



A COMMUNITY OF (NATURALIZED?)  
MINDS  
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I arrived at the Wissenschaftskolleg with the project of writing a book on self-consciousness and personal identity. I wanted to explore the ways in which concepts that first emerged in the philosophy of Kant, in particular the distinction between consciousness of oneself “as subject” – our consciousness of ourselves as the agents of cognition and action: *who* knows, *who* acts – and consciousness of oneself “as object” – our consciousness of ourselves as *what* we know or sometimes even *what* we act upon – have found new prominence in the very different context of contemporary analytic philosophy. I also wanted to explore what psychology (especially in its new development as neuroscience), recent studies of animal behavior, and psychoanalysis can tell us about those concepts. I was especially inter-

ested in the relation between our use of the word “I” and the various ways we are conscious of ourselves. Finally, my plan was to use this full year of idyllic peace to do the kind of continuous and in-depth reading that the normal grind of academic life makes impossible. My ambition was to read Ludwig Wittgenstein’s and Sigmund Freud’s complete works from cover to cover.

Needless to say, the latter at least I did not do. So what did I do?

First I had to clear the decks. Shortly after my arrival, I received the proofs of my new book on Hegel (*Hegel’s Critique of Metaphysics*) from Cambridge University Press, for which I still needed to do the proofreading and indexing. As early as the end of October, I thus had the satisfaction of being able to sign my first work completed at the Wissenschaftskolleg, which is now just out of the press. Reading today my thanks to the Wissenschaftskolleg in the Preface to the book, I remember those luminous October days and my astonished discovery of this extraordinary place, of the friendly and supportive community of Fellows, and of the wonderful team of *Mitarbeiter* who served as our god-fairies all year.

Another step in clearing the decks was to write my responses to commentators’ remarks on my 2005 book, *Kant on the Human Standpoint*, for an “author meets critics” session that was to be held at the December meetings of the American Philosophical Association in Washington. I also had to go back to New York for a few days in November for the conference on “Issues in Modern Philosophy” that my colleagues Don Garrett, John Richardson, and I organize each year at New York University. Finally, I had to complete the editorial work on a volume on *Kant and the Early Moderns* that I am co-editing with Dan Garber for Princeton University Press. Dan and I just completed our editorial work on the book this month. This will be another volume that bears my heartfelt thanks to Wiko for having provided the most supportive of environments for its completion.

But of course what really mattered to me was to get a head start on the new book project, provisionally entitled: *I, Me, Mine: Variations on Self-Consciousness and Personal Identity*. The first order of business in this regard was to write a paper on “Kant on the identity of persons”, which I had agreed to give at the Aristotelian Society in London long before knowing I would be coming to Wiko this year. This did count as starting the main project of this year, since it was going to make its way into a chapter of the book.

While starting work on this, I also began having regular discussions with Frank Rösler, whose project was interestingly related to mine: as a neuroscientist, he was planning to write a book on brain processes at work in what we subjectively experience as being our

own conscious decision-making. He intended to sound a new tone in the over-confrontational debate that has developed in Germany in the past few years concerning the question: Do the new discoveries of brain science put an end to any notion of freedom of the will? He and I agreed that the debate was largely based on mutual misunderstandings on the part of neuroscientists and philosophers. But when we started giving each other reading lists and discussing our respective work, we soon realized that between us, too, there were misunderstandings or, at the very least, concepts to be clarified and different starting points to be justified. In the course of our discussions, Frank asked me to be the moderator for his Tuesday colloquium talk. His presentation was given in early December and gave rise to one of the most heated discussions in any of our Tuesday colloquiums. Around the same time, Paul Schmid-Hempel started the monthly Tuesday afternoon *Tafelrunde* between Geisteswissenschaftler and Naturwissenschaftler, where we informally discussed topics of common interest between humanities and natural science. In addition to this, I attended a few of the *bio-colloquiums* in which evolutionary biologists were presenting their work to each other every Tuesday afternoon. The constant dialogue between humanities and natural sciences, not only at the *Tafelrunde* but also on the occasion of our daily lunches and extended Thursday dinners, was for me one of the most eye-opening and exciting aspects of intellectual life at Wiko.

