

BOOK REVIEW

Friedrich Stadler: *Studien zum Wiener Kreis. Ursprung, Entwicklung und Wirkung des Logischen Empirismus im Kontext*, 1035 pp. Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1997, DM 128.00.

After two monographs on the Vienna Circle (VC) of Logical Empiricism were published already in the early 90s in German-speaking countries,¹ now Friedrich Stadler, founder and director of the Vienna Circle Institute in Vienna, has published his long-awaited magnum opus. One main difference between his book and those of his predecessors lies in its sheer volume: whereas Manfred Geier treats the theme in 157 pages and Rudolf Haller in 304 pages, Stadler requires 1035 for the same purpose.

The book is divided into two main parts, one being the (mainly) consecutive description of the history of the VC and the other – under the title “Die biobibliographische Dimension” – is a documentation containing the photographs, the curricula vitae and the bibliographies of 37 members of the circle and its periphery. The reader will mainly use this second part as a reference work. With one exception: the documentary appendix on the murder of Moritz Schlick (the founder and one of the main figures of the circle) reads like a suspense story.

Also here and there in the first part one finds highly interesting documentary material. The chapter entitled “Der Schlick-Zirkel”, for example, includes all the surviving protocols of the circle which are published here for the first time (pp. 267–363). Then there are sections containing the programmes of the “International Congresses for the Unity of Science” between 1935 and 1941 (pp. 402–436) and an excerpt from an interview with Karl Popper (pp. 525–545). In particular the protocols will contribute to a democratization of knowledge on the VC, because this first-rate material was formerly only accessible to experts. From all these highly welcome documentary additions which give the first part of the book the character of a collage, the reader will easily unearth the core of the VC story. This story covers its prehistory before the First World War (chap. 3 and 4), its non-public phase from 1918–1929 (chap. 6), its public phase from 1929 to the “Anschluß” (the occupation of Austria by the Third Reich in



March 1938) and, finally, the dissolution of the circle and the emigration of its members (in chap. 13). This description is rounded off by digressions on the relations of the circle to some of its prominent outsiders like Ludwig Wittgenstein (chap. 9) or Karl Popper (chap. 10). Experts will find Stadler's discussion of the priority-claims to physicalism (between Wittgenstein, Carnap and Neurath) and his discussion of Popper's strange assertion that it was he who "killed" the circle (and not for instance the Nazis) especially interesting and stimulating.

What then distinguishes Stadler's book from those of his forerunners (like Geier and Halter)? There is, to begin with, the *methodical* approach, which is expressed already in the title of the book ("im Kontext") and developed programmatically in its first chapter. There Stadler distances himself from the insufficiencies of purely internalistic philosophy and science histories and promises to take into consideration also the "social and institutional frame for the rise and fall of this blossoming science-culture in the first (Austrian) republic". His approach makes itself felt mainly in the framing chapters of his story, that is in the long prehistory on the one hand and in chapter 12 on the other, where the relations of the VC to the University of Vienna or to the workers' movement in "red Vienna" are treated. These latter sections contain material from Stadler's very first publications in 1979 and 1982. But here, too, he adds many new things to these "old" publications like, for instance, the successions in the philosophy chairs after the dismissal of Heinrich Gomperz from the philosophical faculty and after the murder of Schlick.

Seen from a *material* viewpoint, his description can be distinguished from those of his forerunners in that the dense network of circles and groups (like those of Gomperz, Karl Bühler or Ludwig von Mises) in which the VC was imbedded, is described in detail. The astonishing multitude of such groups as well as the personal overlaps of their members are also made visible in some telling diagrams (p. 627). Stadler is the first to inform us about the "Mathematisches Colloquium" around Carl Menger with its interdisciplinary activities such as its public lecture series and publications (pp. 437–466 and 630 f.).

