civil rights, environmental protection and social justice

were — and still are — the beacons that guide us. So what happened?

Law school costs money. Lots. So penniless young lawyers knock on the doors of those with money: big law firms, multinationals, the federal government. Armed with our legal ethics, we become an extension of the system we wanted to change.

In "Civil Disobedience," Henry David Thoreau wrote that "legislators, politicians, lawyers, ministers, and office-holders, serve the state chiefly with their heads; and, as they rarely make any moral distinctions, they are as likely to serve the devil, without intending it, as God." But, he added, a very few "serve the state with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part."

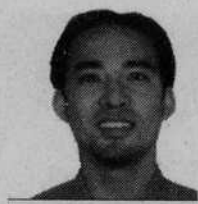
To serve clients with our legal skills and our consciences is not impossible. Lincoln was a lawyer. So was Gandhi. Jackie Robinson broke baseball's color barrier with the help of Branch Rickey, the general manager of the Dodgers — and a lawyer.

Resisting the state or large corporations (which did not exist in Thoreau's day) is a high calling indeed. Our democracy encourages lawyers with a social conscience by funding legal aid programs, paying civil rights attorney's fees, and funding law school clinics. More important, these programs help poor and middle-class people who otherwise cannot afford to hire an attorney.

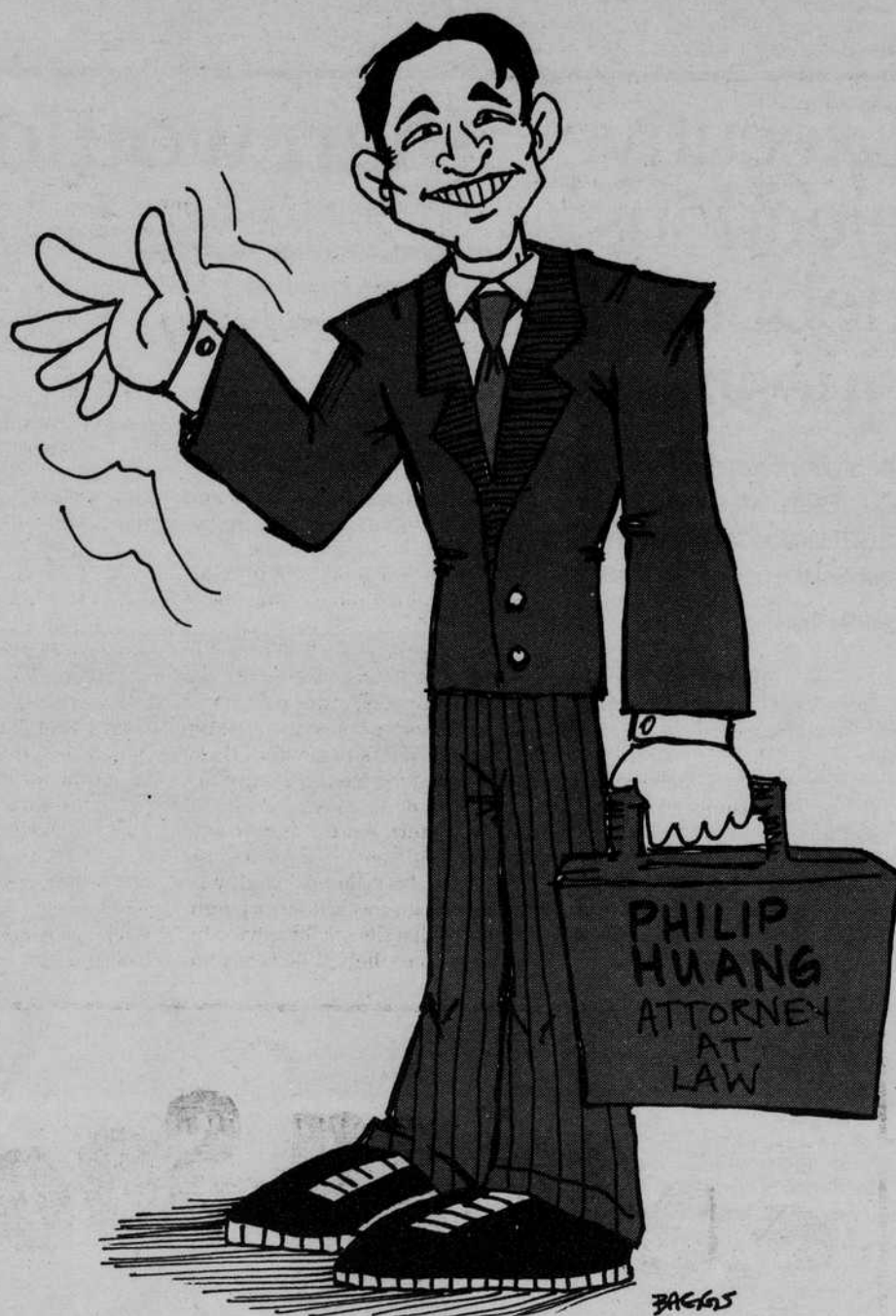
But these hardy souls face more than long hours and meager salaries. Their adversaries, rather than offer better arguments, often try to wipe out their funding! A familiar example is the Oregon logging companies who lost the "spotted owl" cases in court. In response, they tried to shut down the University's Environmental Law Clinic. Legal ethics professor David Luban calls such tactics "dirty law." Those who practice "dirty law" are the reason so many lawyer jokes exist.

