

Michael Bang Petersen

Dear John,

No one has had as profound an impact on my intellectual life as you and Leda and I will forever remain grateful for how you conveyed the basic principles of how to be an intellectual with not only your rigor but also with your warmth, humor, friendship and support.

Back in 2005, I wrote to Leda – by coincidence catching her one of the few times she checked her email – some ramblings about how evolutionary psychology might help explain the constituents of the ideological outlooks of Rousseau and Hobbes and asked if I could visit the CEP. For some reason the two of you saw something in those ramblings from a young Danish political scientist and said yes. I think that “yes” has been one of the most important decisions someone made towards me.

Being in the intellectual environment of the CEP made a lasting impact. The daily discussions with the grad students such as Andy, Aaron, Tess, Daniel, Dave and Annie, of course. But especially, the spontaneous lectures that you gave when we drove somewhere in your car. Or when we sat late at night in your kitchen. I remember one time when the meeting had started around 9 pm. When the clock turned 2 am, I tried to say that I better get home to sleep but you insisted, “there are important matters we need to finish”. And you were right.

In the last years I have moved a bit away from basic research in evolutionary political psychology and moved towards more applied research and policy advising, for example, in the context of the corona pandemic and now as the government-appointed director of a large project to examine the challenges to democracy in the 21st century. Even if these projects have been less explicitly adaptationist, the basic principles of evolutionary psychology have been guides. Especially, I have tried my best to follow your principles of intellectual curiosity and courage.

Thank you for everything.

Michael