

Academic tenure—a barbaric throw-back to caste system mentality?

To the editor:
Two crucial points in Professor John W. Dixon's defense of academic tenure (March 2) require comment. First, Professor Dixon assumes that "judgment [is] made on the quality of [a candidate's] work by those qualified to judge." This is false. A recommendation for tenure is made by "the chairman of the department concerned after consultation with the assembled full professors of the department." Nothing is said in the general provisions from which this passage is quoted about either the chairman or the full professors being "qualified to judge." Of course we are invited to believe that any full professor is qualified to judge any unfulfilling professor, but such reasoning is reminiscent of 'Catch 22' and is not borne out by experience.

The second observation has to do with Professor Dixon's analogy of university teaching to trade specialties. One point is overlooked. A trade specialist must remain competent through his period of employment. If he does not, he may be dismissed (or go broke) irrespective of his length of service or rank. Under the present system of academic tenure, practically no extreme of incompetence results in either demotion or dismissal. Academic tenure is a built-in free ride that destroys incentive. It costs universities millions of wasted dollars each year and, worse, deprives deserving young scholars a means of livelihood.

There is no longer any excuse for academic tenure. Professor Dixon states "Tenure is not something anyone has a right to." I would rearrange his sentence to read "Tenure is something that no one has a right to." The once useful purpose of protecting faculty members against the whims of superiors is adequately served by due process regulations. All members of the faculty ought to be subject to review by their superiors and/or equals periodically, with promotions, demotions, renewal of contract, etc., made on such a basis. The unequal treatment of faculty members that academic tenure creates is a barbarism that the university, traditionally the font of liberal thought and reform, can ill afford to keep. It is a throwback to a caste-system mentality that damages the credibility of the university with the general public.

Robert D. Rodman
Assistant Professor of Linguistics

Tenure archaic?

To the editor:
John W. Dixon's letter (March 2) is so silly and pompous that it hardly deserves comment. But since it contains genuine errors in understanding what "tenure" is, and since its signature appears over the title "Professor," there may be some gullible folks who view Dixon's careless remarks as authoritative.

The "awarding" of tenure does not certify that anyone is competent to teach and do research in a subject. Period spent as a non-tenured faculty member is not any kind of "apprenticeship." If anything counts as apprenticeship, it is the period of time faculty members spent in graduate school, learning how to teach and do research. There are faculty members at UNC

without tenure who came here from other institutions where they already had tenure! What is so disgusting about the archaic practice of giving permanent contracts to faculty members after six or seven years is that the university becomes saturated with these tenured faculty, many of whom are actually incompetent, and who on the average are no better at teaching or research than the untenured faculty. Yet most of these tenured faculty members share Dixon's belief, viewing themselves as "Professors for Life" who are now called upon to "judge" other faculty members who merely haven't been at UNC as long, and of course viewing themselves as being beyond all judgment.

Richard Sharvy
Visiting Lecturer
Department of Philosophy

Academic freedom a sham

To the editor:
The "great deal of foolishness" about tenure and academic freedom has just come from Prof. John W. Dixon Jr. According to Dixon, all members of the academic community, from the highest senior professor to the lowliest freshman are free to study, investigate, learn and teach "free from all compulsion or restriction from outside (or inside) the university." All one has to do is answer the questions: Who really runs the university? What kind of economic and political power do they exercise over it? The answers to these questions should dispel forever the myth of noncompulsion from inside or outside forces.

Our whole system of schooling is geared to produce conformity and perpetuation of the status quo through coercion, sanctions and dismissal. In the case of students, they are indoctrinated in what to think, how to think and when to think; if they do not conform to the patterns established by teachers and administrators they will not get the grades and degrees necessary to take their rightful place on the assembly lines of Ford, Burlington or UNC. What they must learn is how to obey authority and follow directions without too much independent or creative thought. Independence and creativity is generally a good way to fail. It can also cause moral dilemmas or insanity. General Motors does not want people who have moral misgivings about what they are doing. It wants people who will follow directions without questions. Our schooling, by and large, assures this.

