There is a certain amount of truth in the statement that educators are the ultimate egotists. Their demands for "academic freedom", which are actually demands for privilege have no reasonable justification in modern society since educators are neither persecuted nor muzzled. As a class, educators have the innocent conceit that they are experts on (almost) everything and that a specialist in limnology can abandon his shallow ponds and move confidently and expertly through the deeper, more troubled waters of university administration and national policy. As long as this conceit does not spill over into reality, it is amusing but not harmful. But when this concept of academic freedom involves such curious statements as have appeared in Forum papers, such as: "Faculty should be encouraged to freely teach, publish and discuss their views on any issue," and to be responsible but not accountable for "the examination of controversial issues throughout the university, including classroom discussions," it is time to examine an instructor's role in education.

It is disturbing to note that academic-freedom statements virtually all contain the expressed or implied idea that an instructor should have the privilege of abandoning his subject matter and promoting personal attitudes, prejudices and opinions on subjects which may be entirely outside his field of expertise. This is not academic freedom. This is academic license.

It was Dr. Jerome Bruner of Harvard University, I believe, who stated that both the process and the goal of education was disciplined understanding. To attain such ends requires a considerable amount of rectitude on the part of both instructors and students. It involves for the instructor, the professional and moral obligation to stick to the subject matter and refrain from wandering into fascinating bypaths of opinion, and for the student an obligation to learn. It is a two-way street of mutual interaction for the purpose of disseminating and acquiring information and acquiring a methodology for examining, evaluating, storing and utilizing it.

A classroom is not a public opinion forum. It is a narrowly organized assembly gathered together to pursue a specific aspect of human knowledge. In essence, it is a captive audience which has been assembled more or less voluntarily with the implied qualification that the material listed in the syllabus or the catalogue will be the material which is taught. It is, therefore, proper academic conduct for both instructor and students to attend to business. Inappropriate discussion or comment is undisciplined behavior that neither promotes the process nor the goal for which the class is assembled.
I do not wish to convey any idea that I am opposed to freedom of assembly, conscience or speech. I am merely saying that there is a proper time and place for teaching and for pontification and that I oppose the kooky concept that academic freedom is some special kind of license that allows its possessor to commit mayhem in the classroom. Everyone - including academicians - is entitled to the freedoms guaranteed by the law of the land, but no one has any right to inflict personal opinions or attitudes upon a captive audience that has not been assembled by force.

As long as the choice of subject matter is more or less a matter of student option and departmental requirement, it is the responsibility of the teaching faculty to stick to the subject and reserve exotic opinions for specific seminars, the quad, the coffee shop, the faculty senate, the soapbox and the press. Education is too serious a business for either faculty or students to take liberties with it.

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