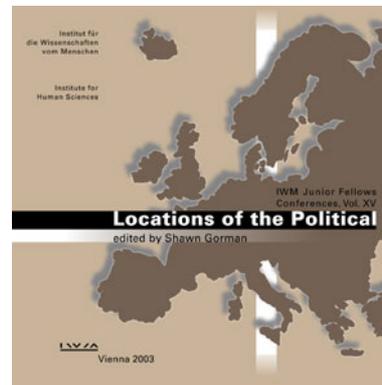


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Locations of the Political

Introduction

Shawn Gorman

In the essays collected for this volume, the political occupies a position that might best be called architectonic: it is the common thread running through the different scholarly approaches of the IWM's Junior Fellows. The difficulty of establishing the limits (institutional, social, discursive) of the political is perhaps one reason why these essays – which deal with philosophy, religion, literature, art, and history (as well as political science) – all create a language to locate it. The strength of the IWM's Junior Fellows' Conference undoubtedly lies in the diversity of the specializations – and individuals – it brings together. So it should not be surprising that the political is "located" in as many different manners as there are topics under discussion.

We begin with a skeptical observation by Eric Brown on the chances people have of being reasonable when it comes to politics. According to John Rawls, public reason is in conflict with the comprehensive doctrine of individual citizens, but certain values attached to citizenship allow this conflict to be successfully resolved within the public sphere of a liberal society. But is Rawls' concept of the citizen is too idealized? It is very hard to identify a commonly shared set of "reasonable" values that actually allows citizens with different belief-systems to make decisions on the basis of mutually acceptable rationales. While Eric Brown adds it is possible for people

who hold mutually incompatible beliefs to participate in a pluralistic liberal political culture, he argues that Rawls' explanation of how this might happen is flawed by an excessively optimistic view of human social behavior. In short, when Rawls claims that political decisions made by actual citizens are shaped by a "duty of civility," or that participation in politics presumes "widespread reasonableness" in the public at large, any observer of contemporary American political culture is likely to find room for doubt. If a secular tradition of liberal values can overcome the fragmentation of political discourse into a set of mutually exclusive dogmas, it remains to be shown what would motivate real individuals to compromise deeply-held and mutually incommensurable belief-systems for the sake of the unspectacular reasonableness of a pluralistic liberal democracy.

On the other hand, our next essay seems more optimistic about the potential for people to communicate rationally. At the end of the nineteenth century, German thinkers were divided over the alternative between logicism and psychologism. Gottlob Frege's philosophical work represents an attempt to ground mathematics (and subsequently, aspects of language) in atemporal logic, rather than in the consciousness of an historical psychological subject. Arguing that "[a]nalytic philosophy after Frege has resuscitated empiricism (and consequently psychologism)," Dimitri Constant's essay returns to Frege in an effort to bring elements of this logicism to bear on some contemporary debates. Establishing the objectivity of knowledge would, for example, make it possible to claim that laws of logic are not "culturally contingent" and that they transcend the "incommensurable paradigms" of interlocutors. In other words, the ideality of meaning that Frege grounds in the logical notions of mathematics could, in Dimitri Constant's view, provide the basis for commonly-held principles that allow discourse to escape from the dangers of relativism. The difficulty of finding how *a priori* objectivities of logic can be established and applied within the temporality of psychological subjectivity notwithstanding, Frege's work offers an indispensable starting-place for a consideration of the ideal notions of logic whose origin a thoroughgoing psychologism cannot explain.

