

THE KANDERSTEG SEMINAR

Wednesday, October 31st – Sunday, November 4th, 2007
Kandersteg, Switzerland

Remarque Institute, New York University

Programme

Wednesday, October 31st:

Arrival of participants by train in Kandersteg

Check in: Waldhotel Doldenhorn
CH- 3718 Kandersteg
Tel: (00 + 41) 33.675.81.81
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19:00 Welcome reception and dinner at Hotel

Thursday, November 1st:

Session I

09:30 – 13:00

On the comparative history of contemporary political thought

How distinctive are national traditions in the study of political thought today? Are the subject-matter, approaches, methods of the subject fundamentally different in different countries and cultures or has there been a steady homogenization in recent decades? Can one – should one – speak of 'American' or 'European' political thought today? What happens when thinkers (e.g. Rawls, Heidegger, Levinas) or topics (e.g. liberalism, republicanism, multi-culturalism) from one political culture get 'appropriated' into the canons and debates of another? Are contemporary political issues and normative debates (over constitutionalism, for example, the responsibilities of the state, or the bounds of political or religious liberty) reflected in the current concerns of intellectual historians? Should they be?

Thursday, November 1st (cont'd):

13:15 Lunch at Hotel

 Free afternoon

19:30 Dinner at the Hotel

Friday, November 2nd:

Session II
09:00 – 13:00 ***Questions of Method***

For much of the past generation intellectual history in the US was shaped by debates over the 'linguistic turn'. Has this moment, and the contemporary prominence of the 'Cambridge school' emphasis on texts-in-contexts, now passed? With what lasting practical impact on the way we write intellectual history? Have these Anglophone methodological preoccupations secured any foothold on the way the subject is studied elsewhere? How different are e.g. the French attention to the 'contextualised' history of intellectuals, or German *Begriffsgeschichte* and how much have they in turn contributed to current approaches elsewhere? Are there still competing methodological alternatives in the study of intellectual history – and if so, what are they? Is our approach to past ideas still coloured by normative concerns or have we entered an age of epistemological eclecticism?

13:15 Lunch at Hotel

 Free afternoon

20:00 Dinner at restaurant Landgasthof Ruedihus

Saturday, November 3rd:

Session III

09:00 – 13:00

Issues of Substance

Are there still 'wars of ideas' to be fought or is 'liberalism' in one guise or another the default premise of modern political argument? For everyone, everywhere? Or are we seeing, in one guise or another, the 'return of history'? Are there still Grand Narratives – e.g. of the religious or anti-capitalist variety – with the capacity to seduce or convince? What remains of the political languages of the twentieth century – 'anti-totalitarianism', 'social democracy' for example? Do older concepts – e.g. 'progress' – still have any purchase upon the political imagination? Does the fashionable current interpretation of the 20th century as an age of political religions – with its implications for our understanding of the international confrontations of our own time – still convince? If not, how should we understand the recent past and its present uses? What can the intellectual historian contribute to such debates beyond the clarification of concepts and categories?

13:15

Lunch at Hotel

Free afternoon

16:00 – 18:00

Closing session

20:00

Farewell Dinner at Hotel

Sunday, November 4th:

Departure of participants.

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