

# Hannah Arendt and the Raising of Conscience in Business Schools

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*Document Version*  
Accepted author manuscript

*Published in:*  
Academy of Management Learning and Education

*DOI:*  
[10.5465/amle.2020.0147](https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2020.0147)

*Publication date:*  
2020

*License*  
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*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Holt, R. (2020). Hannah Arendt and the Raising of Conscience in Business Schools. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 19(4), 584-599. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2020.0147>

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## HANNAH ARENDT AND THE RAISING OF CONSCIENCE IN BUSINESS SCHOOLS

### ABSTRACT

Business schools should be grounded in questions of meaning, not knowledge. Using this basic distinction, inspired by Hannah Arendt, I argue the scientific (e.g.: economic and financial theory), moral (e.g.: codes of conduct) and practical (e.g.: training) forms of knowledge being taught in business schools corrode the ability of students to think. They are corrosive because they are unthinkingly governed by a singular view of education: to instill habits that eliminate mystery, thereby making the world a more certain place. The aim is to realize organizational conditions of control, order and uniformity, which in management practice equates to the conscious pursuit of efficiency and effectiveness. Given the extensive critique of this pursuit, both in terms of its *hubris* and of its baleful effects on human relations and the wider environment, I ask “What if questions of knowledge were subsumed by ones of meaning?” Here, control, order and uniformity make way for thoughtfulness. For Arendt, thinking is the capacity and willingness to refuse the monopolizing force of truth, and to keep truths in the company of their contraries. Education that institutes thinking rather than knowledge, encourages a plural, open awareness of a world that is, essentially, ungovernable. To relate to things thoughtfully, rather than knowledgably, is to develop what Arendt calls conscience. The conscience she speaks of is not a restraining force that pushes away untruths and installs certainty. Rather, it arises from the experience of questioning the certainties woven into human practices by considering how to begin them anew. If instituted though business schools, it places unruliness at the heart of management practice.

## THE CRISIS

In 1961 Hannah Arendt (1961/2006: 177-181) wrote of a crisis in education. The symptoms she identified were threefold. First, the scholarship of teachers was becoming incidental to the apparently more important role of facilitating an alignment between youthfully formed opinions and those predominating in broader society. A homophily had set in, an atmosphere of almost competitive compliance with accepted norms in which gaining a sense of distinction and individuality through one's education had little chance. Education was becoming groupthink. Second, if they could no longer think of themselves as scholars, teachers began looking for distinction as experts in teaching practice, buoyed by a body of pedagogic knowledge, a corpus, like other professions such as law or medicine. Teachers were becoming experts in organizing the creation, dissemination and retention of information. In Arendt's somewhat caustic view, the sense of being schooled in, and passionate about, a disciplinary subject was steadily being lost to a professional interest in communication and dissemination processes. And third, training – acquiring a set of skills to meet a specific task or role – was assuming unquestioned ascendancy. Under the aegis of training learning became technical: it had an explicit point articulated through measured goals; no more sauntering, no urge to wonder and leap, to speculate, or lie fallow awhile, no being curious without explicit purpose. Education was becoming a subservient preparation for vocation.

They were symptoms of what she identified as an atmospheric thoughtlessness pervading the western world, one in which we were unable to pose the unanswerable

questions of meaning because we lack a space for thinking. Thinking is that aspect of an action that recalls and critically examines itself in relation to the self-understanding of those experiencing the action, or what Arendt calls conscience. There is nothing extrinsic or ulterior to conscience. It cannot be understood in relation to smaller components or larger systems: a conscience forms its own limit. The crisis Arendt identifies in modern life, and especially in modern education, is the steady concealing of conscience by habituated processes of evaluation. The educated self is being defined in terms of its value to others, which means it is continually teetering on the point of its own dissolution amid a welter of advice for its improvement and serviceability.

Students are not considered beings in themselves. Rather they are amalgams of smaller things (grades, skills, possessions, titles, aspirations) or subsumed in larger things (schools, examination systems, education policy, commercial interests, classification structures). In being understood as things with component parts, or as component parts of larger things, students are being wrapped in chains for others' purposes: facts or skills are being taught in order to bring about desired states of affairs, which in turn become means to further ends, to which there is no end.

Sixty years on, the crisis has matured, and found its apogee in business schools. Here, set off in the departmental filigree of a disciplinary cash cow, the symptoms of groupthink, the obsession with pedagogic procedure, and a willingness to genuflect to vocational priorities glitter like deceitful jewels, lit by all manner of performance metrics.

Some might push back at this association of Arendt's symptoms of crisis and the business school. Surely, if anywhere, it is in business schools that students are encouraged to think for themselves, to act entrepreneurially, to work at the edges, to be speculative. Surely the emphasis on innovation and independence in business schools

explicitly avoids the dangers Arendt finds in groupthink, pedagogic rigidity and the elevation of vocational procedure? Not at all.

First, groupthink abounds. The emphasis on enterprise is little more than an egregious form of commercial thoughtlessness. Students are to envisage themselves as agile, living minimally, gigging on surfaces, sniffing opportunity, eating it up, assuming there is always more, without ever being curious as to why *their* world should become like this. Why is competition there? Why is growth good? Far from encouraging distinct, critical, self-reliant thinking through such open questions, the frequent and fulsome encomiums to the enterprising spirit being issued by business schools reveal a gathering space for the rise of energetic, new venture-hungry students animated by a collective desire to compete and grow in the commercially orthodox ways. Walk around the business school buildings and the signs are all there. Inspirational quotations from change agents or thought leaders adorn walls like scatter cushions in text, each affirming an already taken-for-granted progression of values: experiment increases productivity, producing 'more with less' makes winners, and a society of winners - and so also losers - is a healthy one. Those who lose should pick themselves up and regard themselves as winners in waiting, if they keep trying they too will unleash their potential, add value, and drive success. The students should already, by year zero, be organising to fall-in with this acquisitive regimen of transformation and neophilia: they are go-getters, risk-takers, animated by the repeated suggestion that the only restrictions to their advancement comes from their own laziness and cowardice.

Second, this groupthink is underscored by academic managers giving priority to certifying pedagogic structures and procedures: teachers use the latest technical media, blending the physical and virtual presence of teachers, material and students in ways that maximise the intake of information. These pedagogic media and principles are

woven into broader evaluation systems that validate and rank systems of informational delivery, curriculum design, student selection, student performance, graduate income levels, alumni reputation, academic success and faculty research excellence. The evaluators act like viziers, advising rectors, chancellors and deans, and separating them from the staff and student bodies. The evaluators' influence has grown to the point they now rival their clients' influence over the institutions they inspect: often without any accountability they hold court on what counts and what to discount, enforcing the procedures with which they are most comfortable, and which continue to accord the evaluating classes continued prestige.

