

Overview

John Connolly in this issue of *Thought & Action* describes the professoriate as a “quarrel of philosophers.”

The term “philosopher” in this use is not a narrow discipline designation, Connolly notes, but applies to everyone in the academy engaged in the search for truth. That those in the academy are a quarrelsome lot is not a criticism of any sort either, to Connolly, but the way thinkers and scholars should act as we go about our business of creating knowledge.

Connolly’s essay, one of the three winners of the NEA Excellence in the Academy award published in this issue, examines the origins of academic freedom in the nation’s higher education institutions. His article, “The Academy’s Freedom, the Academy’s Burden,” explores his concerns about the debate now unfolding in the contemporary academy.

His concern: Postmodern questioners about the nature of truth threaten to throw the baby out with the deconstructed bath water. If there is no truth and only politics, asks Connolly, will the courts continue to protect the academy’s cherished academic freedom?

Many of our readers might disagree with Connolly’s analysis of the dangers of postmodern thinking. And this skepticism befits a group of thinkers characterized as

a quarrel of philosophers.

Skepticism is what *Thought & Action* is all about, too. We’re a vehicle for this “quarrel of philosophers” in search of answers to a multitude of questions on the right path for higher education to follow at this particular juncture in history.

Gary Rhoades, for instance, a frequent contributor to NEA higher education publications and the author of “New Unionism and Over-Managed Professors” in this issue of *Thought & Action*, has a decidedly clear sense of the path higher education faculty and staff should set out upon. The path Rhoades envisions leads to “a public professional unionism” that expands the notion of New Unionism on a solid foundation of Old Unionism.

Higher education faculty and staff, Rhoades notes, should surely work cooperatively with higher education administrators to promote quality in instruction and a high level of professionalism on the job. And, just as surely, Rhoades argues, faculty and staff should play a major role in institutional financial and strategic decision making.

But Rhoades argues that higher education unions, as part of their New Unionism efforts, must also pay more attention—in their collective bargaining agreements and beyond—to the public interest.

As for quality in instruction,

Matthew Richardson outlines a process he's refined that relies on faculty learning from one another through peer observation. Rather than equating the act of observing teaching with the act of evaluating the performance of a colleague, Richardson suggests that there's much to be gained—by observer and observed—when the faculty member doing the observing approaches the assignment as a “student of teaching.”

Also in this issue: two articles that give voice to the sometimes forgotten toilers in academe's trenches, part-time faculty.

Joseph Laiacona recounts how the part-time faculty at Chicago's Columbia College dramatically improved their salaries and gained a strong voice in college decision making without undermining their “rather friendly college environment.”

Two graduate teaching assistants, veterans of the Yale “grade strike,” discuss the importance of graduate students to the academic enterprise and the impact of “the

casualization of academic labor” on higher learning in general and faculty in particular.

Fittingly, in this issue of *Thought & Action*, our correspondence section comes alive with heated debate. The Culture Wars in Academe continue unabated with a challenge by a former student of his to the arguments made by Wabash College's James Fischer in his “culture wars” article in last fall's *Thought & Action*.

Enid Bloch, who wrote last fall on “Fear of Self in Academic Life” is also taken to task for her characterizations of analytic philosophy. This time, we hear from a philosopher—in the discipline specific sense of the word—who believes passionately in the value of his field.

What's important to us at *Thought & Action* is that these debates are taking place among colleagues, in civilized discourse, within our pages. This is exactly what we're here for.

— *Con Lehane, editor*