Next, a departure: Bradley Herling examines the place India occupies in the early thought of Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel to show how an idealized concept of Indian spirituality was molded to suit the development of the Jena Romantic program. Curiously, India signified the "exotic" cultural other as well as a lost origin. In its role as the exotic other, India inspired a kind of "positive Orientalism," while in its role as lost origin, India was a source of Romantic longing. By

examining the Schegels' treatment of pantheism as a "discursive icon," the essay balances consideration of historical / discursive lines of force with discussion of strategems of a psychological order. In Friedrich Wilhelm's case, India emerges as a site where otherness is appropriated and yet is already present as a source of "renewal." The appropriation of Indian history as a form of cultural otherness meant that "the progress inculcated by the dialogue with the historically and culturally different was only meaningful to the present of the modern European; to this extent Romantic historicism was a kind of centric, perhaps even intellectually imperialist appropriation." Yet Friedrich Schlegel's enthusiasm for India was equally "fuelled by a desire to critique the European present through the use of the Indian past": India furnished a mytho-poetic locale where irreconcilably opposed values, like those at stake in the Romantic critique of Enlightenment, found fusion in a common "primordial" source. Meanwhile, August Wilhelm Schegel's *Frühromantik* reflections on India included a poem on his brother Karl August's travels on the subcontinent, an allegory in which Sanskrit is praised by *Poesie*, and a series of lectures in which the mythology, history, and literature of Indian antiquity are portrayed as a source for renewing European thought. Like his brother, August Wilhelm adapted his India to the needs of a Romantic critique of the Enlightenment.

The political takes center stage in the next essay: Katharina Pewny proposes a study in theater and performance art concerning the interrelated themes of rest and unrest. These themes are particularly present in the portrayal of women in modern drama, as well as in the production of playwrights and female performance artists working in German and English since 1996. By examining rest and unrest in these recent artistic productions, Katharina Pewny will establish a "connection between psyche and politics... which may put theater studies and cultural studies in a mutually inspiring dialectic." Cultural and gender studies have mapped the construction of modernity's "hysterical" woman, so an examination of rest and (particularly) unrest as constructions of the *feminine* in contemporary drama and performance art should provide insights about feminist re-appropriation of "male constructions of subjectivity." Through theater, the route is open from psychoanalysis to feminist theory, touching on cultural studies along the way. The displacement of affect involved in Freud's theory of hysterical trauma, for instance, may find a correlate in the physicality of modern performance: "Hysteria, a result of shock and trauma, develops by a "fastening" of affects, which cannot be acted out (they may be partly or completely repressed), and, in the hysterical scene, the affects, now fantastically

augmented, are represented by the body... hysteria is connected with theater via translation processes operating between psyche and body on the one hand, and via mimesis as a representational action on the other." Similarly, the social traumas of history may also find a neurotic symbolization on the modern stage. Katharina Pewny's proposed study of contemporary theater and performance art in New York, Germany, and Austria may equally lead to a re-valorization of the concept of rest itself through an improved understanding of the cathartic effect of dramatic representation of unrest.

Next, the political is located at the intersection of history and discourse. Balázs Trencsényi undertakes a survey of the intellectual history of the early period of Bulgarian independence, focusing on representations of Bulgarian "national character." Because Bulgarian intellectuals portrayed themselves as "cultural mediators" between the state and the people, the issue of "Bulgarianness" served as a political marker in the discursive field surrounding the construction of the new nation. "As the political task of creating Bulgaria was intertwined with the pressing issue of deciding who the Bulgarians actually were, some sort of characterological rhetoric has been influential for the Bulgarian national discourse from the 1860s onwards." Although this characterological rhetoric sometimes portrayed the difference between the elite and the peasantry ("the entire debate around the national character always oscillated between two poles of normativity: the subconscious bearer of the canon (i.e. the peasantry) and "the select few", who represented the active substance, extracting and projecting back the national essence on the community") in terms of Westernization versus the authentically Bulgarian, we are introduced to many alternate constructions. Anton Strashimirov, for example, stressed the "colorful variety of regional types and not... a cleavage between the 'elite' and the 'people'." Nikola Krústinkov criticized the intelligentsia while pursuing a Westernizing agenda, and Ivan Kepov criticized the agrarian regime while advocating the "cult of the peasantry as constituting the character of the nation." In the 1930's, characterology "became a real fashion and a symbolic battlefield of different (meta-)political conceptions," and in a reversal of previous trends, characterology was incorporated into the discourse of statism. By the late thirties, "the references to the 'Bulgarian character' became more routinized and often performed merely legitimizing discursive functions, deriving the new regime's features from the putative national essence." The history of this intellectual discourse therefore involves a significant evolution in the relationship between putative denotation and political connotation.