Third, both the emphasis on enterprise and on pedagogic procedure create pressure to breach the class and campus walls, and bring education into the 'real' world. Good business schools are those dedicated to serving the economy and having advisory boards populated by a cadre of senior business folk. Good courses organize iinternships and work experience, invite industry figures to guest lecture, use textbooks and case studies freighted with examples of industrial application, policy relevance and innovative possibility, and skew good grades toward assignments that offer clear and well-grounded practical advice from well-trained students. I accept that this emphasis on practicality and everyday problems may well quell what has been an almost obsessive championing of abstract theories in business schools, such as those associated with financial structuring, in which cleverness sought to lie alongside cruelty (Locke & Spender, 2011: 188). Yet with practicality comes an advocacy of situational dependency in which the student is to become whatever the immediate industrial setting demands of them (Vos & Page, 2019). Some theorists dress this up as practical wisdom or *phronesis* (Shotter & Tsoukas, 2014), lending an expansive ethical sensitivity to what otherwise becomes a tightly packed commercial dependency in both

students and teachers alike. Yet surely this advocacy for developing an artful attunement toward situational practicalities simply deepens the unthoughtful dependency on those commercial preoccupations enjoying temporary ascendancy, whether it is strategic positioning, design thinking, structured finance, or information technology (Holt, 2018: 23-24)? And as Parker (2018) trenchantly points out, the practical knowledge that prevails business schools is overtly corporate and global, there is little room for discussion of indigenous supply chains, barter, degrowth, transition towns, craft work or social justice. The practical problems being addressed with this turn to vocational relevance tend toward instrumentally configured commercial forms.

On all three counts, business schools have organized themselves as spaces of knowledge generation and transfer where teachers and students alike are placed in service to a class of apparently irresistible and insatiable purposes; the education is little more than instruction.

## **THINKING THROUGH LABOUR, WORK AND ACTION**

Arendt's concerns were broad one's of how best to create citizens. By citizens she meant publicly embodied and emboldened beings who actively considered the interplay of prevailing and emerging interests and opinions, and who, on the basis of this consideration, would consciously resist the instrumental ways in which one interest group or truth claim attempted to assert itself above others. Whilst such instrumentality is all very well in what Arendt called the realms of labour (our means-end concern with meeting material needs) and work (creating norm-bearing social and cultural institutions such as law, the arts or religion), it could establish, if unchecked, an

administratively overbearing and violent social and economic system in which the open variety of human history would be concealed by processes of mechanical reproduction and totalitarian rule.

It is because she is attentive to the nature of labour and work, and to how these can corrupt education, that Arendt's essay feels so timely for business schools. Business schools are concerned with how best to educate future managers, begging the further question: 'what kind of managerial practice do we want?' Given persistent critique, extending at least from Simon (1967) to Khurana and Spender (2011), Parker (2018) and Harley (2019), perhaps our mistake in business schools has been to prepare students for the instrumental realm of labour, and the norm-based truths associated with work, and to ignore what Arendt calls the realm of action, by which she means non-instrumental, contested thought? After all, as much as there are apparent similarities between academic and industrial practice, there are also important differences (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014). Perhaps teachers ought to spend more time in the classroom questioning the nature of the management itself, not just its own effectiveness, but its pervasive style (O'Doherty, 2016). Perhaps through the development of active thought - what Arendt likens to conscience - we might better stimulate wonder, curiosity and an openness to inquiry for its own sake, rather than on instrumental 'in order to ...' grounds (Hibbert et al., 2016). Certainly, there has been a growing realization that creating students who flourish in the labour conditions of market competitiveness, strategic goal setting and vocational practicality is insufficient (Hibbert et al. 2016; Khurana and Spender, 2012). Waddock and Lozano (2012), for example, study programs explicitly designed to raise the self-awareness and self-development of students. They advocate a need to develop a moral capacity for seeing things from others' perspectives, which itself emerges from what Gregory Bateson



(2000: 306) called system wisdom: a sensitivity toward the wider systems to which we humans, as individuals and as organized groups, are connected, upon which we are dependent, and in whose integrity we are implicated. From such wisdom can come a sense of what Zundel (2013) calls an organizational expression of open concern that is as much felt as it is logically argued for, and through which we realize what Peter Berger (2011: 76) calls a standing alongside oneself, an *ekstasis*, a consciousness through which we learn to eschew, challenge and amend the social practices into which we are thrown.

The question remains: how might this critical consciousness be brought about in business schools? As Painter et al (2018), Waddock and Lozano (2012), and Khurana and Nohira (2008) all attest, it can be realized by considering social as well as economic forms of flourishing, by encouraging collective rather than individualistic understanding; and by nurturing aesthetic sensitivity toward the inherent or intrinsic value of form and beauty. Mirvis (2008) also attests to the consciousness raising power of integrative, immersive experiences woven into leadership training, taking leaders out of typical career contexts by involving them in autobiographical storytelling to deepen self-reflection, and placing them in very different cultural and natural environments to enlarge their thinking.

Yet even here, amid this more humanistic atmosphere, there is, if we follow Arendt, a risk of the crisis persisting, if these calls for a more purposive, humanist business education remain committed to servicing the realms of labour and work. It is all very well to enjoin ourselves to a critique of capitalist-inspired education in which civic values are threatened (Nussbaum, 2010: 6-7). But the humanist tradition has an equivocal record when it comes to instilling requisite virtues in business programs: talk of the good is often wrapped up in a discourse of corporate beneficence and

entrepreneurial possibility (Maclean & Harvey, 2020). With Waddock and Lazono (2012: 282), for example, we find, as we did with advocates of *phronesis*, a concern “to engage with the practice- driven pragmatics of the real world.” Citing an AACSB accreditation task force report that business school faculty too often lack real-world contact and have limited awareness of the global and technological environment (unlike, presumably, the AACSB), Waddock and Lazono (2013) recommend greater emphasis on work-based practice and facilitating education beyond the classroom. Their concerns that business school teacher can be too theory and idea obsessed, with little connexion to peoples’ lives, or even empirical phenomena, are well expressed. But is the alternative to this theorising ‘work’ just fall in with the realm of labour and become more vocational? Moreover, whilst they, along with others such as Khurana and Nohira (2008), make persuasive efforts to augment this immersed, problem-centred approach with a thoroughgoing moral sensitivity (so with theorising ‘work’ of a different form), the institutional effect is to have humanist morals ameliorate commercial needs. Arendt would be suspicious here. Arendt would pause to ask why such a priority can be claimed, given the horrors perpetuated by many of the humanist cultures originating Europe. She would also ask whether these particular products of work, though they might indeed be preferable to others, were, precisely because of their persisting attraction, prone to being used instrumentally by the competing private interests found in the realm of labour?

