

Dust thou art

Dean Douglas E. Smith's letter to Professor Kemp, which appeared in last Friday's Gateway, should not pass by without close examination. The contents of the letter are public and Mr. Smith is, we would say, now faced with the responsibility of giving to the student body and everyone else concerned a clear, intelligible, and honest explanation of the reasons behind Mr. Kemp's dismissal from the philosophy department. Instead, as we intend to show here, the dean of arts has given Mr. Kemp (and indirectly us) something which "is as the air," but which is by no means invulnerable.

Dean Smith has attempted to show that Mr. Kemp's "very slow progress in development as a philosopher and . . . prospects for future development" have in the minds of the committee members "outweighed [his] good performance in other aspects of [his] work." This we may call the "Argument" of the letter. But as a 19th century critic said of a disappointing poem, "this will never do." An argument is only as good as the evidence that supports and explains it, and Mr. Smith has backed his argument with little more than glaring contradictions and apparently unexplainable obscurities.

Contradictions . . .

First for the more mundane matter, the contradictions. In the fourth paragraph of the letter, the dean tells Mr. Kemp that he is, according to "reports," a most excellent teacher. It will be best here to let Mr. Smith speak for himself without interruption:

At the time of your appointment, and steadily since that time, there have been enthusiastic reports about your teaching. There seems to be no doubt about your professional skill as a teacher and your enthusiasm for the teaching process. Much of the information presented to the committee on your behalf repeated and confirmed this kind of appraisal.

Now according to this statement, the quality of Mr. Kemp's teaching has, since he first joined the philosophy department, improved steadily and to the point where there is now "no doubt" as to his "professional skill as a teacher." His skill is, says our dean, a "confirmed" fact.

What, then, are we to think of Dean Smith's sixth paragraph, where we learn that the department has "doubts" about the "philosophical content" of Professor Kemp's lectures? Here we also read that Mr. Kemp's slow "professional development as a philosopher"—more below about this unfortunate term, profes-

sional philosopher—has in some way or another applied "indirectly" to his "performance in undergraduate philosophy courses."

And insinuations

We don't intend to explain this business of *we have no doubts, but then we do have doubts*. But we would, before we continue, like to express our feeling that a man writing a "personal and confidential" letter to another man should not bury his meaning in such insinuating terms as "indirectly" and "seems." Mr. Smith first compliments Mr. Kemp's teaching. Then, however, he backhandedly tries to throw doubt on the widely-recognized quality of what he has earlier praised. As it turns out, Mr. Kemp's skill is something that only seems to be excellent. Indirectly, though, this skill is limited by the teacher's slow professional, philosophical development. But nay, Sir, we know not seems!

The contradiction we have just pointed to is complemented by another just as obvious. In paragraph five the dean explains to the professor that his record shows "little or no participation in local activities such as philosophical discussions within the department." Two paragraphs later, however, the dean swallows what he has just said:

Your contributions to the work of committees seem to have been satisfactory but there is no record of outstanding performance. In departmental affairs you have performed effectively when given responsibility and participated generally in departmental discussions.

This is followed with the statement that "there was no criticism of any of this work." What precisely is Dean Smith saying here? Mr. Kemp has performed well on committees, effectively carried out his responsibilities, and, what is most surprising, participated in departmental discussions. He has done so well in these areas, in fact, that there has been no criticism of his work. This is merely an unimaginative repetition of the earlier doubts yet no doubts nonsense. Only this time it is no participation in departmental discussions yet, at the same time, general participation in departmental discussions. And again we notice that the criticism comes not directly but through undermining insinuations: "little or no," "seem," and "participated generally."

Professional development?

Now for the good stuff, the obscurities or, rather, absurdities of Mr. Smith's letter. And what we mean by an obscurity or absurdity is such a nebulous phrase as "professional development as a philosopher." How in the world does a philosopher develop professionally? And what in the world would one use as an index of this development?

We shall consult Mr. Smith:

Your progress toward the Ph.D. was very slow, and the committee was not reassured by your explanation of the present status of your dissertation. There is no evidence of any alternative scholarly work. Your annual reports do not record published research.

According to this, then, a finished dissertation, or, in the absence of that, "alternative scholarly work" ("published work") equals a philosopher. But the equation is a lifeless formal structure, having no truth in reality.

