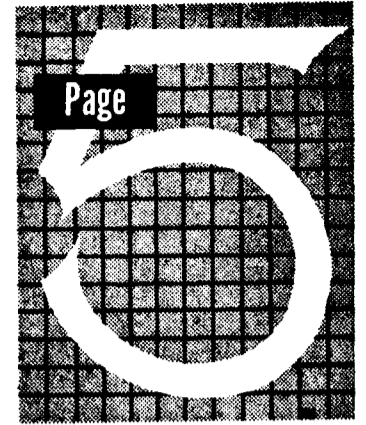


philosophy department head - mardiros



spect, so that this issue was never in dispute. The account you give of the tenure committee's deliberations is a complete fabrication and bears no relation whatever to the truth.

There was evidence that one valued member of the department left because of Williamson's activities and there were signs that others would also do so. It is essential to any good philosophy department where matters of a controversial kind are constantly being discussed that this should take place in an atmosphere of mutual respect. A philosopher must be more careful than many other academics not to confuse disagreements of substance with clashes of personality. Williamson is ever ready to regard any disagreement as one of principle and every disagreement of principle as also a battle between persons and groups of persons. He finds it difficult to believe that anyone who disagrees with him can be both intelligent and honest.

One is then forced to ask if these disabilities are outweighed by Williamson's qualities as a scholar and a teacher. I do not think that his capacities in these respects are negligible, but neither do I think that they are sufficient to outweigh the disadvantages of retaining him and I do think that his teaching and scholarly capacities have been greatly exaggerated.

I have pointed out certain facts which support this view. Namely that in his 3½ years at this university he has published nothing in philosophical journals except one book review; that he has written two articles which have been refused by philosophical journals. One of these rejected articles is the one on Hobbes of which you think so highly and which has been recommended by Professor Macpherson for publication in the Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science. I can quite well understand that Professor Macpherson who is a distinguished political scientist might find in it something of interest to political scientists which in his opinion makes it worthy of publication, but to claim, as you do, that it is on the highest possible philosophical level is, to put it mildly, extravagant.

Again, I have never said that Williamson is worthless as a teacher, but, in my opinion, there are several members of the department who are much better teachers. One reliable indication in certain circumstances is the growth or decline in the size of classes. The fact is that when Williamson took over a particular class in the area of his special interest, the class which formerly had an enrolment of 119 was, in three years, reduced to 31. This I regard as no mean feat. Williamson has never been able to offer any explanation of this curious phenomenon.

The conclusion I draw from facts of this kind is not that Williamson is worthless and incompetent as a teacher and scholar, but the more moderate view that for our philosophy department the disadvantage of having him clearly outweighs the advantages.

The purpose of having a period of probationary appointment is to enable the university to discover whether or not a person can be of service to the university and everything that bears upon this is relevant to the decision to give or deny tenure.

You accuse me of having acted wrongly throughout the tenure procedure. You clearly either have not read or have not understood the statement made by the Staff Association. It asserted that none of the present agreed procedures were violated in regard to the composition and function of the tenure committee. And finally (in response to a slander publicly uttered by Williamson let it be said that no direct or indirect political or other improper pressures

were involved in the Committee's decisions.

The two criticisms made by the Staff Association were concerned with matters of timing. It is true that consideration of Murray's tenure should have been made a year earlier. In fact I tried very hard to get a committee called at that time but the growing pressure of work in the Dean's office prevented the calling of the committee at an appropriate time so that matter was allowed to stand over until the following year. I cannot see that Murray suffered any injustice because of this. The result for him was in fact an additional year's grace in which he could have, if he wished, improved his position. He was well aware of this opportunity and he failed to take advantage of it.

The other criticisms which the Staff Association makes has even less substance. It claims that I should have informed Murray and Williamson of my intention to recommend the denial of tenure. Since the Staff Association recognizes that this is not laid down in the present procedures, I claim that they have no right to make it a point of criticism against myself. Whether or not the procedures should include provision for such prior notification is, I think, a debatable question. I do not think the Staff Association should presume to know the answer before the question has even been discussed.

