



REFLECTIONS ON WIKO BERLIN 2007–2008
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As happens with many Fellows, I didn't do what I expected to at Wiko. Nor did my expectations for Berlin turn out to be accurate. In both cases, the reality turned out to be far better than what I had optimistically envisioned.

My academic plan was to get a very good start on a book on Kant's ethics. I'd worked out a couple of central issues (or so I hope) concerning the first formulation of the categorical imperative and I thought that would provide an adequate basis for further study. Prior to taking up that project, I was going to finish a project I've been working on for about a decade, a study of the cognitive subject of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In this case, I came with a very thick folder full of chapters and draft chapters. When I began working with this material, I realized that there were some issues that I had not dealt with in sufficient depth. Rather than press ahead, I decided that I'd better step back.

I'd agreed to participate in a conference in Cambridge on the issue of transcendental arguments; I also had my *Dienstagskolloquium* to prepare. Rather than present papers I had already read at several places, I decided to try to work up a paper that captured the central argument of the book in a single paper. The conference proved to be extraordinarily help-

ful, in part because I met a Basel philosopher, Sebastian Rödl, whose thinking had been (completely independently) going in the same direction on Kant. We chatted as much as we could at the conference. (Other papers were also very helpful in focusing my ideas on what I was saying that was different.) Preparing for the Dienstagskolloquium proved to be just as valuable. A young philosopher at the Max Planck Institute, Thomas Sturm, set up a brief workshop so that I could try out the paper on Kant scholars. There I met several philosophers, Falk Wunderlich and Bernhard Thöle, who supplied clear and excellent criticisms. Wunderlich's criticisms led me to some of his important work on 18th-century theories of self-consciousness between Wolff and Kant; Thöle offered penetrating criticisms that led me to re-work a number of central points. With what I felt was a more solid argument, I turned to preparing the material for an audience that might not be familiar with the issues. Salman Bashier told me afterwards that it was as if I were teaching a class. This was exactly what I tried to do, present material to the brightest class I would ever face in such a way that the Fellows could participate in a discussion of the issues (which I thought was the point of the Dienstagskolloquium – less performance than serious discussion). I enjoyed the discussion and learned from it, but the discipline of preparing was especially helpful for focusing some central issues.

Having reworked the central argument of the book, I realized that I had to redo almost everything that I had done before. This had the bad effect of making me less able to participate in the enormous range of talks and conferences at Wiko and in Berlin. I decided to take this route, because looking back over materials that I'd worked on over a long period of time convinced me that I needed to take advantage of the opportunity for very concentrated work. I suspect this is not the ideal that Wiko aims for, but the gulf I see between the book I could have produced without coming to Berlin and the 11 completed chapters I take away is so large that I feel it was a very good use of the time.

I have attended a number of Kant sessions – talks and workshops – and these have been invaluable. Thomas Sturm organized a group at the Max Planck Institute that met several times; I also sat in on Rolf-Peter Horstmann's seminar at Humboldt University when I could. Marcus Willaschek organized a workshop on some of my work on Kant's ethics that was helpful, as was a workshop on themes of my book at Constance (organized by Tobias Rosefeldt). The latter gave me the chance for a further and extraordinarily useful exchange with Rödl and Thöle.

To my great surprise, I discovered that one of my fellow Fellows – Candace Vogler – had views on Kant's ethics that were very similar to my own somewhat heretical approach.

We had a number of delightful long lunches working through some issues that are very important in my thinking about the real upshot of Kant's ethical theory. It was even more surprising to discover that Candace's work on Elizabeth Anscombe had direct implications for what I was thinking about on Kant on the self. Along with Ruth Leys, who brought her expertise in the history of emotions to the discussion, Candace and I got together several times to discuss key claims from Anscombe about how to think about the emotions and other mental states.

Perhaps my recent history of chairing departments gives me an odd perspective, but I found the requirement to attend *Dienstagskolloquia* very liberating. In recent years, I've spent too many hours in discussions of faculty issues and too few listening to faculty research discussions. Although somewhat awkward at first, the discussions grew into gentle, but serious, engagements with the issues. By the end, it seemed to me that we were a fellowship of scholars genuinely interested in helping each other as best we could.

That fellowship was very evident in end of the year events, when most Fellows pitched in very willingly in a joint farewell party. Of course, it helped quite a lot that we could draw on Heiner Goebbels' endless talents to put together an end of the year show.

Heiner and Barbara (Rendtorff)'s presence at Wiko certainly added to the special quality of being in Berlin. "Stifters Dinge" at the beginning of the year was a real highlight. I found "Surrogate Cities" a sheer joy to watch (and hear). The exciting Berlin opera scene was a pleasant change from the somewhat staid performances I've been used to in New York. For me, it is hard to imagine a greater musical pleasure than hearing Simon Rattle conducting the wonderful Berlin Philharmonic playing Mahler in that glorious hall. I had been advised that the German classical music scene, especially opera, was unreliable. I did not find it so, but, rather, fresh and exciting.

In advance, I thought a year in Berlin might be too long, and that I might make some progress on a book on Kant's ethics. The year in Berlin was much too short, and the progress (I hope) went in another direction. Today I left behind the thick folder I came with and will bring home my new, almost completed book.