This being so, my work took unexpected turns. Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus and Katharina Wiedemann, always on the prowl for a good intellectual *Kampffplatz* (hello again, Immanuel Kant!), asked Frank Rösler and me to be jointly interviewed by Ralf Grötzer for *Köpfe und Ideen*. The idea was that Ralf would have a conversation with us and then write up a fictitious dialogue that he would submit to both of us for final editing. The editing actually became a rewriting and reformulating of our respective views, a formative experience for me both philosophically and linguistically. I learned the hard way that my German left much to improve, as I did again when we also prepared a more extended dialogue, this time on our own, for one of the Wednesday evening public lectures at Wiko, which we entitled: "Neurone vergeistigen: Geist und Gehirn im Gespräch" (the best translation we found for this: "Minding Neurons: A Dialogue Between Mind and Brain").

This gave me the idea for what I now think will be the final chapter of my book, whose title will be in the form of a question: "naturalizing the mind?" There are two related questions here: 1) To what extent can we suppose subjective mental phenomena to obey universal natural laws? 2) To what extent are the methods and concepts of natural science applicable to the study of subjective, mental phenomena? I take myself to be unreservedly

naturalist and monist with respect to the first question, and pluralist with respect to the second – nature is one, we have every reason to think that human behavior and mentality are, like everything else in nature, subject to universal causal laws; but the methods and concepts applicable to each domain differ, sometimes radically. In our joint lecture I described my position as a combination of “ontological monism” and “epistemic dualism” – I now think “epistemic pluralism” would be a more apt description.

My talk for the Tuesday colloquium (“I, Self, Identity”) was another ground-breaking experience for me. Presenting my project to an audience of extremely smart people with no previous familiarity with the philosophical traditions and concepts presupposed in my discussion meant that I had to rethink practically from scratch just *what* was the import and the broader meaning of what I was doing. Preparing this talk in early May, I was thinking back to the utterly baffled looks I received at lunch in October when I tried to explain the distinction between consciousness of oneself “as subject” and consciousness of oneself “as object” to biologists. I was remembering Paul Schmid-Hempel’s gently ironical remark: “When a biologist hears “‘I’ as subject, ‘I’ as object’ he phases out then and there and thinks: that’s not for me!” And I realized what a long way I had come. Presenting my views in such a context now seemed very far from easy, but nevertheless quite natural, just what a philosopher should be prepared to do. I was helped in the endeavor by the relentless probing and questioning of Pierre-Michel Menger, on whom I inflicted several preliminary drafts of my paper, and by Frank Rösler, who patiently answered my questions about Oliver Sachs’s “disembodied lady”, one of the examples I was using in my discussion of self-consciousness as consciousness of one’s own body, and who gave me further reading suggestions around related issues.

On the occasion of that colloquium talk, I also did my very first power-point presentation, a pedagogical trick the biologists made a must for all of us *Geisteswissenschaftler*. I discovered how playful a presentation could be thanks to this tool, without losing any of its conceptual ambition. A revised version of the presentation has now made its way into Chapter 1 of my book (“Problems with ‘I’”). Chapter two, “Self-Consciousness and Self-Reference: Sartre and Wittgenstein” was written in June and presented on the occasion of a special lecture and seminar organized at Oxford by the *European Journal of Philosophy*. All in all, during my time at Wiko I have written or drafted four chapters. Two chapters were already written when I arrived. As I see the book project now, I have two more chapters to write, but they will call for a good deal of extra reading, which takes me back to the mammoth reading program I had at the beginning and into which I barely put a dent this

year. Still, it is a nice surprise to find out, at this point, that in its own meandering way, taking side steps that I had never expected it would take and that were elicited by the dialogues I had with so many Fellows from other disciplines during this year at Wiko, my book did acquire a structure that, in my view, is much more interesting than the one I envisaged for it when I arrived.

