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Cultural Philosophy

translated by Alan Duncan

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Der Inhalt dieses Studienbriefs wird gedruckt auf Recyclingpapier (80 g/m², weiß), hergestellt aus 100 % Altpapier.

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curriculum vitae

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1977 – 1983	study of philosophy, German, and comparative religious science at the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, Bonn
1985	Ph.D.
1986 – 1992	university assistant at the philosophy dept. A of the University of Bonn
1992 – 1995	fellowship holder of the research community
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2003 – 2007	visiting professor at the University of Duisburg-Essen
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2004 – 2008	founding president of the European Society for Early Modern Philosophy (ESEMP)

Publications (selection)

Das Leben der Lebendigen. Hegels politisch-religiöse Begründung der Philosophie freier Verbundenheit in seinen frühen Manuskripten, Bonn 1987.

(co-ed.) Bewußtsein und Zeitlichkeit. Ein Problemschnitt durch die Philosophie der Neuzeit, Würzburg 1990.

Leibniz' Weg ins perspektivische Universum. Eine Harmonie im Zeitalter der Berechnung, Hamburg 1997.

Das Geld als Zeichen – Orientierung an einem Medium von undefinierbarer Bedeutung, in: Kultur der Zeichen (Zeichen und Interpretation VI), ed. by Werner Stegmaier, Frankfurt am Main 2000, 198-233.

Die Seele als System. Aristoteles' Wissenschaft von der Psyche, Hamburg 2001.

Von der Bedürfnisbegrenzungsmoral zur Bedürfniskultivierungsmoral – Alte Ethik und neue Ökonomie bei Bernhard Mandeville, in: Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie (2001), 338-362.

Was sind transkulturelle Wertekonflikte? Und inwieweit sind sie lösbar?, in: Transkulturelle Wertekonflikte. Theorie und wirtschaftliche Praxis, ed. by Kurt Röttgers & Peter Koslowski, Heidelberg 2002, 46-59.

(Ed.) Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Frühe Schriften zum Naturrecht. Mit einer Einleitung und Anmerkungen, Hamburg 2003 (Philosophische Bibliothek Meiner, Bd. 543).

Georg Simmels ‚Tragödie der Kultur' – 90 Jahre danach, in: JABLIS. Jahrbuch für europäische Prozesse 3 (2004).

Die moralische Entgrenzung der Ökonomie in der Frührenaissance. Exemplarische Argumente des Florentiner Stadtbürgerhumanismus 1400-1460, in: Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen, ed. by Wolfgang Hogrebe together with Joachim Bromand, Berlin 2004, 461-476.

Humantechnologische Expansion jenseits von Metaphysik und Anthropologie – Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Heidegger, in: Humantechnologie und Menschenbild. Mit einem Blick auf Heidegger, ed. by Günther Seubold, Bonn 2006, 47-65.

(Ed.) Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Monadologie (Klassiker Auslegen, vol. 34), Berlin 2009, IX, 278 pp.

Introduction

This course is dedicated to a discipline that appears as problematic as it is young. As terminus for a new region yet to be cleared and rendered arable, "cultural philosophy" appears for the very first time in 1899 in Ludwig Stein.[1] Since its swift establishment after 1900, it has been a topic of such debate that it is doubted even today whether it even has a clearly definable object. Even Ernst Cassirer comes in 1939 to a decidedly sceptical conclusion:

> "Of all the individual regions that we are wont to distinguish from one another within the systematic whole of philosophy cultural philosophy constitutes perhaps the most questionable and debated region. Even the very concept thereof is still by no means sharply delineated nor unambiguously established. It lacks not only solid, recognised solutions to its basic problems; rather, it even lacks an agreement on what can be asked within its boundaries sensibly and rightly. This peculiar uncertainty has to do with the fact that cultural philosophy is the youngest among the philosophical disciplines, and that, unlike the rest of them, it cannot look back onto centuries of development."[2]