Arendt asks questions, and her interest in education stems from its being the place in which question-asking is given serious institutional attention. Not just moral questions about right and wrong, scientific questions about verifiable truth claims, or technical, means-end questions about common sense skill, efficiency and effectiveness. No. More important still are the questions emerging in the realm of action constituted in

the expressive creation, exchange and transformation of opinions. The distinction is akin to that between instrumental exchange and curiosity-driven dialogue established by Hibbert et al. (2016); curiosity broadens the base of questions, and extends into questioning the basis of understanding and re-examining one's sense of self. Unlike work and labour, the realm of action is one of debate and argument, of witnessing and above of stimulating an inner two-in-one dialogue with oneself out of which schism, sitting at very heart of each human self, arises a conscience (Arendt, 1971: 159). The realm of action is grounded in thought, for it is, she argues, when thinking, when we are doing nothing as such, that we are most active, most alive to possibilities of things being otherwise, looking this way and that, taking our imagination for a walk, free from the chains of purposes that bind both labour and work.

Thinking engages us in posing "the unanswerable questions of meaning" through which we humans constitute ourselves first, as beings with a critical interest in how things are for their own sake, including ourselves, rather than in relation to other things to which they are means. In the realms of labour and work the prevailing questions are ones of knowledge, to which there are scientific, moral and practical answers (the rigour -v- relevance debate comes to mind). Here question-asking is fixed through answer-finding structures such as solutions, goals, warrants, controls, verification and prediction. Inquiry commences from an already established interest or position, and questions are framed in accordance with the expectation of an answer through which states of affairs are being continually managed in accordance with stated (but always changeable) goals. It is here that business schools have concentrated their attention. On the one hand they expose students to moral and scientific theories and values associated with work, around whose values, norms and methods has sedimented a groupthink: think of the unquestioned acceptance that has settled around conceptual

fabrications such as competition, growth, evaluative maximization, *homo economicus*, interest-bearing debt, money and contracts. On the other, they encourage students to become versed in the constantly changing practical skills, tasks and problems of modern work life. They justify an interest in software development training, for example, by appealing to norms of employability, which in turn are warranted by the Bologna protocols, and so on in an endless chain of purposes. Ideally, the conceptual/moral hand, and the practical hand come to work in concert, fusing theory and practice in ways that foster sound, rational management practice.

In contrast, Arendt's (1961/2006: 174) view of education asks us to provide a refuge from work and labour, a place devoted to questions of meaning rather than knowledge, questions where human activity - human history - is made subject to the two-in-one dialogue of critical reflection brought about when consciousness also becomes conscience. It is temporary place, a pause before the inevitable passage into the realm of labour and work, a place where students come alive to how humans have, historically, managed themselves, amid the uncertainties these attempts entail. The students collect stories and through them consider how shared human experience of managing has sedimented into tradition (the manners, mores, norms, and activities of managerial practice) that have allowed them to make sense of one another, and to feel at home together in an otherwise uncertain world. In these considerations they are also exposed to the fluidity and frailty of these traditions: to how facts, loyalties, organizations and empires can crack or wane. They might witness: the folly of low thoughts coupled to the unrestrained ambition of leaders (Enron); the often absurd inconsistencies of economic concepts (pollution as an externality); the rapidity with which sound common sense transforms into evil (the enthusiastic support of industrialists for genocide during Germany's Third Reich), the improbable and

impressive rise of supposedly deviant forms of capitalism (China), or connections between historical and current forms of community financing (building societies and crowdfunding), and in all this they can grasp the value of being skeptical about the universality of moral principles, the truthfulness of scientific laws and the purported value of much vaunted technical skills. Schooled in what has passed-by, and by teachers who refuse to offer easy 'yes or no' answers, students begin to move from questions of knowledge to questions of meaning, they learn to think alongside themselves, alive to the fabricated nature of human certainties.

Far from gathering facts and useful skills, education becomes a 'listening in' on how management practice has organized itself, and in hearing what has been said most definitively as knowledge and most typically as common sense, and so handed down as tradition. Rather than being schooled in absorbing and imitating this tradition, the student learns both to wander through and distrust it. This places education at odds with itself, insofar as students are encouraged to think beyond the practices in which they find themselves, including those associated with schooling. It also institutes a more vulnerable sense of the world in which a managerial faith in the practices of rational organization is seen as just that, both a faith, and so something both dogmatic and thoughtless. This 'out of jointness' and 'vulnerability' are not, however, signs of weakness, but strength, albeit very different from the assumptions of robustness that permeate orthodox understandings of the organizationally adept character business education is expected to form. The strength comes, as Rider (2017) suggests, from sensing how any practical activity or skill, and any theoretical claim, fact or moral principle, are in themselves without meaning. Meaning comes in the continual struggle to think through the activity or claim and in doing so implicate oneself in its resonance

in the world. This thinking takes place discursively, in public, and without the comforting, instrumentally fixed pinions of vested interests and position taking.

### ***BILDUNG* – LABOUR AND WORK**

For Arendt the root of the educational crisis was the increasing and seemingly irrepressible involvement of instrumentality and private interests in how and what students were taught. Arendt's diagnosis emerges from her view that European civilization had taken a wrong turn way back, beginning in the seventeenth century with the analytic (and thereby somewhat heretical) thinking of René Descartes. For Descartes existence was strictly parsed into mind (evidenced in the *qualia* of thinking) and matter (evidenced in the *qualia* of extension). There was little room for mystery, things were either one or the other. Of matter we could never be certain, there were always surprises and exceptions to confound tradition and common sense. Of mind, however, we could be more certain, especially the inner voice that was *ours* "a transaction of the mind with itself" (Descartes quoted by Arendt, 1978: 224) So whilst nothing is absolutely certain, we humans are the source of what is most certain (it is hard to doubt our inner self awareness, for example, the one encouraging us into doubt). Hence inside each of us is the secure space in which certainty might seed itself, and so, by extension, what is most certain in the world is what comes from within us, from the mind; we can be surer about what we produce – what our mind produces – than we can about anything beyond ourselves.

The upshot was the rise, and then habituated dominance, of mental phenomena, notably reason and activities associated with reason such as experimental method, which in turn, came to dominate ideas of education. Someone was educated insofar as

they were schooled in a well-organized and systematic use of things to inquire into and organize the world as though it were their world, whether personally, socially or materially (Arendt, 1958: 290-295). The world was what was created as such, by human reasoning, and education became the institutional enforcement of techniques for sensing the world in such a way. To know was to be more, not less, certain, and certainty emerged from the organizational forces by which language, social practice, material science and engineering, commercial production and norms cohered into an image of the world as a calculable coherence of forces at the centre of which was the reasoning, civilizing, human mind.

By assuming the world was there to be controlled and amenable to knowledgeable control, by placing humans at the centre of this ordering endeavor, and by placing the mind at the centre of the human, education became increasingly instrumental, a trend Arendt found most explicitly rendered in nineteenth century humanist projects of her native Germany. Here emphasis was on harmonising the forming of character, or *Bildung*, with wider economic, political and social settlement. It was a process that found expression in educational novels, *Bildungsroman*, whose plots traced the moral, intellectual and aesthetic education of young heroes, embarking on journeys to ameliorate a hidebound original position.