I benefited from my presence in Berlin in other ways too. I gave talks at Potsdam, at the Humboldt-Universität and at the Freie Universität (all in German! Thank you, Sophia Pick, for your wonderful work on the translation of my papers, and thank you Eva von Kügelgen, for the weekly sessions of intensive German, which were also an introduction to so many aspects of German culture, past and present!). I had extensive discussions with younger colleagues at the Humboldt-Universität about their own work and participated in the *Promovierung* examination of a student who in past years had spent time working with me at Princeton and New York University and was now completing her degree at the Humboldt-Universität. She received her degree *summa cum laude*, a feat her advisor, Rolf-Peter Horstmann, and myself, together with all her friends, happily celebrated with her. I also had the interesting experience of being part of the committee for the *Probe-Begutachtung* of the Humboldt-Universität for the *Exzellenz-Initiative*. In addition, being in Berlin allowed me to make short trips to London, Cambridge, and Oxford, where I greatly benefitted from the discussions that followed presentations of my work.

The above would have sufficed to make my year at Wiko extraordinary enough. But it only begins to scratch the surface of the ways in which my life was changed by being here. What made the experience completely unique was the presence of artists among us. Three composers: Noriko and Toshio Hosokawa and Helmut Lachenmann. And a photographer: Tomasz Kizny. From conversations with Toshio and the smiling, gentle presence of Noriko, from Helmut's infectious enthusiasm, imagination and sharp intelligence, from the many *Gesprächskonzerte* they offered at Wiko and at the Akademie der Künste, and also from conversations with Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus and Pierre-Michel Menger, I began to develop what I did not think was possible at this time in my life: a real, in-depth familiarity with, and enjoyment of, contemporary music.

The effect of Tomasz Kizny's presence among us was equally phenomenal. The only strictly non-academic figure in our group, he worried at the beginning that he would simply not fit in. The contrary was true. His haunting photographic, documentary, and archival work on the Gulag was prominently displayed in the lounge. As a gentle contrast, his beautifully sympathetic photographs of passengers on the subway trains in Moscow, War-

saw, Berlin, Paris, and New York adorned the walls of our colloquium room and the surrounding rooms for the whole second half of the year. All of that, and at the end of the year his colloquium talk, in which he explained his past and present work on the Gulag, was a reminder of our collective responsibility, of the seriousness of what we are about, of the beauty of human connection, and of the varieties of ways emotional, aesthetic, and conceptual intelligence can work together and enrich one another. There is simply no other place where this kind of experience could have been a daily part of my life.

I have named only a few of the Fellows from whom I learned an enormous amount and with whom I formed very special and what I think will be enduring friendships. The complete list would include many more, but such a list is not the purpose of this report. Let me just make one last mention, that of my numerous conversations with the wonderful group of German *Rechtswissenschaftler* among us, from whom I learnt not only about the history of German constitutional law and the complexities of the debates surrounding the European constitution, but also about many other aspects of contemporary Germany. Last but not least, the richness of intellectual and cultural experience at Wiko was further highlighted by numerous expeditions into Berlin for operas, concerts, museums, and also visits to reminders of the dark past of the city.

As a whole, I think this year was the exceptional experience it was because of the degree to which a number of Fellows tacitly agreed to invest in the successful interaction and multilogues of the group. This had a cost. I certainly did not write or read as much as I would have had I restricted my presence to Tuesday colloquiums and meals. Reading Fred Dretske's acknowledgements at the beginning of his book, *Naturalizing the Mind*, I was struck by his thanks to the Stanford Humanities Center, where he completed the book. "No one *ever* knocked at my door. They obviously know how to run a research institute." This is not the style of Wiko. Rather, as I see it, Wiko is a kind of academic Utopia. Forget for a while the pressure of specialization and the treadmill of business as usual. Take pleasure in the unexpected and be prepared to change course without any certainty as to what the next turn in the path will reveal. Ride the wave, do your best to keep your balance, and enjoy.

As Spinoza said in concluding his *Ethics*: "Everything very precious is as difficult as it is rare." It is only thanks to the sense of purpose, the dedication, and the intelligence of its staff, at every post – library, kitchen, computer center, cleaning team, academic services, and of course academic and administrative directors – that Wiko can be what it is. The highest wish one can form for Wiko and its future Fellows is that it should keep up its

unique combination of rigor and freedom, careful selection of each year's group of Fellows, and promotion of academic utopia.