The variety of what has been subsumed under "cultural philosophy" from 1900 to the present, and the difficulty of being able to understand these heterogeneous designs at all in answer to reasonably comparable questions, could almost awaken suspicions that cultural philosophy exists only in proclamation, but not in fact, much like the Loch Ness monster. The internal problems of the discipline may well be the reason for the paradoxical situation that on one hand "culture" and "cultural philosophy" have become quite fashionable again in recent years, but that there are, on the other hand, hardly any systematic investigations into why this discipline ever arose or what its past and present objects and goals are. And so there are indeed many and increasingly valuable collections and anthologies of classic texts on cultural philosophy[3] and presentations

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[1] Stein, Ludwig: An der Wende des Jahrhunderts. Versuch einer Kulturphilosophie, Freiburg i. Br. 1899. – The assertion announced by Diemer, Alwin: Grundriss der Philosophie, vol. 2, Die philosophischen Sonderdisziplinen, 4th part: Kulturphilosophie, Meisenheim a.G. 1964, 14, that the term was coined by the Romantic Adam Müller, is not properly cited and cannot be confirmed. The fact of which Konersmann, Ralf: Kulturphilosophie zur Einführung, Hamburg 2003, 20, reminds us that the architect Gottfried Semper already wrote in 1851 of "questions of cultural philosophy", ought not to be overestimated, as Semper was not thinking of a new philosophical discipline here, whereas Ludwig Stein certainly was.

[2] Naturalismus und humanistische Begründung der Kulturphilosophie (1939), in: Cassirer, Ernst: Erkenntnis, Begriff, Kultur, ed. by Bast, Rainer A., Hamburg 1993, 231.

[3] Konersmann, Ralf (ed.): Kulturphilosophie, Leipzig 1998 (2nd ed.); Burkhard, Franz-Peter (ed.): Kulturphilosophie, Freiburg, München 2000. The authors mentioned here also include, for example, Alain, Valéry, Lévi-Strauss, Bourdieu, Tylor, Malinowski or Parsons, so that one could also have subsumed them unspecifically under "cultural theory"; cf. then also the collection by Müller-Funk, Wolfgang: Kulturtheorie.

of exemplary positions[4], but hardly an attempt to assess, portray and order the diversity of historical conceptions systematically.

Structure of the Course

Due to this difficulty, a type of systematic approach to cultural philosophy has been selected for this course that is divided into two main parts. In part 1 a sequence of preliminary explications is pursued in whose course the elementary meaning of the term "cultural philosophy" is delineated and distinguished from different directions. At first, four different fundamental meanings of "culture" are to be analysed whose inadvertent confusion makes the word so unclear and ambiguous today. Without any clarification of this objective level it cannot be seen what problems and objects "cultural philosophy" can have in the first place. Thereupon a delineation follows at the *theory level* as well, that which "cultural philosophy" is and can be being distinguished in its specific characteristics from two other types of theoretical treatment of culture: from the "cultural sciences" on the one hand, and from "cultural criticism" on the other.

In part 2 select classic positions of cultural philosophy are presented that have an exemplary significance for philosophy about culture: Herder, Simmel and Spengler. In this way the problem of the actual object of cultural philosophy is not avoided, but nor is on the other hand the legitimate variety of culture philosophical approaches cut short. With the arrangement of the preliminary explications in the individual chapters the following goals and theses are connected.