Rachel's soul never left her body. Instead, she left law school and now works as a freelance writer. Me? Along with 150 other law students, I graduate on Sunday. Wish us well, if you can. And pray, if you must.

Contact the columnist at philiphuang@dailyemerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.



Philip Huang
 A different light



Steve Baggs Emerald

Letters to the editor

Reproductive rights must be defended

Thanks to Salena Da La Cruz for her column ("Anti-abortion group distorts message with photographs," ODE, May 1) expressing her opinion on the anti-choice group Survivors. I'd like to point out that though De La Cruz does not personally believe in abortion, the fact that she does believe it should be an option available to women makes her pro-choice.

Being pro-choice does not mean that abortion is what you choose. It's just recognizing the fact that every woman has control over her body and should be able to do what is in her best interest.

It should also be pointed out that groups such as Survivors often rely on scare tactics and misinformation to confuse people. When Roe v. Wade passed in 1973, it did not make it legal for a woman to have an abortion through the ninth month, as some material handed out on April 30 stated.

Late-term abortions are extremely rare. Of all abortions, 98.6 percent occur during the first half of pregnancy, and 88 percent within the first 12 weeks, according to www.choiceusa.org. Only a handful of doctors in the country are able and willing to perform late-term abortions, and it is only utilized when the fetus or the mother has serious health problems. Right now, legislators are working hard to take away a woman's right to choose.

It is important for women and men to educate themselves about their reproductive rights and defend them for the future.

Amanda Mabry
 sophomore
 Students for Choice

Anti-gay opinion should not have been printed

I am outraged that the Emerald provided Vincent Martorano the opportunity to indulge his own squeamishness and in the process launch an attack against the LGBT community ("Homosexual men should hide their disgusting acts," ODE, May 9). His commentary is not informative, educational or persuasive about any-

thing other than his personal homophobic feelings.

Martorano says he longs for the days when homosexuality was seen as an illness and gays stayed in the closet; I cannot imagine the Emerald publishing an essay wherein the author expressed longing for the days of Jim Crow. Such blatant racism would be deemed inappropriate for a school newspaper, and such blatant homophobia should be proscribed as well. I wish that the Emerald had not allowed Martorano this forum. It is disgraceful.

In addition to being extremely offensive, Martorano's piece is confused and hypocritical. He doesn't believe that anyone has the right to tell him what should and should not be accepted in society, yet he feels entitled to discourage readers from accepting ordinary expressions of affection between gays. His anti-gay rhetoric contradicts his own logic.

Martorano is ignorant even of the meaning of the word "homophobe." Anticipating that some readers will think him a homophobe, he responds "but I personally am completely comfortable with my sexuality." Though he doesn't know that the word means "one who hates or fears gays," I suggest that his piece illustrates a homophobe completely.

Elizabeth Reis
 assistant professor
 women's and gender studies

Debates should focus on fact, not fiction

It seems disingenuous to call the May 6 forum, "The Economics of War," a "debate," as all three speakers represented similar viewpoints. In unanimity, one usually finds uncritical thinking.

According to the article "Faculty debate Iraq war's effects," (ODE, May 7), University Labor Education and Research Center Assistant Professor Gordon Lafer argued that politically connected military defense contractors "are making out like bandits." This does not withstand scrutiny, as defense sector stocks have been underperforming: The Philadelphia Stock Exchange's 15-stock Defense Sector Index has fallen more than 7 percent this year, compared with a 5.6 percent rise for the Standard & Poor's 500.

The article said Women's and Gender Studies Visiting Associate Professor Gwyn Kirk lectured on how militarism is the central organizing principle of the U.S. economy. In

truth, defense spending amounts to only 3.5 percent of GDP. And Bush's \$74.7 billion budget request to fund the war is well under 1 percent of GDP — piddly-dunk compared with other wars. World War II cost taxpayers 130 percent of GDP, the Korean War required 15 percent, and Vietnam 12 percent.

Hosting a forum on "The Economics of War" is a good idea, provided the speakers actually specialize in economics instead of fiction. The forum should have asked: What are we willing to invest to reduce the threat from terrorism and terror-supporting states, and achieve peace and stability in the Middle East? At 1 percent of GDP, the war looks like a bargain.

Sean Walston
 graduate student
 physics

Soldiers' letters display lack of scope

The letter "Bush was right in freeing Iraqis" (ODE, May 5), the most recent in an embarrassingly long line of hollow patriotic letters to the editor from soldiers abroad, emphasizes several key issues: the quality and diversity of news sources available to the armed forces (although it is their choice to read them), their amusingly childish braggadocio, the pre-maturity of their victory grunts (look at Afghanistan now; it is quickly reverting back to pre-Sept. 11, 2001, times), the simplicity of their binary world view ("'60s hippies"), and most of all their lack of scope and history ("Let the Iraqi people have freedom" — see: Kosovo, Afghanistan, Nicaragua for examples of the United States' other democratic success stories).

I support our troops as humans and not as fodder for the likes of Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz and others to have their martial way with our world. Please do your part to send them as great a breadth of information as you can because I believe they have the right to know what the implications of their actions may be.

Nick Esmonde
 junior
 biology