



A SOJOURN AMONG THE BARBARAS
NIKO KOLODNY

Niko Kolodny was born in New York City in 1972. After studying at Williams College and Oxford University, he received his PhD in Philosophy from the University of California, Berkeley in 2003. He taught for two years at Harvard University before returning to Berkeley in 2005, where he is currently Professor of Philosophy. Specializing in moral and political philosophy, he has written papers on a wide range of topics, including rationality, promising, love, democracy, justifying the state, *modus ponens*, future generations, and Rousseau. His book, *The Pecking Order*, published in 2023 by Harvard University Press, asks what might follow if social hierarchy – at least when not appropriately tamed or managed – is itself something to avoid or regret. The book offers a systematic alternative to the widespread view that our political thought and feeling is nourished primarily by a jealousy to preserve individual freedom; more significant, he argues, is our deep anxiety about interpersonal inequality. His teaching at Berkeley is largely on the ethics of emerging technologies. During the 2023–24 academic year, he gave the Hempel Lectures at Princeton University and the Shearman Lectures at University College London. – Address: Department of Philosophy, University of California, Berkeley, 314 Philosophy Hall #2390, Berkeley, CA 94720, USA. E-mail: kolodny@berkeley.edu.

I began the year with an announced project on privacy for a digital age. Since I was slated to give three lectures on the topic in March at Princeton University and again in June at University College London, my work at Wiko was organized into writing three lectures. The first lecture was negative, criticizing existing views of the value of privacy. The second lecture was positive, presenting my own view of the value of privacy. And the

third lecture was applied, considering implications for real-life issues raised by the Internet and Internet of things. I felt that I made good progress on the first and third lectures, but I still remain dissatisfied with the second. I wonder whether the focus on producing three lectures constrained my thinking about the topic in artificial ways, and I look forward to developing this work more freely as a monograph. Working on privacy, with the “time to think” gained at Wiko and ever-present stimulation from its vibrant and diverse intellectual community, led me to puzzling a great deal about consent in general, which looks to be my main next area of inquiry. On the side, I wrote a paper criticizing the idea that AI ought to be designed to satisfy our preferences. And I spent time responding to comments on my 2023 book, *The Pecking Order*, at the Freie Universität Berlin, University College London, and UiT The Arctic University of Norway in Tromsø.

It would be hard to overstate my sense of good fortune in finding myself among such a wonderful group of Fellows and partners. (Partners were so accomplished in their own right and so well integrated into life at Wiko that it was often easy to lose track of who the official Fellow was.) As the year progressed, with the accretion of Colloquia and meal-time conversations, I felt growing admiration, awe, and affection for each of my fellow Fellows, whether named Barbara or not, and a certain pleasure in reflecting on the traits of each that inspired such feelings. I might start at the beginning of the alphabet with Abiem, Iveren (with her intrepid researches and commitment to benefiting the world with them), then on to Berson, Josh (with his prodigious polymathism and gift for finding precisely the right word) and so on, finishing at the end of alphabet with Yun, Bee (with his dauntless mastery of languages and self-deprecating sense of humor). It was particularly striking that in a profession marked by egotism there was not a hint of egotism to be found. So much cause for vanity, and yet so little of it. Do be warned, though, that Wiko, at least if this year is anything like the norm, is not the place to cure yourself of imposter syndrome.

It was a tremendous stroke of good luck to have such a great group of philosophers among the Fellows in particular: Josh, Omri, Ruth, Kit, Andreas, Artem, David, and Marcus. It was a special privilege and pleasure to share drafts of work in progress with Artem, David, and Marcus. While I of course learned a lot from their specific views, I also learned from their different approaches to doing philosophy. Of course, I learned at least as much from the Fellows outside of philosophy, not just about their own projects, but also about my own. There is always value in being challenged to bring someone, from a standing start, to see why your problems are problems. I can't say that I always met the challenge. But I won't look at things the same way going forward.