Carl Schorske (1967) uses two *Bildungsroman* to contrast the champions and critics of *Bildung*: Adalbert Stifter's *Indian Summer* (1857) and Gustave Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* (1869). *Indian Summer* traces the maturing of a youthful Heinrich Drendorf. Given the security of a financially solid and well-appointed household, Drendorf is schooled in science to the point where he wishes to remove himself from the prospects offered by his father's commercial office, and instead pursue the life of an independent scholar. As Schorske (1967) remarks, this was less a rupture

from bourgeois ideals than their fastidious extension into the practice of observation and experiment. Heinrich obsessed over composite and ordered descriptions of real things, finding in nature a larger, more intricate manifestation of the domestic order by which he had be weaned. And contemplating this outward coherence gave rise to an inward feeling of aesthetic sensitivity, an appreciation of form and beauty that found full and deliberate expression in art. In this passage out of patriarchal domesticity and into the world, Heinrich's teacher is one Freiherr von Risach, owner of the *Rosenhaus*, a house and garden that embodied a Platonic form of cultivated living and its owner the exemplary product of the finest education. The husbandry was both productive and beautiful, the building utterly appropriate to its setting, the ornament uplifting, and the occupant a man for all seasons. Amid the sheltering eaves and fronds Heinrich completes his passage into manhood – from domesticity and commerce, through science, to art, each stage building on and enhancing the former, to realize a perfectly functioning unity.

Stifter's ideal of educational development is fabricated along lines similar lines to those Arendt analyses as the movement from labour to work. Learning to labour finds students becoming skilful in the largely material and overtly practical activities associated with biological survival that have always concerned humans. With industrialization, however, this concern becomes an obsession, as an interest with shelter, food, warmth became a thoughtless pursuit and ownership of expendable possessions. Bound to commercial necessities, "the *animale laborans*, driven by the needs of the body, does not use this body freely" (Arendt, 1958: 118), finding itself given over in its entirety to producing and consuming, having limited capacity to hold onto 'wealth' which ultimately has to be 'spent' and consumed again; only this time with greater appetite and with more craving (Arendt, 1958: 124,133).



Respite had come in the form of work, exemplified by Heinrich's moving beyond the confines of his father's overtly commercial world, both outwardly, through scientific inquiry into truth, and inwardly, through the acquisition of aesthetic sensibility, taste and morality. Unlike labour, where things are used up and replaced, work touches on things that endure in use: the symbolic resonance of rituals, the legal judgment of a court, the knowledge garnered through scholarly inquiry, the intensities of sporting games, the love of a family, and the beauty of art. All these require a distance from the immediate interests and concerns of the body, a capacity for care and disinterested joy, and even a revelling in the mystery of things-to-be-discovered. Heinrich's education takes him from labour to work, from the considered management of assets to considerations of truth and beauty, whilst always relying on the insulated privilege purchased by commercial success. He develops cultural taste: a discerning sensitivity, a capacity to withhold emotion so that a natural ebullience in the face of beauty becomes something calm, schooled, and productive (Arendt, 1958: 294).

The problem, as Arendt notices, is that work relies on labour. At best Heinrich Drendorf will always be an isolated and rarefied minority occupying one *Rosenhaus* or another, merely a romanticizer (*Schwärmer*) who barely touches worldly affairs. Meantime, in daily life: "usefulness and utility are established as the ultimate standards for life and the world of men [sic]" (Arendt, 1958: 156); and no matter how tasteful those who work, they still surround themselves with, and rely upon, fabrications, and every fabricated product becomes again merely the means for another purpose in an endless devaluing of the things of the world as they make way for what is progressive and new. Moreover, in becoming cultured the likes of Heinrich educate themselves in order to realise a form of socially warranted self-perfection; they use art like any other thing, in this case as a tool to keep reality at bay (Arendt, 1961/2006: 203)

If Stifter's *Indian Summer* reveals the apotheosis of a bourgeois *Bildung* so refined it cannot outlive its privileged isolation, then Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* narrates its more worldly and sordid denouement. The central character, Frédéric Moreau, is far from central: his qualities are patchy, vague, mediocre and without unifying consistency. He inherits some money, undeserving, moves to Paris, and encounters little but his own inadequacy, in the company of middling acquaintances connected by a vague and equalising attraction to sex, money and social status. What passions he has diminish into thwarted and inappropriate flirtations, his business ambitions are quickly given over to mendacious projects and his politics - which might surely have been heightened by the novel's being set during the 1848 rebellions - find expression in a petty urge for orderliness. Flaubert is revealing an unsure world of turbid morals and contingent novelties, none of which could be grounds upon which to build social progress (Schorske, 1967).

Whereas Stifter is invisible as an author, confident that his mental creation is persuasively exposing the reader to the correct organizational form that education should take, Flaubert is continually breaking his narrative, as if to exemplify the contingent and stuttering nature of his character's education, and during those moments, when the narrator takes stock of Frédéric's actions, it is unclear if the disapproval is ironic, and whether the irony is then being approved. On the surface Paris gave the impression of unified, bourgeois settlement - its wide boulevards of honeyed stone and glass arcades, its commercial energy, its dignified, radiating centrality as the seat of state, its rose-lined gardens and electric-lit entertainments - surely if anywhere was a product of work this was? By officials it was seen as a city epitomized by self-reliant confidence. By its denizens though, even those like Frédéric Moreau who had means, it was experienced as a series of seductive and then frustrating

traps. Frédéric's everyday life is forever being organized by forces of labour and work: class snobbery, commercial obsession, technological development, and bureaucratic process. He finds these forces multiplying in the hierarchies of occupation that restrict his access to more lucrative business opportunities, in the incessant blur of advertisements and street choking streams of carriage traffic that divert and coral his movements, and in the casual and diverting dalliances with friends and lovers with whom he lives on metropolitan surfaces. His education, such as it is, becomes a reduction of expectation, to the point of resigning himself to the immediacy, insignificance and ephemeral nature of things as they occur, perhaps enjoyably, but always fleetingly, as work, and increasingly labour, take hold. It is, as Walter Benjamin noticed, a novel in which the meaningfulness of educational development and the plot cohere in mutual emptiness. At either end of the novel, and as weightless as the events it envelops, is a conversation between Frédéric and his friend Deslauriers, recalling an event of their youth where they presented a handpicked bouquet to the patron of their local bordello:

'That may have been,' said Frederic when they had finished, 'the finest thing in our lives.' 'Yes, you may be right' said Deslauriers, 'that was perhaps the finest thing in our lives.' (quoted in Benjamin, 1936/2007: 98)

Benjamin argues this ending, recalling the opening, is itself the finest way for Flaubert to end, for here, in these two educated characters "the meaning which the bourgeois age found in its behaviour at the beginning of its decline has settled like sediment in the cup of life." (Benjamin, 1936/2007: 99) It was this form of settlement that so worried and annoyed Arendt (1968/2007: 7): the empty gestures concealed by the appearance of

substantial possessions whose collective accumulation was called growth in both spirit and material wealth, a world of relentless, unquestioned, pointless labour sheathed by the superficial products of work.

