



THE VIEW FROM THE NINETEENTH
CENTURY
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I doubt that any new Fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg is well prepared for the most interesting and complicated aspect of residence here. I'm sure all prepare well for the research program, have a schedule in mind, and if they come with a family, try to prepare for those issues, too. But, aside from the four or five other Institutes for Advanced Study, there is no other setting in modern academic life in which forty or so adults live in such close quarters for most of a year, a good percentage in the same apartment buildings, eating lunches four days a week and dinner once a week, gathering every Tuesday for a one-hour paper and an hour of discussion, attending some Wednesday and Sunday colloquia, par-

ticipating in outings and private dinners, and so forth. So unless one has had a stay at another research institute, there is little to prepare one for such a close experience with so many strangers. I am in two departments in Chicago and an associate of a third, and after twelve years there I have seen a good deal more of some Wiko Fellows than I have of several colleagues in those departments – put together. For an American, the first associations are with the summer camps of one's youth. I don't know many people who have gone on vacation cruises, but I gather the experience is similar. (Although the Wiko "tour directors" and "cultural events organizers" are a good deal classier.)

Aside from the fascinating group dynamics this all gives rise to, such togetherness also obviously leads to a great many conversations across disciplinary boundaries and requires of each Fellow a willingness to try to explain his or her interests to "non-specialists". There are real benefits to such attempts and such exposure. I now know a good deal more than I ever thought I would about medieval semantics, India, European political economy, wasps, birds, spatial cognition, the neurology of speech recognition, how the meaning of cultural objects can change when they move about into other traditions, the social function and control of science, the role of politics in Renaissance painting, John Donne, the history of Zionism, translations of the Koran, Shakespeare's life, why Proudhon might be important to contemporary China, the role of newspapers in China, the problem of "periodization" in modern European history, "cerebral citizenship", Senegalese transmigrants in America, and a good deal more of value in my own discipline, about Spinoza, Aristotle, and political philosophy. On the other hand, I only know about "fifty minutes worth" more about these topics. That is valuable, but in my experience real inter- or transdisciplinary exchange works best when people from different fields are working on the same or similar problem, as in the many valuable working groups formed at Wiko. For me, the value of these general exchanges in this sort of close, daily contact was that it gave one a chance to understand the importance or significance of a research project to a particular person with a particular life history and perspective, within a particular national academy, why an issue might inspire the kind of dedication and sacrifice necessary for research. (Or in a few cases, what research on "auto pilot" looks like without such a commitment and why things might have ended up that way.) It gave me a lot to think about.

I came to Berlin to finish a very large project on the nineteenth-century German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel. I have been working on the project off and on for twelve years and cannot seem to tame the beast. But I decided to try to finish up some other projects first. (This was probably not a good idea. As usual, none of these other projects turned out to be

minor or easy to complete.) One was a paper on Theodor Adorno for a conference in the fall in Frankfurt. Reaction to that paper was so spirited, and for the most part hostile, that, while I was of course all the more convinced that I was right, I decided to revise the paper extensively for the published version, which will appear in a Suhrkamp collection in 2005. Another was a collection of recent essays of mine, *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath*. I had planned such a collection for a while and decided to use the late fall and early winter to organize the collection and to write the long, introductory essay. The collection has essays on Gadamer, Adorno, Heidegger, McDowell, Arendt, Manfred Frank, romanticism, Leo Strauss, abstractionism in art history, civility, and Proust. When it was sent out for review by Cambridge University Press, I received some very valuable feedback and re-wrote several sections of several papers and the entire introduction. That collection is now finished and will appear in late 2005. I have also for some time now owed a publisher an introductory essay for a collection of my essays in German, *Die Verwirklichung der Freiheit*. I had to work quite extensively with an editor in Frankfurt to make sure the essays were uniform in terminology, references, primary works cited, and so forth. This turned out to be a bit of a nightmare, and used up quite a chunk of time. But it's done and will also appear in 2005, with Campus Verlag. I also finished up reviewing the final text of a translation of my book on Henry James, which Fink-Verlag published in the middle of the year as *Moral und Moderne: Die Welt von Henry James*.

One of the projects I am working on concerns the status of "ideals" or "values" other than moral or ethical or political values. I am especially interested in aesthetic ideals, and more particularly in the historical fate of the beautiful in the development of visual modernism, what role such an ideal played (or largely did not play) in the great turn in European art away from figurative representation and then eventually away from the notion of "art" as such. One of the interpretations of the development of European modernism I most admire is that of Michael Fried, an art historian at Johns Hopkins. I was invited to a conference in Paris on Fried's work, so in the late winter I wrote a paper called "Authenticity in Painting: Remarks on Michael Fried's Art History" and presented it at this conference. I profited a good deal while working on this paper from conversations with Fellows and staff at Wiko. The paper will appear in 2005 in the journal *Critical Inquiry*.

The University of Chicago has a very nice tradition each year. A faculty committee is elected and this committee decides on one faculty member to invite to give a lecture to the entire University community. This is the "Ryerson Lecture" and it is a great honor to be asked. Its endowment allows for a large dinner to be given by the President of the Univer-