When asked what Wiko was, I often described it as a summer camp for academics, located in Grunewald (“Imagine a posh, leafy food desert”), with a mess hall and activities, like choir, field trips, and dances. (“Dances?!” “Yes, dances.”) Even as someone not much given to audience participation, I found myself more eager to be a good camper than I would have expected, dancing in at least some of the discos, until at least my early bedtime, and dressing up as 1984’s Winston Smith for the future-themed Karneval. The costume amounted more or less to appearing as a shabby man in a jumpsuit. It was somewhat concerning that few seemed to recognize that it was a costume.

One of the highlights of the year was the running group, which met under the flag of the Kosovo embassy housed in Villa Walther on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays to run around the Grunewaldsee, along with occasional longer weekend runs, led by Daniel, to Teufelsberg. Artem, who first organized the group, was our fearless leader, followed by Andreas, Andrew, David, Ismaila, Lara, Mallory, and Stefan. I was invariably at the back of the pack, watching Mallory disappearing ever further ahead in the distance, but I was touched that someone always slowed their pace to keep me company and that those at the front would often circle back toward the rear so that we would all finish at roughly the same time. Artem had the brilliant idea of taking photos of the group at the end of each run. Apart from being a cherished record of the year of runs, it worked as an added inducement to show up. As much as one might like to believe that one is above such things, there was a definite feeling of FOMO in being left out of a photo of runners cheerfully jacked up on endorphins.

The year held delights not just for me, but also for my wife, Jessica Cross, our son Eddie, and our dog Shirley. Jessica and Shirley went for long walks in the forests of Grunewald. Eddie made the most of Berlin’s public transit, as well as the permission to drink beer. We traveled widely in Europe, with some or all of us visiting (mind you mostly on holidays and weekends when I was involved!) Copenhagen, Prague, Spain, Paris, Greece, Venice, Munich, Vienna (where I stayed near another Kosovo embassy), London (where I stayed next to still another Kosovo embassy), Tromsø, Dublin, and Stockholm.

Unlike Eddie, who was thrown into the linguistic deep-end at the local Walther-Rathenau-Gymnasium, Jessica and I had fewer opportunities, apart from classes and the *Deutschisch* with Eva, to practice German. For reasons I still can’t explain, the only locals I encountered who seemed to struggle with English as I struggled with German were (a) hypereducated doctors, (b) American football fans at a Superbowl viewing, and (c) two inexhaustible Mormon missionaries, who cornered me as I was leaving the main building.

Walking Shirley, we developed proficiency in what we came to call “Hunddeutsch,” answering questions about Geschlecht, Alter, and Rasse. (“Mädchen, sieben Jahre alt, halb Chihuahua, halb Pudel.” “Na, heute ist alles verpudelt.”) The staff were patient and forgiving interlocutors, who, for example, realized and let pass unmentioned that my literally expressed demand for reparations (Entschädigung!) was a request for reimbursement (Erstattung?).

The staff of Wiko was simply extraordinary in their competence, generosity, and good cheer. When the Rektorin writes, “You might wish to criticize the way we do things at the Kolleg,” I struggle to think of what anyone might have to criticize. I don’t believe that I have ever felt more welcomed and supported by an institution. Andrea and the rest of the preparing-your-stay team did a marvelous job in getting us settled, not least in finding Walther-Rathenau for Eddie. From the summer intensive to the last weekly class, Eva was a delightful teacher of German, overflowing with suggestions of things for us to engage with. (I haven’t given up hope that someday Andreas, Henk, and I will master the distinction between dative and accusative!) Library services felt like a personal research genie, with books appearing like magic on request. Dunia and the dining staff were amazing, serving invariably delicious meals, with encyclopedic knowledge of everyone’s dietary requirements. IT brought an extra monitor to our apartment as if it were nothing and was remarkably unjudgmental about the fact that we lost two (yes, two; don’t you judge!) sets of keys. The entire Wiko staff went out of its way to arrange a *Praktikum* for Eddie, which he thoroughly enjoyed. The list of thanks could go on and on. But I will stop here and simply express my eternal gratitude to Wiko for an unforgettable balm and reset of a year.