## **FORMING CONSCIOUSNESS**

For Arendt education is something altogether less instrumentally progressive than that championed by Stifter and lamented by Flaubert. What she takes from *Bildung* is an enduring sense that education encompasses a sense of expressive struggle with meaning through which a sense of self is formed. In this she belongs to a lineage of thinking that comes straight from Goethe for whom, when it came to the question of proper development, nothing mattered more than transcending one's dependencies on social and economic position by nurturing confident self-reliance.

Where her forebears like Goethe had erred, however, was in championing an almost naturalistic, untutored quality of self-reliance in the distinction maker - the human individual - who, they assumed, could flower amid the litter of urban civility and reasoned attainment. Whilst not quite the noble savage, the ideal figure was emotionally and sensually sensitive, a sentimental figure like Frédéric Moreau, but with the intellectual wherewithal to sustain an independence of thought, and who would then bring these qualities into society, ennobling both themselves and others with the raw but increasingly refined taste and probity, coupled to an instrumental productivity. In erring toward a sentimentalism in the individual body, they also erred toward a conservatism in the public body, analyzing ways in which an organic ordering of family, cultural and economic roles might settle society into the well-governed orders

created through the efficiencies of human reasoning in whose hands we can, following Descartes, be more and not less certain.

Arendt agreed the job of education was to prepare people for occupying a world beset with labour and work, but this did not entail knowledgeable instruction in the theoretical claims of science, the dogmatic values of moralizers, or the practicalities of bureaucrats, industrialists and engineers. It was, rather, an experience realized through active inquiry, debate and argument, one whose participants acknowledged and resisted the authoritarian influences and tendencies that marble all organizational settings in which interests are vying with one another for prominence. Through continual inquiry into the conditions of labour and work that are forming and modifying the subject-object relations in which we find ourselves, students come to recognize how these relations institute certain forms of knowledge (scientific, moral and practical) that restrict as much as enhance understanding. They restrict because they cast the difficult questions of meaning into shadow: it is easier, for example, to conceptualize and manage for firm growth than it is to ask of oneself the question why a firm should grow and what am 'I' as a subject, in relation to such growth?

Arendt was taking inspiration from Kant, for whom thought was a continual experience of antinomy or unruliness, a term that Arendt jumps on, for here she finds a conceptual distillation of how, in being conscious, the individual subject is simultaneously both central and incidental. The subject perceives inwardly and intensely, and recalls experience, yet also only by virtue of pre-existing background sensory and institutional through which subjects as objects are constituted, and in thinking of themselves in relation to themselves and other objects they realize a condition of thinking that exists for the sake of themselves alone. The subject then gets a view of what it is to be a subject encountering objects, and in this experience, autonomy

emerges from being able to ask whether this particular gathering of a subject and objects might be constituted differently. Education for thinking is always caught up in the history of its attempted execution. As Landfester and Mettelmann (2020) argue, this form of *Bildung* refuses to oppose concerns of value with those of utility. Indeed it hints at their uneasy intimacy, and those experiencing *Bildung* embody a continual struggle of bringing the lofted and the grounded into perpetual conversation. This is especially so in a business school, where questions of value and utility are to the fore, and where *Bildung*, were it actively instituted, becomes the pedagogic embodiment of the repeated attempts to stretch beyond experience in order to evaluate it, whilst all the while recognising such a stretching move remains 'of this world' (Landfester and Mettelmann, 2020).

As Arendt was aware, this meant the thinking subject upon whom Kant placed so much weight was not a pre-existing unity (already having consistent cognitive faculties, free will, moral responsibility) able to cashier the objects of experience either at the behest of reason or romanticized feeling. Rather, subjects needed to continually think through themselves, from within history: it is not a given, the subject is always becoming an object alongside other objects, empirically placed in fields of experience and social relations into which it is thrown, steeped in previous attempts at inquiry, itself a creature of tradition, itself an object in the realm of labour (a worker, an asset, a consumer) and work (legal title, believer, pupil. In always becoming an object the subject is experiencing possibilities, it is transitioning into something, but once it *is* something it is conforming with scientific knowledge, moral principle or practical commonsense): to recall Benjamin, sedimentation is always occurring.

Both Heinrich and Moreau were captured by these transitioning, sedimenting mechanisms. Heinrich transitioned into an isolated, fine-balanced moralizer and truth

teller, whilst Frédéric remains confined to Parisian manners and mores – preternaturally aware of what the world immediately expects of him, and ill-equipped to imagine the potential to develop being anything other than a process of imitation. Heinrich’s *Bildung* is an escape from the knowledge of labour into the intellect and morality of work, whilst remaining increasingly dependent on labouring operations, whereas Frédéric’s is a capture by common sense. Both are attenuated forms of consciousness. Arendt’s *Bildung* forces consciousness into an awareness of, and joy in, the subject-constituting activity of unruliness, a plural condition in which emerges an inner “two-in-one voice” of thought:

Thinking accompanies life and is itself the de-materialized quintessence of being alive; and since life is a process, its quintessence can only lie in the actual thinking process and not in any solid results or specific thoughts. A life without thinking is quite possible; it then fails to develop its own essence —it is not merely meaningless; it is not fully alive. Unthinking men are like sleepwalkers.

(Arendt, 1971: 158)

And given the quintessence of life is processual and not substantive, what is essential cannot be a stable property, rather it is nothing more than being-as-potential: to think is to experience being as potentiality. Our capacity for thought arising from consciousness might be flimsy and patchy, but it is all we have to extricate us from the knowledge claims being instituted in realms of labour and work, realms in which the cruelty, taunting and evil that so often accompany claims of certainty can readily take wing and fly amok.

## CONSCIENCE

Encapsulating thought in consciousness forces thinking away from its being just a state of contemplation and towards something more active, where it touches and embeds itself in history, but in a history where time takes on a rectilinear rather than cyclical form (Young-Bruehl, 2010). A cyclical form of temporality has the future spinning out from, and referring back to, the already known conditions of the past (whether those of scientific fact, moral standards or common-sense habit), then conscience is redundant. In the realms of labour and work these cyclical temporalities dominate operational procedures progress toward known goals, and decisions are warranted by appeals to law, to fact or habit, all of which finds the future subservient to the past. It is Descartes' world where the mind has already created the forms a future world will, or ought, take and where agency is constituted in choosing from clear, manageable and measured options.

In contrast, in rectilinear forms of temporality the future is manifest in unique, unpredictable events; the subject is not just conscious of this potential, but finds themselves implicated, as the seat of such potential calling the future toward itself, exposing its inherent and necessary incompleteness. Here transition gives way, potentially, to transformation, though one that can always be held in abeyance, or refused. It is an experience of what Arendt calls conscience. Conscience stretches into a future where there are no certainties, taking thought away from the tranquillity of contemplation and towards the tense and tensed experience of action (Arendt, 1978: 226, 236). In action there is no choice (choice being a function of a knowledgeable relation to the world in which futures are laid out through mental operations and



appear as options, probabilities etc) but an urging upon the self to act upon itself, to think itself into being.

