

Teaching as *Amor Mundi*

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“Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it. . .” (Arendt, 1961: 196).

I often find myself thinking about the quote above from ‘The Crisis in Education’. To love the world, Hannah Arendt said, is a difficult task. To love the world is to try to understand it, to reconcile ourselves to it (neither of which should be mistaken for resignation), and to care for it – to care for its future and the possibilities that it opens for us. While the latter will often involve acting with others in pursuit of common goals and animated by principle, understanding and reconciliation are just as important if the world is to remain a home fit for the lives of human beings in our plurality. But in order for us to engage in understanding and reconciliation, we must slow down, find some critical distance from what is happening around us, and ‘think what we are doing’ (Arendt, 1998: 5). This isn’t about figuring out, or being taught, *what* to think, but about *how* to engage in thinking – it is about cultivating ourselves, and others, as thinking, engaged citizens, without requiring that those others think and engage in the same way that we might ourselves.

I knew Patrick, first, as a teacher. I took an undergraduate class with him in 2007 on Human Rights in Theory and Practice, and it was during a week on refugees and statelessness that I first came across the work of Hannah Arendt. Her thought would go on to play a central role in my doctoral research, which Patrick supervised. I couldn’t help feeling that there was, therefore, something poetic about sharing the seminar room with him again, in his final semester before retirement, exploring the work of Hannah Arendt. This time, however, 13 years since we met, we were in the room as co-teachers, as colleagues and as friends.

Patrick not only guided me through the doctoral process with care, attention and patience – to my project and to me – but he has also taught me how to be a teacher. This isn’t teaching grounded in knowledge of theories of learning, guided by a curriculum, or bearing any professional accreditation – as with many aspects of contemporary academe,

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Patrick has little patience for the commodification and bureaucratisation of teaching. Rather, what I learned from Patrick are those intangibles of teaching. I learned the importance of patience, the value of warm professionalism, the power of kindness, the necessity of humour, the empowerment and confidence that come with setting and meeting standards, and of the importance of understanding, encouragement, and honesty if and when those standards aren't met. Patrick took *care* of his students, and in doing so he has embodied the *amor mundi* of the educator – the taking of responsibility for others and their ability to think and contribute something new to the world.

As a student and teacher of political thought and as a political thinker himself, Patrick is not interested in the fads, fashions, or 'turns' that characterise contemporary academe. Doing the work of political thinking requires time, patience, attention to detail, openness and a willingness to engage with the work of others on their own terms – which is not, of course, an expectation of agreement with them. Patrick embodies these values in his own work, and he imparted them by example to his doctoral students. I take on the responsibility of guiding my first doctoral student in September. Only time will tell, of course, if I will be up to the task of caring for the world through caring for the education of others. But one thing I do know for certain: I could not have had a better teacher.

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