



FEELING AT HOME IN BERLIN
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A year off from most of one's university duties is a precious thing in itself. One does not want to waste such a rare opportunity. There are so many things one has always wanted to read, write, learn, do, or try out. Perhaps now ... When one has the special privilege to spend that year at the *Wissenschaftskolleg* at a relatively early stage in one's career, the greatness of the opportunity is multiplied – but so is the internal pressure to get the most out of that year. It became clear to me early in the autumn that, for me, there are two keys to a good *Wissenschaftskolleg* year. The first lies in trying to be realistic about the amount I can read, learn, do, and try out within a single year. In other words, that the best way to spoil the year is to worry too much about how much work can, should, or could be done. The second consists in striking an acceptable balance between making satisfactory progress with my own project and leaving time and energy for the incalculable: for all the enriching

and exciting intellectual impulses coming from the other Fellows and discovering, together with my wife Agi and our daughter Juli, the fascinating cultural life of Berlin and the beauty of nature around it. The plan proved to be working. As we were taking stock of the year with my family at the dinner table toward the end of our stay in Berlin, we agreed that this was one of the best years of our lives.

My main research project was on various aspects of early Greek cosmological speculation and its connections with different spheres of Greek intellectual life. One part of the project focused on the epistemological role of visualization, in particular on the construction and use of three-dimensional, reduced-size astronomical models. As it turned out, this topic fitted very well with the discussions on the role of visualization in science initiated by the image scientists (the “Picture Boys”). Also for this reason, I decided to hold my Tuesday colloquium on this topic. In the talk I argued for two related points. First, that the construction of such models was part of Greek cosmological speculation from the very start, from the time of Anaximander of Miletus in the sixth century B.C.E. Second, that this was so because the models were not mere illustrations added subsequently for explanatory and didactic purposes, but were part and parcel of theory formation itself. To embed the historical theses in a systematic framework, and to show that playing with such “gadgets” is the best way to come up with a three-dimensional geometrical structure that can account for a set of complex observational data, I discussed at some length the famous story of the discovery of the double helix of the DNA. As I was pondering Anaximander’s celestial tubes, I realized that the best would be to actually build an *exempli gratia* reconstruction of his model. So I started to experiment with different designs. After some asking around, I found Andreas Vierkötter, an architect turned creator of designer furniture and models. Visits to his workshop in Kreuzberg and discussing the best material to be used and how to construct the model was great fun, just as much as dealing with the mathematical problems of how to project the constellations on the inner surface of a tube by taking into account perspectival and other distortions. For someone like me who normally works only with texts, creating an object was a particularly exciting project.

Another part of my project focused on the connection between cosmology and different conceptions of the soul in early Greek thought. In early texts, philosophical and literary alike, considerations about the nature and fate of the soul are intimately bound up with speculations about the structure and constitution of the world. This is most conspicuous in various doctrines of the afterlife. If the soul survives the death of the individual, one has to know where the soul goes after it leaves the body. Thus any developed eschatological

account will include a cosmic topography, as the description of the journey of the suitors' souls to Hades in the *Odyssey*, Plato's eschatological myths, or Dante's *Divina Comedia* amply show. Yet, from the time of the early Presocratics, there was an alternative model to describe the soul-cosmos relationship. According to this model, the soul (or the bearer of various psychic functions) is a portion of one or more specific stuffs that also have cosmic functions. The "portion model" allows a great number of individual variations, depending on the general psychological and cosmological theories it is part of. It is a general tendency, however, that in those doctrines where one of the elements has a privileged position, the soul is considered to be a portion of that element. In such cases, the same element is called divine and has a fundamental role in the maintenance of the cosmic order. The two models integrate the soul in the world in different ways and both have theoretical advantages and drawbacks. For example, in the portion model it remains problematic how to create such a persisting unity of the "soul stuff" that it is then able to function as the bearer of personal identity. In the journey model, by contrast, it remains unclear what the soul ultimately is, and how it interacts with its environment.

Although I originally thought that I should discuss this topic in a single paper, the material turned out to be so rich that it looks increasingly likely that I will end up writing a book. First I wrote a paper, which I read at a conference in Pisa in the autumn, in which I have set out the interpretative framework and presented a brief survey of the most relevant cases. Then I applied this framework for the discussion of various Orphic texts for a conference on Orphism in Palma. In a further paper, which I presented at a symposium on Heraclitus in July, I examined Heraclitus' theory of the soul. In the next phase of the project, I shall discuss the soul-cosmos relationship in Plato's *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*.

Apart from my main project on cosmology, I completed and prepared for publication two papers, one on Aristotelian metaphysics, the other on Epicurean atomism. I presented both papers at the Humboldt University and at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich. I also worked as co-editor on a Festschrift for Kornél Steiger, my former professor at the University of Budapest. The book should come out early next year. In addition, I wrote a number of articles for the second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and had to realize once again how time-consuming it is to write seemingly simple encyclopedia entries.