In an opus magnum like Stadler's, some small mistakes are practically inevitable. The fact that Herbert Feigl is mentioned in some places as a contributor to the International Encyclopedia of Unified Science (IEUS), although his planned monograph on Scientific Explanation was never finished nor published, is one of these small errors. Friedrich Waismann's Königsberg lecture of 1930 on Wittgenstein's viewpoint in the philosophy of mathematics is not, as Stadler tells us (on p. 389), lost, but has been published in the meantime. Paul Lazarsfeld was not an author of the

famous “Marienthal”-study on the consequences of unemployment (written by Marie Jahoda), and it is not true that this study fell victim to the bookburnings in Nazi Germany (p. 610).

Apart from such minor mistakes, I find some general trends open to objection. When Stadler attempts to defend the VC against some critics, he sometimes goes too far himself. That is the case when he points to the circle’s achievements in the fields of ethics and aesthetics. To be sure: some members of the circle took these themes seriously. But their publications are relatively few and harbor some grave deficiencies. To make progress in these fields, one has to go beyond the VCs noncognitivism in these areas. Stadler, in my opinion, has also placed exaggerated hope in the consequences such a reappraisal of the “*Vertreibung des Geistes*” from Austria could have. If one places so much emphasis on the social and political context of the intellectual climate of those 20s and 30s, as he does and rightly so, then one has to reduce the expectations for a renaissance of scientific reason in a meanwhile very different intellectual and political climate in Vienna (and in some other former scientific centers which had close contacts to the VC in central Europe like Berlin, Göttingen and Prague too).

Without doubt Stadler’s historical picture of the VC is the most complete one available to date, and one is tempted to ask whether he has left anything at all open to future investigation. I would like to emphasize only two points here.

(1) Stadler himself, in other publications, pointed early (1982) to the relations of the circle to arts and culture such as the politically-inspired art of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*. In his new book, he mentions in passing other relevant areas like architecture and urbanism, but only briefly (pp. 70, 381, 596) and literature of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* is not mentioned at all (as, for instance, the novelists Rudolf Brunngraber and Alfred Döblin). In the last few years, it has become more and more apparent that in fields like architecture and literature much interesting new material remains to be discovered. The publication and discussion of this material will give a more complete historical picture of the cultural ramifications of the “*Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung*” and will, at the same time, provide some fruitful perspectives for the modernity/postmodernity debate, in which Stadler professes to be interested himself (p. 19).

(2) Although, in the documentary portions of his book, the author from time to time ventures a glance at the other side of the ocean, he concludes his story mainly with the emigration of the VC from Austria. This strategy is not consistent, because the circle’s work in Austria, already from the early 30s on, went hand in hand with the internationalization of the

empiricist movement. One only has to bear in mind that Herbert Feigl already left Austria in 1930 for the USA. In the other direction not only W. V. Quine and Charles Morris (listed in the documentary part), but also some other American scholars (not mentioned in this part) like Ernest Nagel or Sidney Hook visited Vienna and/or Prague and later on served as spokesmen for the circle in the USA. Of course also the Congresses for the Unity of Science or the IEUS would provide material for a chapter entitled "Internationalization of Logical Positivism" that remains to be written. To be sure, Stadler at least presents the programmes and the list of contents of these two major ventures of the circle in exile. But the presentation of this documentary material can, of course, be no more than a beginning. What the effects of the activities of the former VC in its exile countries (mainly the USA) were and how its teachings were transformed in the process of acculturation to its new environment, remains, as Stadler himself underlines, "a vast field for multicultural exile studies" (p. 613).

In my opinion, it is very well possible that such an historical investigation of the VC on the one hand and the ongoing more systematically orientated evaluations of "modernity" (including philosophical modernity, to which the VC surely belonged) on the other will converge in important respects. The recent discussions, for instance, of a theme like "Unity of Science" point in that direction. Be that as it may: there is no doubt that everyone working in that field and in related fields will have to come back to Stadler's book as the new standard work.

NOTE

¹ Manfred Geier (1992) *Der Wiener Kreis. Mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*, Reinbek bei Hamburg. Rudolf Hailer (1993) *Neopositivismus. Eine historische Einführung in die Philosophie des Wiener Kreises*, Darmstadt.

Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte
Humboldtallee 11
37073 Göttingen
Germany

HANS-JOACHIM DAHMS