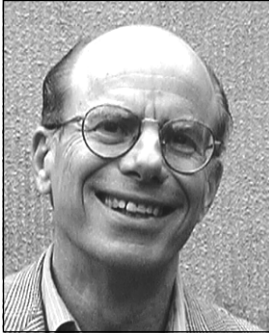


Stephen D. Krasner

Disciplines and Differences



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My academic goals in Berlin were to work on two subjects that have long engaged my attention: international political economy and sovereignty. The common buzzword for both is globalization. Many observers have argued that technological change has led to dramatic increases in international transactions that have revolutionized the politics and economics of global relations and transformed conventional sovereignty. I am skeptical. In my book on international political economy, which I almost, but did not quite finish, I argue that effective sovereignty is a necessary condition for globalization rather than that globalization is undermining sovereignty. Effective national governance creates the conditions under which globalization can take place.

While I sometimes have felt that I have been whistling in the dark on this issue, I found a particularly congenial group of globalization skeptics at the Wissenschaftskolleg, a group that included economists, anthropologists, political scientists, and political theorists. Robert Wade, in particular, whose work I have long admired helped to organize us to meet on a regular basis. I had written several chapters of my planned book a couple of years ago, chapters with which I was deeply dissatisfied, but I was not sure how I could reconfigure my presentation in a more effective way. Like all, or at least most social science enterprises of this type, this kind of reconceptualization is a solitary exercise. But I know that without the regular meeting of our group, I could never have proceeded so effectively. We academics may be mostly introverts, but we cannot work effectively without an environment in which we can extrovert ourselves, at least some of the time.

Sovereignty has been my second major focus at the Wissenschaftskolleg. The basic rules of sovereignty – non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states and recognition of juridically independent territorial entities – are well known but frequently violated. Every major peace treaty from Westphalia through Vienna and Versailles to Helsinki and Dayton has included provisions that have protected the rights, first of religious minorities, then ethnic minorities, then human rights more generally. Rulers, especially rulers in weaker states, have never been free to do what they wanted. During the year, I elaborated this theme in several articles including a contribution on sovereignty to the new *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. But the most exciting, at least exciting for me, piece of work that I completed on the question of international norms and rules had to do with the Sinocentric international system rather than the European one. The traditional Sinocentric world was one of hierarchy rather than formal equality. China was at the center and Chinese values demanded that other political entities offer at least symbolic obeisance. But to what extent were these norms, like the norms of sovereignty, honored? Not very much, as it turns out. China was, for instance, not able to secure deference from the Islamic political entities of central Asia, which were episodically militarily more powerful than China itself. Organized hypocrisy, saying one thing and doing another, was as common in the Sinocentric world as in the Eurocentric one. Writing this paper on East Asian international relations was fun and it reminded me again that my tastes go to knowing a little about a lot (I am hardly an expert now on east Asia) rather than a lot about a little. Issues of

sovereignty or how it has changed are no where more apparent than in Europe. In the context of the European Union, the conventional rules of sovereignty are hardly visible. Supranational institutions such as the European Court of Justice and qualified majority voting mean that the member states of the Union are no longer autonomous, a fact that they recognize and that many of them, especially Germany, embrace.

The reasons for Germany's strong attachment to the European Union are not mysterious. Two world wars suggested that Germany was not likely to secure any kind of attractive outcome operating on its own and that German interests could better be promoted in a multilateral context in which Germany could get more of what it wanted by limiting its own freedom of action in ways that would reassure its neighbors. But, of course, there is something more: Germany is still struggling to come to grips with its own past. My year at the Wissenschaftskolleg has only reinforced something that I knew from my one earlier experience abroad, two years teaching secondary school in northern Nigeria: understanding another culture is not easy. In the fall there was extended newspaper coverage about the death of a six-year-old boy, half Iranian, half German, in a small town in Saxony, an event that had taken place a couple of years ago but was revived by a story in the *Bildzeitung*. The boy's mother claimed that he had been murdered at a local swimming pool by neo-Nazis. On the face of it, this seemed implausible. The pool was crowded. The mother asserted that her son might have been tormented before he was drowned. It seemed unlikely that no one would have come forward. Nevertheless, the case received extensive media attention. The president and the chancellor became involved.

What was one to make of this? That the Germans, or the German political system, or German politicians were particularly and acutely sensitive to racist incidents or that they simply did not have their feet on the ground: that they were so anxious about appearing to be indifferent that they gave credence to a story that strained credibility? But in the end, the medical evidence, although not decisive, suggested that the boy had a congenital heart problem that could easily have contributed to his death.

This was not the only incident during the year that left me somewhat perplexed, or better put, with an understanding that I did not exactly know what was going on. Proposals by some members of the Christian Democratic party for a German *Leitkultur* prompted a long debate that ended in a whimper but, I wondered, how many Germans really do believe in a *Leitkultur*! While I think I under-

stand the various opinions that Germans might hold about something like a *Leitkultur*, I do not have a good sense of how these views are distributed across the population.

In contrast to these two incidents, the discussion about immigration policy, a leading story through most of the spring, seemed eminently amazingly rational. The special commission, headed by an important Christian Democratic politician, also included some technical experts, one of whom, Rainer Münz from Humboldt University, I had the pleasure of meeting several times at the Wissenschaftskolleg. The Commission's proposal to base immigration on skills and the needs of the German economy were eminently sensible. It even appeared possible, although I would not bet on it, that the major parties might reach agreement.

This effort to understand the normative structure or structures within which contemporary Germans are functioning is, of course, only one example of how difficult it is to reach firm conclusions about certain kinds of questions, especially the kinds of issues that we traditionally associated with the humanities. For an American, the term of *Kulturwissenschaft* borders on an oxymoron. There is science, then there is, well, something else. Having the opportunity to listen to natural scientists, social scientists, and humanists is one of the great pleasures of the Wissenschaftskolleg. This year only reaffirmed my view that the natural sciences are really great. The insight that bats navigate using some kind of radar, as we learned this year, was only made in the late 1930s. My God, I thought during our several bat lectures, how much these people know now. Natural science does afford the opportunity to conduct experiments and experimental research does make it possible to test ideas. We social scientists do ok, at least in the sense that social science does have a commitment to stating hypotheses clearly and trying to test them against empirical evidence (post-modernism has hardly made any headway in economics and political science). But the evidence is often inconclusive and in most cases, certainly with regard to my own research, there is no way to run experiments. The humanities have an even harder time. It is not clear exactly what the data is. There is skepticism about the ability to separate subjects and objects. Modes of reasoning are not necessarily shared. The idea of testing alternative hypotheses, the bread and butter of social science, is often much harder in the humanities, where it is not clear what the alternative hypotheses would be.

The best part of my year here in Berlin was seeing how people from other disciplines think. The worst part was the reinforcement

of a view I already had, which is that some things, like the political and cultural norms of a different society or maybe even one's own, are difficult to understand.