Three non-professionals

Let us look at the cases of three ancient, but undisputedly great philosophers. From ancient Greece there is Socrates, whose thought was recorded by his student Plato, of whom I shall speak in a moment. From ancient Hebrew culture there was Jesus Christ, and from eastern culture Gautama Siddharta (or Buddha). These three venerable fellows deserve to be called philosophers. But—alas!—they don't deserve the title of Doctor of Philosophy. For not one of them, as far as we know, ever wrote a single word. And why? Simply because they were too busy teaching their divine words. And Plato, according to what we know, made no progress toward his dissertation until his late seventies and early eighties. (His dissertation, about which dissertations are written, would not be accepted by any committee today.) He, too, was busy teaching.

But these guys are old and musty. So let's turn to the New England philosopher who wrote *Walden* (another dissertation that would be out of place in today's graduate school). Of development—philosophical, mental, spiritual, it's all really the same—he says this:

Let every one mind his own business, and endeavor to be what he was made. Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed and in such desperate enterprises? If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.

Which is just the point. A philosopher's development—and it is of philosophers that we are now speaking—is not a desperate enterprise. Nor is it something that can be measured by standards other than the philosopher's own. A real philosopher's path is laid on rails whereon his soul is grooved to run. Find and "keep on your own track," says Thoreau. And of each of our tracks he says, "let us spend our lives in conceiving them."

Philosophy and scholarship

A true philosopher is a deep diver, a mighty conceiver. In his searching and researching he

dives within to the foundation of his being, and without to the foundation of the universe. And then he links the two together. "O Nature, and O soul of man! how far beyond all utterance are your linked analogies!" It is sufficient for a philosopher to spend his life conceiving and to leave the copestone of his work to futurity.

At this point it is clear that Mr. Smith has unintentionally and to no effect created an oxymoron in prose. *Professional development and philosopher* have, literally, nothing to do with each other. He meant to say that Mr. Kemp has shown no professional development in the often desperate enterprise we call academic scholarship. And because published scholarship, which is not philosophy, weighs so heavily in the decision of the tenure committee, all we Rintrahs are roaring and shaking our fires.

We have done with our giring and gimbling in the brillig wabe of Mr. Smith's letter. We would, by way of conclusion, like to direct the attention of those who "hire and fire" in the philosophy department to what Emerson (another philosopher whom they should know well) says in "The American Scholar":

Colleges have their indispensable office—to teach elements. But they only highly serve us when they aim not to drill but to create; when they gather from far every ray of various genius to their hospitable halls, and by concentrated fires set the hearts of their youths on flame.

How hospitable is the philosophy department to a man who has served his students highly, who has carried out his indispensable office by bringing his intellectual fires into the classroom and there directly setting the hearts of his youth on flame? The answer to this is obvious in the letter that dismissed Mr. Kemp as "not worthy of continued work here."

"Dust and ashes"

Teaching here was indeed a mistake for Mr. Kemp, for it is clear from Mr. Smith's letter that the philosophy department worships at a heathen altar. There it is the published record of a man's research (not necessarily thought) that is deified and not the man thinking. There the living philosopher, the man whose life is his philosophy, is sacrificed to the Anti-Christ of philosophy and genuine scholarship both, the outward form or ceremony of scholarship. In such a department the intellectual fires have died. "Dust and ashes, dead and gone with."

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To: Prof. E. W. Kemp
You ask for reasons for negative recommendation of a concerning your tenure and for deliberations of the department advisory committee. Officially I think I should say that the advisory committee is an information body not provided for in the Faculty Handbook the nature of which concern requires that its proceedings remain confidential. I realize that you are only asking for the nature of the case which comes against the affirmation of your tenure and that you did not request for confidential proceedings to be revealed to you, but I think it incumbent upon me to state that, even if superfluously, confidentiality attaches to the actual deliberations of the advisory committee.

My reason for a negative recommendation was simply that you had not achieved even a minimal requirement of scholarship.

After having been a student on this campus for three years, having been through the process of being pushed, pulled and shoved around by various administrators and apathetic towards "academia" this campus. However, the denying tenure to a professor is admired and respected by students and who has laid career on the line for students provoked me to such an extent that I feel like I've been kicked the guts.

Mario Savio of the Berkeley Free Speech once said:
There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes

I am disturbed by the tone of The Gateway's coverage of the philosophy department's proceedings, in particular the assumptions behind the defense of Professor Kemp. These are the professor may be either a teacher or a good scholar, but both: that if he is the first degrees or his publication should not be scrutinized, and that if he is the second he is automatically a dry-bones pedant. A consequence, or

While the philosophy department may feel justified in denying Prof. Kemp tenure on grounds that he has not fulfilled the conditions originally set for his appointment, it should consider whether these conditions are valid. There can be no question that one's research ability is determined by the number of publications and more than the effort put into

Tenure: explanations, replies, arm