Goals and Theses in the Chapter Outline

First of all, in chap. 1.1 the *basic thesis* is supported and developed that the object "culture" is of an elementary polysemy that can be mastered clearly, however, by the ideal-typical reconstruction of four historically evolved basic meanings. Accordingly, it ought to be demonstrable that cultural philosophy also treats several different objects and consequently develops entirely different lines of questioning, depending upon which of the four fundamental meanings is presupposed. Hence the *consequent thesis* of the course arises, that the unity of the object of cultural philosophy can primarily disclosed in each case via the underlying concept of culture. Through the subsequent distinction of "cultural philosophy" from both "cultural sciences" (chap. 1.2) and "cultural criticism" (chap. 1.3) it ought to become clear as well that cultural philosophy in the narrower sense is something exclusively modern. For it arises, as can be seen from the third basic sense of "culture", in the first place on the basis of the secularisation of Europe, and in the second on that of the

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Einführung in Schlüsseltexte der Kulturwissenschaften, Tübingen, Basel 2006. A just as unspecific collection that does not distinguish between "cultural philosophy", "cultural science", "cultural sociology" etc. is in Wirth, Uwe (ed.): Kulturwissenschaft. Eine Auswahl grundlegender Texte, Frankfurt a.M. 2008.

[4] Geyer, Carl-Friedrich: Einführung in die Philosophie der Kultur (1994), Darmstadt 2009; Perpeet, Wilhelm: Kulturphilosophie. Anfänge und Probleme, Bonn 1997.

radical demythologising of the human world, within which all extra-human entities can be interpreted in formal respect as cultural creations of man. With these distinctions and delineations, historical as they are systematic, a first sketch can follow then in chap. 1.4 that etches out both the common main business and the various types of cultural philosophy. It is in this framework that the conclusion is grounded that a comprehensive system of culture that would underlie the individual theoretical systems of cultural philosophy is at least impossible to find, and probably does not exist. This lack of systematicity on the side of the object, though, implies neither the impossibility of systematic cultural philosophy, nor does it necessarily constrict the productivity and clarifying power of cultural philosophical theories.

In the second part three exemplary approaches to cultural philosophy are presented in conclusion (chaps. 2.1-2.3). The relevant conceptions of Herder, Simmel and Spengler show first of all how broad the range of all possible forms of cultural philosophy is, depending upon what interests and questions are pursued, what cognitive presuppositions are accepted and which of the four fundamental senses of culture is at work. Secondly, the three examples document where the potential for knowledge in a philosophy of culture lies, and, by the same token, especially when one considers the Spenglerian type critically, where the boundaries of its legitimate claims lie.

1   Preamble

The lack of clarity of "cultural philosophy" is essentially rooted in the lack of clarity of "culture". This term is, at least in modernity, infamous for its polysemy and vagueness.[5] It also belongs to the most hollow pathos-words and impressive vocables that rustle through science, politics, and everyday life. Whether culture declines and falls into ruin has been a topic of much debate for centuries. But that the concept of culture decays can even be proven. And while the culture vocable has drawn an unforeseen cult for a long time now, the rather rare[6] and one-sided[7] scientific clarification of the term displays an astounding uncertainty. The reason for this is the "diverse, not always straight forward history of development" of the concept of culture itself.[8] For the systematic clarification of what cultural philosophy means it is therefore imperative that a first step (1.-4.) clarify the fundamental meanings of "culture" historically and systematically. In a second step (5.), then, a preview is to be given which of these fundamental meanings is predominant in the three types of theoretical treatment of culture.

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[5] „Nowhere is there a clear concept of culture, and one needs only look at any philosophical dictionary in order to be able to determine the awful mess in the concepts of culture or civilisation." – This conclusion in Dempf, Alois: Kulturphilosophie, München, Berlin 1932, 9, is all the more true for the present day.

[6] Perpeet, Wilhelm: Kultur, Kulturphilosophie, in: Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie, ed. by Ritter, Joachim, vol. 4, Basel, Darmstadt 1971 ff., 1309-1324, gives only a few hints for a clarification of the history of the term. A good overview of the "General History of the Word Culture" for that time was to be had from Kroeber, Alfred Louis; Kluckhohn, Clyde: Culture. A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions, Cambridge, Mass. 1952, New York 1967 (2nd ed.), 11-73. A new general perspective that also underlies our presentation is found in Busche, Hubertus: Was ist Kultur? Erster Teil: Die vier historischen Grundbedeutungen; Zweiter Teil: Die dramatisierende Verknüpfung verschiedener Kulturbegriffe in Georg Simmels ,Tragödie der Kultur', in Dialektik. Zeitschrift für Kulturphilosophie, 2000/1, 69-90; 2000/2, 5-16.