The Staff Association's final point of criticism involved the claim that Murray and Williamson were not allowed sufficient notice in order to give them adequate opportunity for seeking positions elsewhere. I do not accept this criticism as a just one. Murray and Williamson were told of the denial of tenure very early in January, thus giving them eight months' notice just before the height of the hiring season, which as far as philosophy is concerned, runs from January through to April or later. Furthermore there are more jobs in philosophy than there are qualified people to fill them. I am convinced that no injustice has been done in this regard. Nevertheless, the Staff Association feels strongly concerning the general need to increase the period of notice to twelve months and for this reason it recommended that Murray and Williamson be offered terminal appointments for a further year.

Although I do not agree with the Staff Association's views on this matter, I have deferred to their opinion and have consequently accepted this recommendation to allow Murray and Williamson the grace of an unusually long (20 months) opportunity for seeking other employment. The proposal that there be offers of terminal appointments of one year came in the first place from the Staff Association and therefore in no sense is it a bribe.

As to the rumours which you are so busy circulating about the nature of these terminal appointments, the fact is that Williamson and Murray are excluding themselves from departmental meetings, and the nature of the courses they would teach if they accepted the appointment is still not determined. This obviously depends upon the other appointments that we shall be making and upon the convenience of the department.

You make some dire predictions which I believe to be groundless, concerning the future of our department. I think that this mode of argument is unworthy of anyone who claims to have had philosophical training. As you correctly assert, in reply to your question, I wrote on February 16th "no members of the department are resigning." You say in response to this that you have reason to believe that the only first-rate people in the department, without exception, will leave just as soon as they can secure an acceptable position elsewhere. I wish to draw attention to the number of escape

clauses that you have allowed yourself in this statement. On this view nobody need declare his intention of resigning nor set any definite limit upon his stay with the department. Anybody who declares his intention of staying with the department will be ruled out by you as not first-rate, according to some obscure criterion which I cannot follow. I wonder about your phrase without exception which you use in this connection. The most vociferous supporter of Williamson and Murray within the department was Professor Tennesen, who, according to your own statement is one of our distinguished philosophers. Professor Tennesen has denied that he has any intention of resigning and in an unsolicited letter to me dated February 3rd, he says: "I hope you will understand how deeply I regret having said anything derogatory about you. I write to ask you to forgive me and to assure you that you can count on my full loyalty and co-operation in all possible respects—come what may—with regard to building up the department in general and the graduate program in particular. . . . I want to stay here and I am thoroughly convinced that together we can shape our growing department into a philosophical centre of which we can be truly proud."

The often repeated assertion that as a result of the Murray-Williamson denial of tenure there will be resignations from the department is a falsehood. Not a single staff member, not a single graduate teaching assistant, not a single graduate student will withdraw from the university on this account. This assertion will of course be proved by the event and I am confident that it will be. I have recently had more applications for graduate teaching assistantships and for sessional lectureships and for permanent appointments on the staff and for admission to graduate studies, than the department has ever had before. There is here in Alberta no crisis of confidence in the philosophy department and this is particularly true among those who have some knowledge of the department and its members. I am prepared to present evidence of this to anyone who wishes to enquire. You, Sir, at a distance of 2,000 miles, are engaged in repeating falsehoods which you could not possibly have checked. I conclude that you are guilty of intellectual irresponsibility. This is further illustrated in your attempt to assess the philosophers in the department.

You say that Professor Tennesen is a distinguished philosopher, but that Professor Price's qualifications do not overwhelm you. I would be interested to know on what grounds you distinguish between Professor Price's degrees and Professor Tennesen's. I would also be interested to know if you have read Professor Price's book on Kierkegaard. I would be interested to know if you have looked up the philosophical papers written by myself and those by Professor Cohen. The great bulk of the publication done by the department has been the result of the people I have mentioned. The rest of the department, i.e. those of the rank of assistant professor, have produced between them some three articles (this includes Williamson's article yet to be published). If you intend to include Mr. Murray among the younger, more vital, members of the department, may I here point out that after three years and a subsequent three full summers, ostensibly spent at Oxford, he withdrew from the D.Phil. program without ever submitting a dissertation and that he has published literally nothing.