For Tereza Vajdova, a contemporary case provides the context for a critical evaluation of the facile equation of the non-political with claims to objectivity. Her essay examines the public discourses surrounding the Czech Republic's accession to the European Union, and argues that the effort to "de-politicize" the accession process has prevented a desirable level of public (political) participation. Non-governmental organizations tend to frame the issue in terms of how, and not whether, accession to the EU should occur; political opponents of accession are marginalized; and the Czech government pursues an information strategy that, while ostensibly objective, is based on the assumption that EU accession is inevitable: "pre-accession activities, including the information strategy, have been framed in ways that tend to reduce the political dimension of the activities and have an inhibitory effect on public debate." In the public discourse created by the government, several strategies are employed to create the impression that the Czech Republic must join the EU. The accession is portrayed as the only choice; complying with rules for EU-entry is touted as essential; deadlines within the accession process produce a certain sense of "necessity"; and most significantly, claims to "objectivity" become the ruse of a discursive strategy designed to stifle debate. In effect, argues Tereza Vajdova, public debate in the Czech Republic over EU accession has been reduced to an enforced silence.

Finally, Berthold Molden's essay analyzes how intellectual debate in post-civil war Guatemala has been refracted through the prism of the controversy surrounding the 1999 book *Rigoberta Menchu and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* by American anthropologist David Stoll. The international success of *I, Rigoberta Menchu* (1983) created heightened awareness of human-rights abuses inflicted on the Mayan population during Guatemala's protracted civil war. Menchu's own role as a spokesperson for the cause of the Mayas in particular and of indigenous peoples in general – for which she received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 – brought Stoll's thesis, with its revelation that certain elements in Menchu's *testimonio* were false, into the international spotlight. The discussion that ensued in newspapers like the *New York Times* and *El País*, however, neglected the important implications the controversy has for the politics of historical memory in Guatemala itself. By disclosing the inaccuracies in Menchu's book, Stoll gave leverage to his claim that the Mayas were a hapless third party caught between two armies during the civil war – an interpretation that Menchu and many indigenous-rights groups contest. In effect, Stoll's argument about Menchu is the polemical spearhead of a politically-charged interpretation of the role indigenous peoples played in the Guatemalan civil war, in

which ethnicity is virtually ruled out as an underlying factor in the violence while the responsibility the government bears for human-rights abuses is minimized until it merely equals the that of the insurgents – flatly contradicting postwar truth-commission reports. For the former Guatemalan army general Mario Mérida writing in *El Periódico*, for example, the "amerikanische Akademiker wird... zum wissenschaftlichen Aushängeschild einer die Verantwortung zu gleichen Teilen zuweisenden und die Guerilla verstärkt belastenden Umdeutung des von der Wahrheitskommission transportieren Geschichtsbildes, wie sie von vielen Militärs betrieben wird." While positions in the Guatemalan political spectrum do not always precisely correlate to opinions about Stoll's thesis, it is clear that the controversy over Menchu reflects a broader debate about historical memory, and in particular, about the self-expression of those victimized in this terrible conflict.

The diversity of these approaches no doubt parallels the national and intellectual diversity of the Junior Fellows themselves. It is also worth noting that the IWM Junior Fellows' Conference allowed a group composed partly of Europeans and partly of Americans to fruitfully discuss ideas related to the political at a time when communication between Europe and the U.S. (in institutional, social, and discursive terms) has, by all accounts, deteriorated due to factors of a political nature. For that, among other reasons, the essays collected in this volume should be distinguished as the products of an admirable scholarly ideal.