As for the academic freedom of nontenured faculty... monkeys in a zoo have more freedom! Instead of grades and degrees, however, faculty are forced to conform with the threat of job security. Some of the best teachers I have had were nontenured people who showed great imagination and creativity in their teaching and failed to conform to the "rules" set forth by the tenured professors and administrators. Not one of these creative teachers now teaches at UNC. They have all been systematically eliminated from the university by the so-called "excellent" professors with tenure. To hear Dixon tell it, the judgments of the academic powers are made by people who are "qualified" to make

letters to the editor

such judgments. If this is true, why is it that many of the worst teachers my friends and I have had have been tenured—usually full professors whose minds and values are firmly stuck back in the 19th century?

Well, anyway, Prof. Dixon can call all this academic freedom if he wants to but it certainly does not coincide with the real experiences of many students and teachers. His own closing statement that conformity to university "canons" is a good measure to use when judging a candidate's fitness for a permanent appointment, tells us where his thinking is at and why academic freedom is a sham.

Roger Wilson
Graduate student, English

Expression denied

To the editor:
In reference to Martin's apology letter to Mark Kepler and the fiasco letter defending Martin:

I am appalled that people who are given the elite opportunity of higher education have either allowed themselves to be desensitized to the need for artistic expression or have intentionally avoided and ignored something that they now with indignant ignorance scream out against. Perhaps I have grossly overestimated the potential of places like this university for developing sensibilities.

For the people who defend Martin, who doesn't know whether to condone breaking and burning things that belong to other people or to put his foot in his mouth and call it a joke, your attitudes are grave reminders of the fragility of free expression. Your viewpoint is far from even Martin's high school humor: "We support the universal right of the artist to keep the product of his expression locked in his own room (since only he can appreciate it fully)." This statement alone is enough to spark a deluge of reply from not only artists, writers, musicians, etc. but from anyone remotely interested in freedom.

You demand to know what art is; you assume the position of "citizen art critic," and yet your method of criticism is to deny expression. If you were sincerely concerned about the "mystique of art" you would be asking instead, "why art?" Your attitudes are a damn good clue to one answer.

Lynda Lamm
University Gardens

Not all additives 'poisonous'

To the editor:
I read with interest the article on nutrition and our national health status (Feb. 28). I applaud the author for bringing the issue of poor nutritional habits to the attention of Tar-Heel readers, and agree that there is much that we could all do to improve our health through diet and exercise.

However, as a student of nutrition, I must comment on several specific points about diet. First of all, starch is not the villain in our plague of degenerative diseases and need not be consumed "with extreme caution." In fact, most population groups with a low incidence of coronary heart disease consume a large part of their total energy from carbohydrate in the form of grains and tubers. Even in diabetes treatment, recent

evidence suggests that there is little need for carbohydrate restriction (except for some sugars).

Secondly, the issue of whether or not an excess intake of saturated fat and cholesterol is a cause of coronary heart disease is still up in the air, although the Intersociety Commission for Heart Disease Resources recommends dietary modification for those at risk. As far as I know, lecithin is not recommended for the prevention of atherosclerotic disease or for reducing serum cholesterol levels.

One final point. While I would agree that there is unnecessary processing of some foods for the sake of convenience, I can't agree that processing necessarily makes a food useless or that all food additives are "poisonous." It is this type of exaggeration

evaluation of the incendiary act.

Does a person (other than the artist) have any right to knowingly destroy a work of art? The answer to this question seems to be an immediate negative, although obviously there may be extenuating circumstances, as when the work of art physically threatens the individual or property. If Jean Tinguely's *Homage to New York*, for instance, were to begin its dance of death in someone's living room, that person could scarcely be blamed for forcibly removing it, even though the removal might cause the premature demise of the work. An interesting corollary to this question, although not one applicable to the situation under consideration, is whether once the work is complete, even the artist has any right to destroy it.