So much for the distinction that you make between the senior members and the younger men upon whom you say the vitality of the department depends. The fact is that you

know nothing about the relative merits of the members of the department except the prejudiced judgments that you have derived from one particular source. I am confident that all the continuing members of the department will make significant contributions to philosophy in due course, but the fact is that the department is not divided in the way you depict.

I hold strongly the view that questions of tenure and the like which involve judgments about the merits and demerits of one's colleagues, should not be discussed in a public forum, nor should they be the subject of rumor and scandal mongering. These discussions belong in the privacy of university committees and, in the case of appeals, to the privacy of Staff Association committees. If discussion of one another's merits becomes general in this university, then I think that we will surely create an atmosphere which is inimical both to teaching and research. We should all of us be going about our jobs, doing them as best we can, without worrying too much about whether or not we are doing better than the other fellow. For this reason, I have been reluctant to enter into public discussion concerning this tenure case.

However, Murray and Williamson quite needlessly made it a public issue from the first. I have broken my silence on two previous occasions. One on television and the other on radio. In both cases I did this because Williamson had already initiated his participation in these programs and because it had come to my attention that he was engaged in slandering and denigrating the philosophy department and many of its members. Again I am forced to speak out in this letter. I have tried to do so as factually and as reasonably as possible. I am afraid that you, Mr. Robinson, have not exercised similar restraint.

I am indeed surprised and disappointed to find that a graduate student of philosophy from one of the best departments in Canada, has acquired so little skill in selecting and assessing evidence, and in drawing logical conclusions from that evidence.

I draw your attention to the words of a former teacher of mine at Cambridge, Ludwig Wittgenstein, who wrote:

"What is the use of studying philosophy if all that it does for you is to enable you to talk with some plausibility about some abstruse questions of logic, etc., and if it does not improve your thinking about the important questions of everyday life, if it does not make you more conscientious than any journalist in the use of dangerous phrases such people use for their own ends. You see, I know that it's difficult to think well about "certainty," "probability," "perception," etc. But it is, if possible, still more difficult to think, or try to think, really honestly about your life and other people's lives. And the trouble is that thinking about these things is not thrilling, but often downright nasty. And when it's nasty then it's most important."

Anthony M. Mardiros,
Professor and Head,
Philosophy Department

Mr. Paul Robinson
University of Toronto
Toronto, Ontario

12th March, 1966

Dear Mr. Robinson:

I have received your comments on the denial of tenure to Murray and Williamson and I must say that I am astonished at the violence of your language and the irrationality of your arguments in contrast with your earlier letter to me. It is almost as if it were written by another person. Let me recall your earlier letters to me on this matter.

I replied to your first enquiry of January 28th that in general I disapproved of the discussion of the merits and demerits of one's colleagues outside of the academic committees where it is obligatory to discuss these matters, and that therefore I was reluctant to embark upon such a discussion with you or anyone else. Nevertheless I indicated that Professor Williamson's philosophical competence was not a major issue in denying him tenure and that his influence upon the department was the major factor.

You replied to my letter on February 11th, thanking me for my "prompt and forthright reply" to your enquiries. You then went on to say that you had received further letters from members of the department (unnamed), that you had written in reply to these asking for evidence of their assertions, and that the replies had been unsatisfactory. You then concluded by saying that "I am not equipped to offer a judgement. Moreover I do not feel that and substantial good may be obtained by pressing further with my enquiries." You then indicated that you wished your application for a position in this department to stand.

Three weeks later you issue a public tirade against myself in which you accuse me of dishonesty and duplicity. I have searched your letter in order to discover what caused this abrupt about face on your part. You seem to feel that I have changed my ground in regard to the reason for Williamson's denial of tenure. This is not so. I have maintained, throughout the whole proceedings, that the major reason for denying Williamson tenure was his destructive effect upon the department—apparent soon after his arrival in Edmonton and increasingly evident as time went on. This tenure committee accumulated a mass of evidence around this point, with statements from every member of the department, from absent members of the department, and from former members. Although of course there was some conflict in the opinions expressed in this matter, the overwhelming evidence supported my contention in this re-