

Wandern

I'm so glad to have been invited to speak to you on such a wonderful topic – *wandern*! It's such a rich idea! So many magical associations!

Some of them are very old indeed. We think of **the medieval guild system**, with its division into three stages: *Lehrjahre*, *Wanderjahre*, and *Meister* – typically translated as apprenticeship, journeymanhood, and mastery. Only the first two are marked out as periods of time, years in the making; in the last, you've arrived at a kind of eternal present tense. Mastery is like that.

As an apprentice, you learn your trade from a single master, close to home. That can take years. But it's the journeymanhood, the *Wanderjahre*, that we're most interested in. Having learned the rudiments, the apprentice goes on the road to learn what he can from many masters. One might travel to the next town and learn from some master there, and then on to the next town, and so forth. You're probably traveling on foot from town to town, so it's likely you don't travel very far. But still, compared to staying at home, it's an eye-opening experience. Journeymanhood is your chance to see a bit of the world, and learn, just a bit, how people in other places do things differently, and think in different ways.

Eventually, you've learned what many masters have to teach you, and you return home to prepare your masterpiece – *Meisterstück* – to display the mastery of your craft. And then you're in business, free to practice your trade.

And that tripartite division is still echoed today in our universities, in the ranking of academics as assistant professors, associate professors, and full professors. How ironic that many a keen and critical professor is eager to ascend within what's still essentially a medieval system! And of course, one of the best parts of the old medieval guild system has been entirely lost: associate professors should be *wanderers*, going about from place to place and learning their trade from the best people, wherever they may be. But they don't.

Wandern is certainly also **an arch Romantic word and thought**. So much romantic poetry hinges on wandering. There's a yearning in the word, a striving for something new. You don't have a goal in mind – that's the point. Otherwise you would be *traveling*. But *wandern* isn't at all the same as *reisen nach*. *Wandern* is open-ended, that's its appeal. The journey itself is the goal. What will I experience? I'm not at all sure.

We think above all of Eichendorff. *Wandern* can be joyous, as in

Der frohe Wandersmann

Wem Gott will rechte Gunst erweisen

Den Schickt er in die Weite Welt;

Dem will er seine Wunder weisen
In Berg und Wald und Strom und Feld.

Die Trägen, die zu Hause liegen.
Erquicket nicht das Morgenrot,
Sie wissen nur von Kinderwiegen,
Von Sorgen, Last und Not um Brot.

Die Bächlein von den Bergen springen,
Die Lerchen schwirren hoch vor Lust,
Was sollt ich nicht mit ihnen singen
Aus voller Kehl und frischer Brust?

Den lieben Gott lass ich nur walten;
Der Bächlein, Lerchen, Wald und Feld
Und Erd und Himmel will erhalten,
Hat auch mein Sach aufs best bestellt!

Wandern is above all an experience of the joys of nature. In that way it's very different from the medieval guild system, where you learned different human customs and practices.

The wanderer can experience the simple joys of country life –

Es zog eine Hochzeit den Berg entlang
Ich hörte die Vögel schlagen,
Da blitzten viel Reiter, das Waldhorn klang,
Das war ein lustiges Jagen!

– but the weight of the sublimity of nature also causes our hearts to contract:

Und eh ichs gedacht, war alles verhallt,

Die Nacht bedeckt die Runde,
Nur von den Bergen noch rauschet der Wald
Und mich schauert im Herzensgrunde.

In wandering we learn to encounter something much larger than ourselves. *Wandern* is to these Romantics a going out of themselves, which leads to an expanded sense of self when you return.

It also reminds me of **Hegel's view of philosophy**. Hegel had a very unconventional picture of philosophy, and of our job as philosophers. Our job isn't to build our philosophical edifice and defend it against all comers. Rather, we should wander through the views of all the philosophers. The truth is what starts to gel at the end of that wandering. We need as it were to perform all the labors of Hercules, to recapitulate the wandering of Odysseus for 20 years, having all kinds of adventures along the way. Hegel wants us to recapitulate those adventures and build towards a truth that isn't abstract, but is rather full and rich.

And of course one thinks also about those *hippies* of the early 20th century, those dropouts from society who went *wandering* through the countryside, really quite aimlessly. I'm talking about **the *Wandervögel***. There was something of the Romantics about them, those youth who went wandering through the countryside. Something even pre-Romantic. I can't help associating them with Rousseau, who felt that we were *free* in the state of nature, and that civilization has corrupted us. But watch out: that seemingly idyllic form of wandering can be an illusion and a trap. And there was a nationalistic element to the *Wandervögel* that we certainly don't want to emulate today. Moreover, the movement morphed into something more like the Boy and Girl Scouts, teaching *traditional* values. And that's not what we mean by *wandering* at all.

But what of today? How can we be *Wanderer* today? (Well okay, not *today* – please stay focused and on task today!) I mean, what's the contemporary counterpart to wandering?

I think that a lot of you are actually in your years of apprenticeship now, and that your years of wandering will begin in your 20s. That's a pattern I see repeated very often today. Not joining a company and then sitting tight for 40 or 50 years, but rather wandering around a bit, in an open-ended sort of way, and seeing what comes along. Seeing what life brings. That's actually a very good experience, and I wish it on all of you when you graduate from college. Become a wanderer. It takes a bit of courage, but the payoff is that you will be a much stronger person for it, and you're likely to find much more interesting work.

But I also think that you can be wanderers throughout your whole life. If you aren't already, you can start tomorrow. Because wandering isn't so much about rambling through the outer world now. It's an exploration, but not like a vacation. Rather, you can explore *inner* space.

Back in the Middle Ages, there weren't lots of books to be read, and you probably couldn't read them in any case, so to get the experience of something new, you had to go to a

new place. But that was of course very limited, both in space and in time. Your wandering was probably on foot, and you might never get very far. You might never get to a major city.

How different things are today! Today you can wander to any corner of the world, explore the most exotic cultures, undergo endless adventures – *by reading books*. If you think about it, the person who really studies good books about a subject – and there are good books about every subject today! – knows more than the person who takes a tour of the place and mindlessly snaps photographs instead of really experiencing it. They're *at* the new place – they've got a "selfie" to prove it – but they're not *inside* the new place at all.

But the ardent pilgrim, the ardent wanderer, is *inside* their goal. *Set aside your smart phone*, and pick up some good books. Make them books about something utterly alien to you. Another culture, a remote culture. That's a wandering you can do for your entire life. Get in the habit now. That's a kind of inner journeymanship that's very good.

And of course, learning a foreign language is the absolutely best way to explore a culture from the *inside*. *Language maps the inside of culture*. German's a good start! But don't stop there. Learn another language besides. You don't need to learn it perfectly: even an imperfect understanding of another language is a priceless gift.

Also – ich wünsche ihnen allen eine Gute Reise!