What of the case where the person is unaware of the object's status as a work of art? This seems to devolve quickly into a question of personal property: whether anyone ever has a right to destroy something that does not belong to him. As the members of the Laboratory are divided in their views

virtually infinite promulgation of "works of art," including everything from factory-produced tables to biologically-produced waste. Even Heidegger's qualification (*DTH*, March 1) that only conscious intent can produce a work of art restricts the application of the term insufficiently, as it allows such things as the whittling of a senile and the productions of Art 45 to count as art, a clearly ridiculous state of affairs.

The proposal of Misenheimer *et al.*, however, is a little better. The idea that what is art is determined by the tastes of the populace makes the concept of art all too variable and forces one to say that, for instance, when Rembrandt painted his works they were not (yet) art. Fortunately for the forces of change, art is not solely that which is recognized as art.

Given this much, it seems apparent that there are two very separate moral issues here: the issue of the rights of the artist and that of the rights of the populace. Questions pertaining to the first issue include: Art there limitations on what the (self-styled) artist has



AS I WAS SAYING TO JIMMY — I CALL HIM JIMMY — WHEN WE SPOKE ON THE PHONE THE OTHER DAY, "JIMMY," I SAID, "YES, FRED." HE SAYS — HE CALLS ME FRED...

that makes the average person despair of ever finding a healthful diet and give up on learning how to improve his health through good nutrition.

Peggy Kloster
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Logic Lab examines art

To the editor:
As the days go by, the stream of rhetoric generated by the burning of the alleged sculpture at the Unions seems not to shrink, but to increase in vigour and confusion. Despite the admirable attempt by Misenheimer *et al.* (*Daily Tar Heel*, Feb. 28), to inject a modicum of rationality into what has generally tended to be a crossfire of sophisticated name-calling, there seems to be no clear awareness of the issues involved in this debate — if debate it can be called. Thus, we here at the Logic Laboratory have attempted a brief exposition of what we feel are the major issues relevant to the

morality of the institution of private property, we reserve answer on this. However, the question brings us to one of the most central issues of the debate.

When is a created object a work of art? A work of art seems to have certain quasi-rights of its own (we use the term "quasi-rights" since there is some disagreement on whether anything not actually a person can have rights in the fullest sense) among which are the quasi-rights to our attention and respect. This is not the case with a pile of junk. Thus, it is important for us to be able to determine which objects are works of art and which are not, that we may be able to determine what behavior is appropriate in which cases. In the present case, the heinousness of the crime (or, in a more Marxist interpretation, whether it was a crime or not) is precisely dependent upon whether or not the construction counted as a work of art. Several answers to this question have been proposed thus far in the debate, none entirely satisfactory. The standard position among the self-professed artists who have joined the squabble seems to be that every created object is a work of art—or perhaps (in the Dadaist tradition) every one that the creator so designates. As Misenheimer *et al.* pointed out, this position is hardly defensible, as it allows for a

right to create? For instance, does the artist have the right to create bad art? Does the artist have a right to decide which of his works are art? Good art? And, especially relevant to this case, does the artist have the right to display his works indiscriminately?

Corresponding to these questions are questions of the rights of the viewers, who are equally as much a part of the artistic process as the artist. Some of these are: Do the viewers have a right to determine which works they will and will not experience? It has been pointed out that they may take action against a work to protect themselves from physical harm; what about mental anguish? Have they rights to be protected (or to protect themselves) from bad art? Art they don't care for? Art they didn't ask to experience?

A final question is raised by the display of the construction on the Union roof (and, incidentally, by the continued presence of its charred remains thereon): To what extent does the environment itself have quasi-rights against intrusion by anyone, artistic or otherwise? In recent years, there has been a considerable movement, penetrating even to Chapel Hill, toward works occurring on sites in the world at large, and works of art have seemed to become as ubiquitous as empty beer cans. Can it be that, when all is said and done, art really does belong in the museums?

Robert France
for the Logic Lab

Poetry in the mail?

To the editor:
Two things may be deduced from Mark Kepler's letter in Wednesday's *Daily Tar Heel* (March 2):

- 1) He enjoys writing incomplete sentences, or
- 2) His poetry is no better than his sculpture.

Craig Lynch
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