Conscience obliterates Descartes' separation of mind and matter: it brings oneself toward oneself, but in action, and thoughtfully. It takes action beyond its context by breaking the cycle in which the future is made dependent on the past. It recalls the active forms of interpretation Hibbert et al. (2016) identify in collaborative learning through which subjects follow an interpretative arc swinging from thought on past tradition to present and future action. In doing so, they re-frame the gathering place of the always incomplete vantage point of subjective learning *as a generative experience*: crossing the fault line into conscience becomes a momentary incision into a realm of action free from prior determining conditions, whether these conditions be the theories and ideas of scientific truth, beauty and ugliness, morals (realm of work), or the practical common sense sedimented from servicing material needs (realm of labour). Yet it is only momentary, because in its very expression learning can find itself woven into objectifying forces whose truths look to clarify and manage experience rather than wonder at its mystery.

Associating *Bildung* with conscience finds education being an unruly exposure to the possibility of transgressing and transforming knowledge. This interplay is created firstly through the dialogue of active thinking, whether in conversation with others in exchanging opinions, or with oneself in critical consideration of one's own desires, actions and affiliations. Second, comes the forward projection of one's self, in which the plurality of positions to which any thinking self is exposed prompt an unruly leap to consider things anew as a subject freed from the comforts and certainties of objective conditions. This exposure to newness - what Arendt (1971: 371) calls natality, the second birth to which all humans are potentially privy - can only ever be momentary,

for no sooner is the fault line crossed than the subject is subjected to the institutional machinations of power once more, private interests wash in, attempting to maintain the apparent (normal) necessities in organizational life by granting certain roles, bodies and institutions symbolic, executive and legal force, and denying influence to 'others', whose status and range is tightly controlled.

Historically these 'others' have been the transgressing bodies that have been refused proper recognition - the bodies of non-whites, women, children, the insane, refugees, animals, tramps, clowns, anarchists and slackers – bodies for which there has never been much in the way of an available better state. What is left for these 'others' has been the of irony playing roughly and then delicately with the institutional strings held taut by the pinions of 'truth', ping-pong-ing them to a point of institutional irritation, snapping them perhaps. Yet "irony", as H D (1944: 17) notices "is bitter truth/wrapped up in a little joke", a joke that is all too often on those transgressive souls whose refusal to comply with collective standards confines them to an isolated individuality. Sure their refusal is its own *Bildung*, but one that can be exhausting, annoying, perplexing, as in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage* (1938: 210) which follows the development of Miriam who has found herself educated into a state of near penury, eking out a secretarial life in Edwardian London, surrounded and roundly ignored by so many Edwards (and Georges, and Harrys) all of them sober sorts, keen on business and sport, sometimes uneasy about others but never themselves, living in a realm of settled ideas and concepts (patriarchy, colonialism, heteronormativity) and as thoughtless as a wide, graveled avenue running regularly toward a flat, straight horizon, devoid even of a leavening line of trees. Miriam learns simply, by keeping going, toward the edge of the world, bereft of words or arguments in which her convictions might find shape, until

she realizes that being alone (and yet besides herself in thought) need not condemn her to living in a corner, with only death for company. All it needed was transgression:

Greater than the sadness of not being good, more thrilling, was the joy of feeling ready to take responsibility for oneself. I must create my life. Life is creation. Self and circumstances the raw material. But so many lives I can't create. And in going off to create my own I must leave behind uncreated lives. Lives set in motionless circumstances. (Richardson, 1938: 508)

From transgression comes transformation, but she could only enact this by leaving others behind: there's the rub. Miriam's education is in a self-government and self-awareness in which the orthodoxies of labour and work are tested and transgressed matter-of-factly: new ways of living open up, but always and only with reference to herself in her personal and often immediate circumstances. Arendt is more ambitious, hence the importance of education, for here the interplay of consciousness and conscience, and the plurality and natality that ensue, is instituted for all students rather than left to the accident of personal tenacity that Miriam endured.

## **EDUCATION, KNOWLEDGE AND MEANING**

In his semi auto-biographical novel *The First Man*, Albert Camus (1995: 114) remembers how:

... school did not just provide them an escape from family life. At least in M. [Germain's] class, it fed a hunger in them more basic even to the child than to the

man, and that is the hunger for discovery. No doubt they were taught many things in their other classes, but it was somewhat the way geese are stuffed: food was presented to them and they were asked to please swallow it. In M. Germain's class, they felt for the first time that they existed and that they were the objects of the highest regard: they were judged worthy to discover the world.

Camus' teacher creates a place in which to enact active thinking, both in dialogue and solitude, free from the vicissitudes of labour and work, a place to begin again and again, exposing oneself to becoming new through a plurality of opinions none of which are yet resigned to being certainties. Students are objects of high regard worthy of undertaking discovery: they are subjects for the sake of subjects.

For Arendt, this space of discovery is constituted by encouraging students to adopt a unruly orientations toward tradition, and allowing the 'others', those who are typically excluded, to become the bearers of truths that run wild, constituting potentialities that standard while male folk (sic) are neither invited nor equipped to make. It is a process of expansive maturation, where students are encouraged to listen to events of human history as if it were a patchwork of musicality, one textured by low, ruminating rhythms, by arias of declared self-assertion, by discordant alliances of apparently mis-matched tone, and by standard tunes and authorized deviations. And in apprehending such rich detail students come to appreciate how certain events and values in history become distinct and form tradition, they learn what counts as truth (fact, principle and common sense), and being steeped in such they push at its edges, they take it on and in doing so they form a conscience that, *ipso facto*, cannot be governed by anything other than itself. .

Without the unruly capacity for questioning tradition, education becomes little more than the acquisition of stone-like facts scattered upon a dried-up riverbed of sedimented agreement going by the name 'civilization'. And it is to the stymying of this thoughtful, unruly conscience, suggests Arendt - a conscience that as Camus implies is potentially a most natural thing amongst the young - that most western forms of *Bildung* have been dedicated. These are the forms that have been overly influenced by Descartes elevation of human cleverness, an elevation in which the authorising power of tradition grounded in collective agreement had become increasingly attenuated by one grounded in instrumental reason: the raiment of truth became less mysterious and ornate, a more impersonal, functional cloth woven from tightly woven threads of entrained cause and effect. By inaugurating the pursuit of knowledge, at the expense of meaning, Descartes opened the way for educators to equate learning to the elimination of mystery: the more we know, the more certain we might be, closing off divergences and schisms in the horizons of inquiry, widening the reach of man into the unknown. Under the impress of knowledge, to learn from tradition was to learn from a storehouse of earlier attempts at applying reason. To learn of history as scene of progress, in which instruments became more powerful, opening up the world, with the telescope then microscope, with expeditions, with classification systems, but always with man and man's mind at the centre, extending his reach. Education was, and still remains, the institution of a specific form of learning in which knowledge grew and meaning waned, bringing with it truths that instilled an atmosphere of control, conformity and comfort. The crisis has been naturalized by the globalized spread of this specific form of learning, one at which the business schools consciously excels.

