

Theodore E. Uehling, Jr. 1935- 2006

Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., founder of the University of Minnesota, Morris (UMM) philosophy program, died in March 2006 at his home in Ely, Minnesota. A gifted teacher, Uehling was a much beloved UMM professor for over 30 years.

“Ted had an amazing intellect, but he was an even more remarkable human being,” states John Mason ’85 of his teacher. “Ted was in a position to mold countless young minds, and I am confident there is an entire army of people that he has influenced to try to make the world a better place. In my mind this is his legacy. Intelligence and human kindness are rare commodities indeed. Ted not only possessed a unique combination of both, but he leveraged his talents to challenge promising young minds to examine their lives, their beliefs, and their actions....”

His area of scholarly specialization and publication was Kantian aesthetics. Uehling received his B.A in 1959 and Ph.D. in 1965, both from the Ohio State University. He published The Notion of Form in Kant's Critique of Aesthetic Judgement (Mouton, 1971).

Ted's long and productive UMM career, from 1963 until 1996, began and ended in the classroom. As an early member of UMM's faculty, he was instrumental in overall program development of the new campus in the early 1960s. In 1966, he was elected as the UMM Faculty of the Year. The following year, he developed a four year seminar honors program and served as its first director. In 1969, he received the All- University wide Horace T. Morse Award for Outstanding Contributions to Undergraduate Education.

In addition to teaching, he served in various administrative roles including director of general education, assistant dean, and acting chair of humanities. Uehling's obituary reads: “His first love was his students, and although he served short stints in administrative positions, he always chose to return to teaching.” In 1971, he was elected to the Outstanding Educators of America. In 1975, Uehling and two colleagues, Peter French and Howard Wettstein, organized the first UMM Philosophy Colloquium, a campus tradition that continues today and, in 1976, they inaugurated the now internationally recognized journal, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*. Ted served as an editor for this journal for its first 20 volumes.

Ted's professional activities were wide ranging. In 1984 and 1986, he led two National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminars for Secondary School Teachers, titled "John Locke and the Philosophical Foundations of the American Constitution" and "The Ethical and Social Thought of Kant and Rousseau," respectively. In 1985, Ted served as vice president of the North American Kant Society. He was also a long time member of the American Philosophical Association, the Minnesota Philosophical Society, as well as the North American Kant Society.

In 1998, friends and alumni of Uehling created an endowed scholarship that recognizes his dedication to UMM students and his contributions to UMM. As requested by his family, memorials may be sent to the Theodore E. Uehling, Jr. Scholarship Fund or the Distinguished Visiting Professorship in the Liberal Arts Fund at UMM.

“Dr. Uehling was the first person who encouraged me to question everything in the world about me and who ensured me that being curious is a great thing. He also inspired me to believe that thinking big philosophical questions about life was normal and expected.”

Jennifer Grasswick '88

“I may have learned more in Ted's classes than in any other...what I learned in Ted's classes has supported me in my life's decisions on a regular basis...”

Kenneth Kollodge '65

“What I admired in Ted was the fact he did not try to inculcate knowledge in his students, control their thinking, or influence their choices. He encouraged them to discover things on their own. His greatest joy was to observe their process of discovery.”

Anne Stewart-Uehling, spouse

“He was influential in allowing me to become the person I am today...he challenged me to discipline my thinking....I am grateful and want you to know that Ted was very good at what he did, and I am a better person for knowing him.”

Kelly Quick '94

“I was saddened to learn of the recent passing of Ted Uehling. As a philosophy major at UMM in the early nineties, I had the opportunity to study with him. At first, I found him intimidating. My first assignment from Ted is long forgotten, but it must have had something to do with Bertrand Russell. I do remember I didn’t do very well on it. At the top of the page, in his neatly tight handwriting, was written, ‘See me.’

Up the Camden Hall stairs I trudged. I timidly knocked on the office door. He invited me in, asked me to sit down, and I pulled my paper out of my backpack. He said, ‘You’ve got a good start here. But you need to go further.’ He asked me questions. I scribbled notes in the margins. He allowed me to go back to my dorm and rewrite it. As I was leaving, his steely blue eyes quickly shifted into a twinkle. He winked and said, ‘Next time, come in before the paper is due.’

That’s exactly what I did. Every time I had a paper due in one of Ted’s classes, I made my way up the Camden Hall stairs for his assistance. We talked about baseball, thunderstorms, music, and love. He held my mind to the same high standard to which he held his own, with more confidence in me than I had in myself.

Finally one day I burst out in the middle of a Philosophy of Kant class with the proclamation that I was going to refute Ted. He feigned shock, the other students laughed, and I presented my argument. Class time ended, but Ted asked me to stay. The old feelings of intimidation returned, as I worried I had overstepped my boundaries. But the familiar twinkling blue eyes and the slow grin gave him away. I had raised the same argument one of his colleagues had raised when Ted presented his paper at the most recent philosophical conference. Ted told me my ideas were valuable insights, I shouldn’t be afraid to speak up in class, and I was much smarter than I gave myself credit for.

I won’t exaggerate and say that this changed my entire perspective, and that this moment gave me all the confidence I would ever need in my whole life. But Ted gave me one of the first votes of confidence I ever received, and for that I am grateful.”

Renee Axtell '93

I remember those days during the 70’s at UMM fondly. It was my first full-time position in philosophy and it was wonderful to be involved with Ted and Peter French during the early days of the Midwest Studies in Philosophy. We were extremely energetic, to the point sometimes of exhaustion. One year I think we had 15 or 20 speakers in philosophy coming to campus, much more than is common almost anywhere, even in large departments. And Ted handled a lot of the details, he was much more of a detail person than I certainly and probably Peter as well. Now that I’m handling the details, they somehow evaporate into a kind of fog. It was a wonderful first position for me since Ted and Peter, and UMM as an institution were very devoted to good teaching. That’s not the case everywhere, and I learned a great deal from it.

It’s said in Jewish tradition that the loss of a person is like the loss of the whole world. In Ted’s case, his outlook on life informed by his massive knowledge of the philosophical tradition constituted a kind of whole world. It’s very sad that so much of this was lost relatively early in his life. But this is an occasion to remember it, to remember how much he had and how much he was.

Howard Wettstein
University of California, at Riverside.

(Courtesy of the UMM Alumni Relations Office and the Philosophy Discipline at the University of Minnesota at Morris.)