[7] Luhmann, Niklas: Kultur als historischer Begriff, in: Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik. Studien zur Wissenssoziologie der modernen Gesellschaft, vol. 4, Frankfurt a.M., 31-54, notes rightly that it has "thus been difficult for the social sciences to agree on a theoretically well-rooted concept of culture" (31). It escapes him, though, that even these attempts are directed merely at one of many basic historical meanings of "culture". Even Luhmann's respectable construction on the "historical concept of culture" itself rests on historical hypotheses that one can only regard as fumbling in the dark (31-42).

[8] Pflaum, Michael: Die Kultur-Zivilisations-Antithese im Deutschen, in: Europäische Schlüsselwörter. Wortvergleichende und wortgeschichtliche Studien, ed. by Knobloch, Johann; Moser, Hugo et al. Vol. 3: Kultur und Zivilisation, München 1967, 288-427, here 289.

1.1   What Is Culture? – Four Basic Historical Meanings

If the history of the concept of "culture" is to be *systematically* clarified, one must not get lost in the jungle of concrete usages.[9] Upon closer examination, *four basic meanings* appear as a guideline *that arises one after another in history*, meanings in which different epochs are reflected. That all four basic meanings are still alive today, but are seldom distinguished from one another through terminological modification is the reason why talk of "culture" is so unclear today. Therefore the four basic meanings are classified here in terms of intellectual history, explicated analytically with evidence, separated with memorable formulas, and defined as well as possible.

> **Four basic historical meanings of culture**

The Latin nomen actionis "cultura"[10] is rooted in the verb "colere", i. e. *to bestow care upon a thing, tend, take care of a field*, but also *to inhabit*.[11] In the agrarian, old Roman society, it refers primarily to the tending of ground and soil. Thus, culture begins with the cultivation of the field (agri cultura) and with the tending of the garden (horti cultura). From this primary level of *cultivating things* (cultura rerum), though, the name is already transferred at an early stage into the figurative, thus shifted from the *outer* nature (field, garden) to the *inner* nature (body and mind). Of these two metaphorical aspects of meaning, it was then less the *cultivation of the body* (cultura corporis), to which also personal hygiene, cosmetics and laundry care belong, than rather the *cultivation of the mind* (cultura animi) that became predominant from Roman antiquity into the 18th century. Thus, the first, classical, fundamental meaning of "culture" that stands in the background of all these three levels of usage proves to be the *form-giving, ennobling treatment and care of natural dispositions (for the sake of the perfection of their fruits) by man*.

> **Culture of body and mind as metaphors**

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[9] The two standard works on the history of the term culture are Niedermann, Joseph: Kultur. Werden und Wandlungen des Begriffs und seiner Ersatzbegriffe von Cicero bis Herder, Florenz 1941; Baur, Isolde: Die Geschichte des Wortes 'Kultur' und seiner Zusammensetzungen, Diss. Phil. München 1951. Both works, with their valuable plethora of material, serve as a rich source of information for the newer volumes, but allow the reader easily to miss the proverbial forest for the trees.

[10] For the manifold and multifaceted antique history of the word, of which here only the larger lines can be pursued, the differentiated presentation in Niedermann: Kultur, op. cit. (fn. 9), 15-36, can still be recommended.

[11] In explanation of the fact that "colere" means both "to inhabit" and to "tend", « notice » Ernout, Alfred; Meillet, Antoine: Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine, Histoire des mots, Paris 1959 (4th ed.), 132: "Les deux sens apparaissent également attestés dès l'époque la plus ancienne, les deux idées étant nexuses pour une population rurale, cf. agricola".