Arendt's objection to this learning is telling: the world is being viewed as a laboratory, first for commercial and practical development, and then aesthetic and

moral elevation, so that, like Heinrich, students might all develop and refine themselves in accord with rational techniques. Here conscience and consciousness overlap, becoming almost synonymous, because in equating thinking with instrumental reasoning managers associate certainty and security with right and proper conduct. Here conscience becomes a source of certification, a confident and assertive check on our ignorance and our irrational desires. As Phillips (2015) reminds us, this restrictive, reprimanding role assigned to human conscience has a rich history, perhaps nowhere better than when mused over by Hamlet:

But that the dread of something after death  
(The undiscovered country from whose bourne  
No traveller returns) puzzles the will  
And makes us rather bear those ills we have  
Than fly to others that we know not of.  
Thus conscience does make cowards (Shakespeare, 2016: 3,1, 70-95)

Cowards, that is, for whom the unknowable future (the one Arendt is encouraging students to leap into) is better treated as something to be known, which means treating it as the past (cyclical time). Conscience then becomes the executive mechanism by which this known condition corals future possibility, typically through a hectoring instantiation of cultural and practical legacies encapsulated in tradition. It ensures development, or *Bildung*, stays the assigned course, confined, unwilling to be borne by undiscovered countries, repressing the fault line, snuffing out plurality and natality, content with the realms of labour and work.

By relating to tradition quizzically and so something to be taken on, in a spirit of unruliness, Arendt conceives a different form of conscience: an expansive force that is generous, mystifying and even disturbing. It is revealed through the struggle to pose questions which, when posed, fail to indicate the kind of response required: there is no gap to fill, instruction to follow, or goal to fulfil. The questions of meaning concern criteria, not content: “What is factually entrancing?” “What is ethically provocative?”, “What is it to hold things that are so fixed they common to us all?” Criteria either relate concepts to objects of specific sorts (facts are related, for example, to laboratory instruments or scales through which tools they are generated), or they relate concepts to other concepts (concepts of knowledge are related, for example, to those of authority and authorship). In thinking about these relations (which are questions of meaning), two related forms of learning occur. First comes an intellectual familiarity with the criterial range of possible uses sedimented as tradition (knowledge is related to the regularity of identified cycles of cause and effect, to methods of verification, to an urge for organizational control and propriety). Second comes the thoughtful acceptance of this familiarity: a conscious acceptance of the criterial uses by which knowledge appears. Where the first involves a consciousness of events and interpretations, the second invokes consciousness of their contingency, out of which emerges conscience, which in turn prompts an understanding that things could always be otherwise, that the truths of tradition (facts, principles, commonsense) are inevitably fragile and can be thought anew, notably by those ‘others’ who do not fit, but in not fitting see more clearly the limitations of knowledge that prevail along the corridors of established opinion. Being exposed to the different ways history has been sedimented into tradition, and the uncertainties thrown up in identifying how it is subjects have been prepared to accept these uses in the realms of labour and work, exposes students to what remains a

perpetual disappointment with criteria (the kind of disappointment that lead us to undertake further inquiry). In absorbing this disappointment students gain conscience with which to confront a culture with its own criteria as they are played out within tradition.

To exemplify this agonistic, opinionated relation to tradition Arendt is drawn to Walter Benjamin's characters 'the flaneur' and 'the collector', both being figures for whom plurality and natality have become part of an expressive performative routine. Collectors are figures who, far from seeking to restore the authority of the past by invoking tradition, find the past a place of scattered objects that might be wrested by curiosity and delight from their overlooked interment. Simply being alongside the objects is sufficient: no longer in dull thrall to usefulness, the objects gather to themselves a sense of queer, impenetrable distinction, an aura that cannot be classified or controlled: "against tradition the collector pits the criterion of genuineness; to the authoritative he opposes the sign of origin." (Arendt, 1968/2007: 44). And as Benjamin moves from figures collecting things (like books) to collecting everyday quotations and images from the past, he moves as a wanderer, a flaneur, walking without apparent practical purpose, unmoved by dialectical propulsion towards goals, sensually curious about those symbolic and textual fragments whose power had once come from their proximity to ordinary reality but which had become somehow incidental and even lost (Zundel, 2014). Arendt enjoys Benjamin's interest in these small past realities: the idioms, rhymes, typeface, adverts, buildings and songs (the products of labour and of work) which live along the edges of conceptual unities and theories. It is a history of things that now live along the edge or beyond prevailing culture, and he takes these things, stripped of their original association and function, and finds in them an originality to set against the traditions that, being products of labour and work, they



once did so much to sustain. These fragments are lifted into the present (Arendt reminds us that Benjamin's attested method was one of drilling for particulars rather than excavating for generalities), and, having been transformed by time into something concentrated and distinct, and so collectible, this distinction becomes a disturbing strangeness.

To relate to tradition like this, to apprehend the past as a place of rich and strange fragments from which plurality we might be provoked to begin anew by taking tradition on, is to sense how education simultaneously conserves and disturbs. An exposure to the past is an encounter with what the world has amounted to, and such through expert-led, normative forays – the thinking emerging from lectures, the talks, the reading, the conversation, the application of concepts – can come a deep and respectful familiarity with the conserved genius, struggle and error gathered as 'tradition', and following this a sense of what can be taken on and renewed through projecting will:

Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and, by the same token, save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable. (Arendt, 1961/2006: 193)

It is a point that becomes instituted when schools, such as business schools, create institutional space in which students are introduced by experts to the tradition by which managerial and work practice has been set down as knowledge. The school acts as a refuge, shielding students from the world awhile, allowing them to learn of the world thoughtfully and in such a way that they might come to care for it by willing

themselves to enact its traditions differently. The thoughtful are neither so patinated by disappointment nor mollified by quiet resignation as to have given up on beginning again, and so are equipped “to intervene, to alter, to create what is new”, and without such a space, without education “the world, in gross and in detail, is irrevocably delivered up to the ruin of time” (Arendt, 1961/2006: 189).

