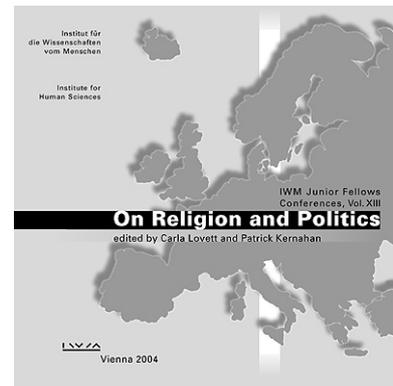


IWM Junior Visiting Fellows' Conferences, Vol. XIII

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Introduction

Carla Lovett

Emerging from the dimly lit U-Bahn beneath Stephansplatz in the heart of Vienna's Old City into the bright sunshine of the plaza above, one is immediately confronted with contrasts that have much more to them than shades of light. Indeed, at every turn remains of the city's glorious imperial past lie amidst the bourgeois hustle and bustle of modern day life. One first spots the beautiful thirteenth century Stephansdom, the very soul of the city, standing grandly in the middle of the square despite the intrusion of the ten year old Haas Haus, a modern asymmetrical structure of glass and marble popular with tourists but scorned by locals. And nearby, k.-und-k. boutiques with long traditions of royal service sit poised among the high-end shops of the nouveau riche (Louis Vuitton, Dolce & Gabbana, etc.). The feeling of schizophrenia that one might sense from this description is really not limited to the architecture, music, or commerce of the city, but rather permeates the entire Viennese world view. Although it has been almost a century since the end of the empire, Vienna still seems unsure of its identity. Partly old imperial capital and partly new provincial backwater, Vienna continues to celebrate the fin-de-siècle glory days of the Habsburg Monarchy while at the same time resigning itself to its more subdued role in the debut-de-siècle European Union.

This was the Vienna encountered by a group of earnest young scholars who descended upon the Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen (IWM) in July 2001 to take part in its semi-annual Junior Fellows Conference. IWM is a social science think tank where scholars from both the east and west are invited for varying lengths of stay to participate in a pleasant and engaging intellectual environment. During our tenure philosophers, political theorists, sociologists, economists and historians from the Balkans, the United States, and a number of EU and Central European countries were in residence which led to insightful discussions on a whole plethora of topics. Philosophy, art, and technology, literature, religion, and politics. Topics often considered indelicate in the polite homes of family and friends were fair game here and freely and intensely debated.

For us Junior Fellows, it was an intoxicating environment. We were no longer in the protective nests of ivy covered graduate schools with their ivy covered professors, but rather in the defiant and uncompromising realm of real intellectuals with real *ideas* and *experiences*. More than that, we felt a part of it ourselves, even contributing members. After all, we were Fellows too (for us, the “Junior” was simply an administrative detail), and just as passionate, if less realistic, in our hopes, or rather plans, to change the world.

Then came 9/11.

The fall, being and nothingness, nausea, shock, metamorphosis. In the span of an hour on that Tuesday afternoon (Vienna time) we were ripped from our post-Cold War world and thrust into the Age of Terror(ism). Work stopped, and why should it not? Do we stay or do we return home? And what do we do once we get there? We stayed, and worked resumed, but when we left IWM at the end of our tenure three months later we were no longer intoxicated.

Centuries ago, in his essay “On Education,” Aristotle maintained that a state would be best governed if done so by well-educated citizens. This volume, *On Religion and Politics*, concurs unreservedly and humbly attempts to do its part by bringing to one’s attention those two fields of inquiry never more important for, or hotly debated by, educated citizens than in this time and place. (Polite conventions notwithstanding, politics and religion now *are* the topics of every conversation.) The articles contained here have both nothing and everything to do with the circumstances of September 2001. None of the seven focuses specifically on topics of explicit relevance (terrorism, oil, jihad, and so on) but each is directly informed by the event and strives to contribute something to the larger theoretical discussions (on ethics, democratic values, American imperialism, religious fervor, collective identity, etc.) raised then and continuing now.

The arrangement of articles is chronological, although it could have been any other, and thereby provides a historical dimension to more contemporary aspects. The themes presented still reveal the hopes, or rather plans, of the authors to change the world, but much of the naïveté is missing. In its place is at times gloomy skepticism, raw passion, thoughtful intensity, or careful optimism, and the volume's general tendency towards a moral earnestness is as much a result of shattered illusions as it is the acquiring of a sober pragmatism. After all, contrary to the prevailing belief of some intellectuals, the clash of civilizations represented by nineteenth century Vienna's confrontation with modernity and by the twentieth century's bipolar world of communism and capitalism remains, unmistakably present, in the twenty-first century. The latest East-West dichotomy might be new (or old?) but the reasons are timeless – politics and religion.