sity after the talk for former lecturers, invited faculty, and officers of the university. I was asked to give the lecture in 2003/04 and wrote the lecture throughout the winter and returned to Chicago and presented it in April. It was a grand if intimidating experience, since I had to make the ideas accessible (and interesting!) to a very large audience that ranged from freshmen to faculty to University trustees. The lecture, “Bourgeois Philosophy: On the Problem of Leading a Free Life”, concerned a question I have been puzzling about for some time. At just the moment in the nineteenth century when Western European societies, for all of their visible flaws, seemed to start paying off the Enlightenment’s promissory notes, reducing human misery by the application of its new science and technology, increasing the authority of appeals to reason in life, reducing the divisive public role of religion, extending the revolutionary claim of individual natural rights to an ever wider class of subjects, accelerating the extension of natural scientific explanation, and more and more actually gaining what Descartes so boldly promised, the “mastery of nature”, it also seemed that many of the best, most creative minds produced within and as products of such societies rose up in protest, even despair at the social organization and norms that also made all of this possible. Beginning with romanticism and continuing in “modernism”, in painting, literature, and music, as well as philosophy, bourgeois modernity as a whole became not only a great problem but also a very confusing, largely distasteful fate. It is as if the sorts of achievements that bourgeois philosophers like Locke and Hegel, however different, had thought would count as monumental human accomplishments – the end of sectarian, religious war, the creation of some zone of privacy or domestic intimacy, health, equality under the law, rights protection, relative security and so forth – now, to many of great intelligence and imagination, were not being exactly rejected, but were, simply, somehow not *enough*. This dissatisfaction is so extreme that although much of European modernism was inspired by a revolutionary consciousness and a hope for a rapid acceleration of the modern trajectory, it is also not an exaggeration to say that such aspirations were increasingly overshadowed by something darker, something like a high culture “bourgeois self-hatred”. I would like to understand better such questions as: what sort of a *philosophical* problem is that (if it is)? How adequate is a philosophical response that simply says: this legion of the dissatisfied are simply wrong; it *is* “enough”? Or that we just need *more* of all that, or its more *extensive* realization? This lecture was an attempt to frame such a problem properly.

During this visit to Chicago, some members of the philosophy department had arranged for a rather grueling six-hour marathon seminar, which largely focused on my work on Hegel and the work of a philosopher whom I regard as one of the four or five most im-

portant working today, John McDowell, who has been making more reference to Hegel lately as a way of posing his own problems and some of his claims. I had written a paper about McDowell before and he had responded in print. I used this occasion to write up a lengthy “response to his response”, which was included in the papers for this seminar. This encounter was one of the most interesting of my philosophical life. The paper will be reprinted in the collection mentioned above, as will my response to his response.

I also had agreed some time ago to give four lectures in Paris next November, one of the “conferences” hosted by the Collège de France. The lectures concern the philosophical psychology of Friedrich Nietzsche and argue that the French reception of Nietzsche after the war has been essentially greatly distorted by the influence of Heidegger and that a great deal of Nietzsche becomes both clearer and more persuasive when we see him as located in the only intellectual tradition he referred to in enthusiastically positive terms, “the French moralists” of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, especially Pascal and La Rochefoucauld (Nietzsche blames Christianity, not Pascal, for Pascal’s Jansenism) and by a huge margin, Montaigne. I try to show in these lectures, “Nietzsche, moraliste français: La conception nietzschéenne d’une psychologie philosophique”, what Nietzsche’s claims look like and how they might be defended if he is understood in a “Montaignean” light. The lectures will be published next year as a book with this title by the Parisian publisher, Odile Jacob. Since I have not had to speak French in such an intimidating, grand context for some time (i. e., ever), I also made use of the Wiko year to “récupérer” my spoken French, working a couple of hours a week with an excellent tutor that Christine von Arnim found for me.

All of which brings me back to the Hegel book. My book is about Hegel’s “practical philosophy”. By practical philosophy, most philosophers nowadays would mean an account of the distinct sorts of events for which we may appropriately demand reasons or justifications from subjects whom we take to be responsible for such events occurring. As it is sometimes put, to focus appropriately on that issue we also need to ask for a broad delimitation of the normative domain (whatever is done “for reasons”, purposively, where reference to such reasons is essential in understanding what was done), and so are asking about the possibility that there *are* these distinct sorts of events, actions (things done for reasons). Within his comprehensive practical philosophy, the heart of Hegel’s answer to the last kind of question consists in a *theory of freedom*, the basic features of which are well known, but which also comes with presuppositions and implications that either resist attempts at interpretive clarity or, if clarified, have seemed quite objectionable. The theory has it that free-

dom consists in being in a certain reflective and deliberative relation to oneself, which itself is only possible, so it is argued, if one is also in certain (ultimately institutional, norm-governed) relations to others. Finally, these relational states of individual-mindedness and common like-mindedness are argued to be constitutive of freedom because they are *rational*. My purpose in the book is to offer an interpretation and a limited defense of such claims. (It is quite a controversial claim, because Hegel is very pointedly not counting as a condition of such free activity the capacity to cause actions “spontaneously”, not insisting that a condition of responsible action is that “I could have acted otherwise.”) Like other books, there are a couple of “core” chapters in this book where the basic claim and the intuitive objections are discussed and on which all the rest depends. I gave one of those chapters as a lecture at a few universities in Germany and a few in the States in 2003/04, and I believe I have solved, finally, the most difficult problems (although I have had such a wish-fulfilling fantasy before).

Berlin was an especially valuable place for me to continue working on such a project, not only because one can visit Hegel’s grave here, sit at the *Schreibtisch* that he used, and, I guess, feel his spirit in the air, but because there is in this area a very strong collection of academics with interests in Hegel, and there was also a visiting American Hegelian scholar (and old friend), Terry Pinkard (the author of the finest biography on Hegel) in Berlin as a Humboldt Prize winner. The German academics kindly organized a “working group” that met biweekly to discuss several chapters of my work in progress and related literature on the problem of freedom in German idealism. There were professors, assistants, and students there from Humboldt University, Free University, Potsdam, and Leipzig. The discussions were lively, extraordinarily well-informed and very helpful.

I also had the pleasure of giving a Mittwochskolloquium at Wiko (on Hegel’s theory of freedom) and a Dienstagskolloquium on the problem of the self and self-knowledge in Proust.