## **OUR UNRULY FUTURE**

In the *The Human Condition* Arendt reflects:

[W]e are perhaps the first generation which has become fully aware of the murderous consequences inherent in a line of thought that forces one to admit that all means, provided they are efficient, are permissible and justified to pursue something defined as an end (Arendt, 1958: 229)

There is simply no room for thinking, for considering traditions anew, for wondering whether things might be otherwise: what matters is the knowledge to better bring about a controlled passage from knowable means to known ends. It is an ordering that finds its apotheosis in modern management practice: in strategic restructuring programmes, in financial instruments, in design thinking, in human resource management. Indeed everywhere in business, and no more so than in business schools, in whose confines the accidents and pauses of everyday organizational life are suspended, allowing teachers and students to deal in the untainted currencies of instrumental knowledge. This knowledge takes the form of scientific theory, moral principle and practical know-how, both in terms of content (such as theories of agent-

principal relations, the details of competition law or compliance codes, or vocational software skills) and delivery (such as theories of pedagogy, research ethics codes, or online classrooms). The questions being asked and answered are semantic and semiotic: How to be more enterprising? What are key drivers of value? How to deliver more relevant, multiple skill sets in a timely way and across national borders? They are questions to which answers are available, not just in terms of content, but grammatical space. They are of the form: How do you manage operations using this software? Here, push these buttons. How do you measure and improve performance? Here, encourage, count and then reward these outputs. We accustom students to the expectations woven into the framing of these questions. They are equivalent in form to the simple instruction: “add 2”. An infinite number of regular spaces have been granted to those responding to such an instruction, the answering space is ready-prepared (Bearn, 2012), whether within the discipline called management studies, or all the other disciplines riven with managerial code (O’Doherty, D., & De Cock, C. 2017). This is what Arendt laments in her observation that, with the onset of the modern age, we no longer pause to think about the kinds of questions we are asking: knowledge is the only way of relating to the world, meaning has been lost.

Like Arendt, critics of business schools are concerned that an overtly instrumental worldview intent on, and passionate about, doing more with less, has become an all-sided view: they lament the lack of interest in, or concern for, wider system effects of this productive zeal. Yet typically the remedy being offered by critics has been to call for a reconfiguration of theory (moving from shareholder to stakeholder theory, say, or an interest in theories of care and practical wisdom), coupled to a recalibration of the relative weight given to the different forms of knowledge (greater emphasis on morality and practical engagement). Whilst this might

ameliorate the experience of an instrumentally governed world, it does nothing to challenge it: the realms of what Arendt calls labour and work continue to dominate, and the world continues to be related to as a calculable coherence of forces that can be brought under human management. The fact that experience keeps upsetting this dominant worldview, the fact that things continue to resist being an object of control, seems to simply encourage business schools to press further with the knowledge project in both how and what is taught: to better refine theory, to effect more nuanced forms of mutual regulation, and be more adept in vocational skills. For Arendt, this simply serves to deepen the crisis, for it further conceals what was once available to us as beings able to inherit a tradition and take it on, but is now increasingly lost: the possibility of thinking anew.

The proper job of education is to provide an institutional space within which students learn develop a conscience, which they do, along with teachers, by thoughtfully posing the unanswerable questions of meaning. Questions of meaning arise through the active consideration of human tradition, and how it is humans have attempted to organize in relation to the practical demands of survival and flourishing, and the evaluative demands of truth, beauty and the good. Thinking is consequent not on the classification and ordering of these attempts into those which are better or worse, but the willingness to set them out of joint, to apprehend them as though they can die and be begun anew, to think with and then through them. It is to step outside of the managed atmospheres of comfort and control, and there to encounter those conditions of vulnerability and possibility which, for Arendt, we cannot alter, because they are the conditions of life itself: those of our finitude, coupled to our natality. Through this expansion of attentiveness students are to gain an enlarged and unprejudiced sense of tradition brought about in inquiry and argument, both with others and themselves, and

second by developing a will - the tool of conscience, to use a working word - through which things can be reset, begin again, in unruly ways (Arendt, 1971: 413). Conscience: a scandal of confrontation that is natural because it comes through birth, a beginning anew (Loroux, 2017). What emerges is a forming of conscience which reveals itself in an acquired inability to disappear into categories or blend with positions, the scandalizes in order to protect and conserve what can be properly held in common as an idea, without its being put into service. Without conscience education becomes a handmaiden for interests that see fit to issue instruction and demand imitation, and should these interests become as dominant as those of technologically mediated business there is little room for subjects bearing witness to objects, only for objects. Indeed, without conscience the routines and roles into which subjects are continually being thrown become all they have. They become objects: some are entitled, many are exploited, all of them thoughtless. It is only in refusing the comforts of tradition that tradition can survive.

Teachers have a critical role in creating a space for conscience. They are to show the students what the world has become by studying the myriad ways management, economies and trade have hitherto been organized. This showing uses concepts and images of language, but critically, so that meaning is neither smoothed out by standardising frames or pulverized into practical know. This means developing, through collegial academic work and labour, a theoretical authority that relishes conjecture, that pursues and tests concepts, that does not shy from argument, that experiences inquiry as a struggle, that bears witness. Here theory (*theoria* or what Arendt likens to the contemplation or witnessing of ideas and opinionated claims) becomes a spectacle, akin to theatre, where students spectate and might be pulled into the drama, comedy and tragedy of it all. This requires more than just offering students models, cases and

categories by which meaning appears. It means, in addition, attending to the atmospheric conditions of learning, breaking the order of the standard classroom (Beyes & Michels 2014), and thereby making meaning struggle and even topple.

With thinking, Arendt is restoring contemplation to an active space. It has little to do with its pre-modern elevation as a medium for touching the divine, nor is it, in its modern guise, a superfluous aside to the necessary unfolding of historical or natural laws. Arendt's *theoria* is the thoughtful and willed completion of action: it is the critical setting by which what is done accounts for itself, in relation to the idea/claim/opinion informing the action as it unfolds (Arendt, 1958: 20-21; 302-303). This accounting can be done by those creating theory, but also by those watching on, and as in theatre, which is an experience in itself, this watching has no ulterior purpose. The audience (*theatai*), look upon those performing and understand it as a spectacle, as a struggle to make something last beyond its expression, and which can be contemplated and wondered over, and through which a conscience might emerge (Arendt, 1971: 79). And because, Arendt (1971: 83) argues, the withdrawing audience for this form of theatre are those going through a second birth, as she calls it, they are replete with possibility, and so might better realize that, in their newness, it is they who will be inheriting the world being presented to them, a world that they might then knock awry a little, or intensify, or attempt to discount completely. Through education they might come to realize, albeit momentarily, that in their newness they have been placed between forces that Arendt (1971: 172-3) calls the infinity of the past and the infinity of the future and which they find *aimed at themselves*. It is this emphatic sense of implication as well as potential that elevates and animates consciousness into conscience.

There is nothing certain, correct or predictable about this conscience, it is more a flickering, and uncanny in its never being fully an object of knowledge. The job of

education is to foster it to the point that, when students enter the realms of labour and work, the flickering stays alive, a generational flickering. As the students come into the world they struggle to keep up the curiosity, humility and originality generated by conscience; its unruliness gets diverted and consumed by labour and work. Perhaps irredeemably so if Arendt's diagnosis of the modern condition is apposite, yet that does not excuse us from attempting to generate and keep the flickering alive. After all, that is all that conscience is, just an attempt, wanting for it to remain so.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the AMLE editor Bill Foster, the reviewers, and my colleagues at MPP at Copenhagen Business School for all their robust and critical encouragement.

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