An immense bonus of this year was the presence of Myles Burnyeat at the Wissenschaftskolleg. I had always regretted that I missed him in Cambridge – when I went up, he had just moved to Oxford. So imagine what I felt when I first received the list of Fellows and

saw his name next to mine. The discussions I had with Myles on a daily basis on ancient and modern philosophy will have a lasting effect on my work. As both of us were invited to the Symposium Aristotelicum in Venice in July, we decided to prepare for the meeting together. So each week we read and discussed the topic of the Symposium, Book Seven of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The photo that appeared as an illustration to the article in the *Süd-deutsche Zeitung* supplement on the Wissenschaftskolleg was taken at one of our meetings. In the second semester, Myles and I went to the Humboldt University after every Tuesday lunch to attend the seminar of Christof Rapp (a Wissenschaftskolleg Fellow from the previous year) on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* book *Theta*. During the train rides from Grunewald to Friedrichstraße, we often continued to discuss what we heard in the morning at the Tuesday colloquium.

This brings me to the Tuesday colloquia. Apart from some exceptional individuals, the life of an academic involves quite a bit of intellectual asceticism. One feels that there are so many genuinely interesting things out in the world about which one will never be able to learn more than the occasional popularizing snippets one reads in newspapers because one needs to focus on one's more or less restricted field of research. I particularly liked those talks when the speaker explained something of the methods applied, and dared to go into some technical details as well, so that I felt that I had a peek into the way research is actually done in other fields. And the best colloquia were those when the speaker managed to convey how exciting and engaging his or her subject matter is, so that I got the feeling that, yes, I can imagine myself spending a couple of years of my life working on this topic. Also, it became increasingly clear to me that no matter whether one uses PowerPoint, multimedia, or just reads from sheets of paper, sits or stands, speaks about philosophy, biology, image science, sociology, medicine, poetry, physics, or history, sprinkles jokes or uses an elevated style, to my mind, the ultimate criteria of a good talk are still the clarity of thesis, analysis, and argument.

The musical events were among the highlights of the year, much appreciated by both those who have a strong background in music and those who otherwise rarely go to a concert. Stefan Litwin is not only an outstanding pianist and a composer of thrilling music but also an awe-inspiring speaker. His *Gesprächskonzerte* were perfect combinations of musical and educational experience. I also had the opportunity to meet Maurizio Sotelo and enjoy his music at the Wissenschaftskolleg and in the Philharmonie. To my great surprise, Maurizio came up with the idea of composing a piece on the *Derveni papyrus* (on which I published a book) and invited me to work as the "librettist". Getting involved in the creation

of a piece of contemporary music is, yet again, a truly exciting prospect for someone who normally works on ancient texts for a rather restricted scholarly community.

An extracurricular activity marked the year, too, and will probably have a lasting effect. Two of the biologists, Kevin Foster and Tom Wenseleers, and the former Medieval English scholar Steven Davis (Jamie Monson's husband), all practiced climbers, regularly went to a climbing hall in Wedding. Sometimes in November, the sociologist Christopher Edling, our neighbor in Heydenstraße, and I got seduced and joined in. From that time on, the trips to Wedding became an important part of our weekly schedule and developed a strong, and as I hope, lasting friendship among members of the "Wissenschaftskolleg Interdisciplinary Klettermannschaft". Of course, we kept discussing our work before and after climbing, from which, in true Wissenschaftskolleg spirit, I have learned a great deal more about evolutionary biology and social networks.

Acquiring some proficiency in German, and thereby getting access to the whole world of German feuilletons, literature, and academic discussions, was a major boon of this year. The daily five hours of the intensive language course with Marita Ringleb, probably the best language instructor I have ever met, were a gratifying mixture of surprisingly hard work – also because before Nancy Fraser and Eli Zaretsky joined in, the intermediary group consisted only of Myles Burnyeat and myself – and great laughs. If I ever write my memoirs, how we explained "Cambridge change" in German and exchanged the roles of waiter and guest with Myles will certainly receive a page or two. When in early October Myles and I went to the conference of the Gesellschaft für antike Philosophie at the Humboldt University, we shared the frustration of properly understanding the German of only the non-native speakers. Just as later in the year we shared the joy of understanding more and more of German language talks and gradually being able to participate in the discussions. It was a special *Erfolgs Erlebnis* when, in mid-June after my talk in Munich, I was able to conduct a one-hour discussion in a certainly not faultless and elegant, but intelligible German. My wife Agi, who spoke very little German when we arrived in Berlin, had made even greater progress, while our daughter Juli, who had no German in September, had picked up so much in the kindergarten that now she often corrects our mistakes and helps us out when our vocabulary fails. For a five-year-old, eleven months is an awfully lot of time – and when we started to tell her that we soon move back home, it was quite moving to hear her saying that she feels that by now Berlin and Heydenstraße are her real home. Even if for us adults eleven months felt much too short, for these months we felt very much at home in Berlin and, thanks to the wonderful staff, at the Wissenschaftskolleg.