

THE PROFESSOR was almost through in his explanation of arson, an aspect of criminal law, when a plump, chubby-faced young student snapped his fingers and said, "Sir, I have a question." The professor gestured a yes-nod. "Suppose, sir, I place a dynamite at the side of the concrete wall of this university and it explodes, destroying the wall, am I guilty of arson?" The professor, apparently annoyed at his question, ignored him completely; he had just explained that, in arson, the element of burning is essential. Certainly, if nothing is burned, there is no crime of arson. This seemed very clear to the whole class. Another equally question-wise student was told bluntly to sit down for asking a silly question; the professor regarded it as a trick to "kill" the time.

Generally, students are entitled to ask questions during any stage of the instruction. It is the students' right. However, there are some, especially professors, who are a little inclined to regard this more as a "privilege" than as a right, but the majority, especially the students, are of the unanimous belief that it is a right. Actually, to ask questions is a right, an absolute right afforded the students as an inherent incident to teacher-and-pupil relationship. In the process of conveying knowledge to the students, doubts or uncertainty with respect to a particular aspect of the instruction may creep into the mind of the students; thus, leaving his mind in an utterly confused state. The occurrence of this confusion cannot be avoided no matter how clear and effective one's method of imparting knowledge is. The only remedy to offset this confusion is to allow students to ask questions.

There is, however, the unwholesome habit among present-day college students of misusing the right to ask questions. In fact, as far as this right is concerned, students nowadays may be classified into two groups namely: those who make use of this right as a means of removing confusion, and those who avail of this right as a means of gaining classroom "popularity".

This habit is unwholesome with respect to the second group. Perhaps, it is in the awareness of the existence of this right that helps make it unwholesome. A student nowadays asks questions no longer in the spirit of point-clarification but rather on the desire to make others believe that he is somebody in the

This Habit of Asking Questions

by arturo b. raboy

class; that he is an intellectual; that he is adept in the matter of speaking the English language — etc. I remember a class in Religion. A student stood up and asked, "Father, do you believe in the pre-existence of the soul?" To which the good Father answered, "The Catholic Church does not believe in the pre-existence of the soul; the soul exists only at the moment of birth." But the student pursued his question with, "But, Father, I have read a book by a renowned author that pre-existence of the soul is possible; the Mohammedans believe that." At this point, the good Father appeared vexed, and he shot through an embarrassing retort: "My dear boy, you are asking me a question outside the subject matter of this class. If your purpose is to argue with me just for the sake of it, I do not like it." Obviously, this was a punch on the nose. But others have succeeded in gaining special treatment and respect from their fellow classmates.

Perhaps, the most exasperating mode of asking questions is that which is purposely made to "kill" the time. This is very common (rampant is more appropriate) in the College of Law. A professor who is frankly fond of shuffling class cards during recitation usually finds himself being bombarded with mostly impertinent and ridiculous questions — and the professor sadly winds up the lecture with very little of the lessons taken up. This trick is certainly unfair to the other students, who are more seriously interested in the explanation of the law; it would deprive them of the more important portions of the law which are usually left unexplained due to the interposition of a silly question; likewise, it would deprive the professor much time in proceeding with his lecture.

Actually, there is nothing wrong with a student's asking questions. In fact it is his right. However, he cannot use this right in any way he wants. This right, like any other right, has its limit: the question must be sensible and less time-consuming; it must be motivated by an honest intention, by good

faith. But there are students, particularly law students, who are simply bold enough to attend classes without any preparation at all, and when they sense the prospect of being called on to recite, they immediately stand up — without even the courtesy of raising their hands — and start firing questions right and left. The next thing you know; it is already time for the next class. On one occasion, I asked one of my classmates why he was always asking questions. "Why, don't you like my asking questions?" came his surprising reply. "Sure, I like it; but don't you think we were wasting too much time on those two questions? They were not really important." I told him. "Yeah, we wasted much time all right, but it did the trick. I might have been called and I have not read the assignment; it saved me from a grade of 'S'. I've had lots of them already."

It was a clean "live"-saving trick all right, but he failed to realize that by wasting the professor's time, he was doing damage to the whole class; time which could have been devoted to the further explanation and illustration of the law. But the heckler was such a clever fellow — not to mention his little command of English — that the professor was fooled.

However, it might be well to remember that the blame should not be borne solely by the students concerned. Part of the blame should also be shared by the professors. A fair observation would indicate that some professors are quite noticeably impressionable. They become impressed by the students' rhetoric, high-sounding questions. This is certainly a weakness on their part, and smart students are quick to capitalize on this weakness to obtain good grades.

On the other hand, we can still find professors who are equally smart on this kind of skulduggery in class, and they don't hesitate to embarrass students if the question turns out to be nonsensical. This is the type of professors we need to stop this kind of malady in class. ■