

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-89055-7 - Karl Popper - The Formative Years, 1902-1945: Politics and Philosophy in Interwar Vienna

Malachi Haim Hacoen

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction

Why write an intellectual biography of Karl Popper (1902–1994)? To his many admirers, the answer may be obvious. He has been one of the most widely known philosophers of the twentieth century and may one day be recognized as its greatest. His philosophy, critical rationalism, resolved long-standing problems in the philosophy of science, and his cosmopolitanism inspires our age to look beyond the nation-state. He contributed to virtually every field of philosophy. Terms that he coined, or redefined, have become salient in contemporary discourse: Open Society, social engineering, essentialism, falsifiability, psychologism, World 3. He has been translated into more than forty languages, and additional translations continue to appear every month. Open Society projects and Popper centers have been proliferating around the world. He has become one of the most influential twentieth-century philosophers.

Born and raised in Vienna, Popper emigrated to New Zealand in 1937, settling in England in 1946. *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945), his major work in political philosophy, transformed him, almost overnight, from an unknown Viennese philosopher into a trans-Atlantic intellectual.¹ He wrote the book during World War II in his New Zealand exile, intending it as a defense of democracy against fascism, but it quickly became, with his full support, a charter of cold war liberalism. He regarded his political philosophy as the application of the philosophy of science that he had developed in interwar Vienna. His *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (1935; 1959) is arguably the most important work in twentieth-century philosophy of science.² He drew a vision of science as an adventurous revolutionary project, an unending quest for growing, but never certain knowledge. Nobel laureates in physics and biology, seldom appreciative of philosophers of science, admired him: “incomparably the greatest philosopher of science ever,” said biologist Peter Medawar of Popper.

For a time in the 1970s, leaders of all three major West German parties, notably former chancellor Helmut Schmidt, declared themselves Popper followers.³ *Samizdat* editions of his works circulated in Eastern Europe

¹ Two vols. (London: Routledge, 1945). The work has remained in print for more than half a century, reissued in six editions and numerous reprints.

² Karl Popper, *Logik der Forschung: Zur Erkenntnistheorie der modernen Naturwissenschaft* (Vienna: Julius Springer, 1935); *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, trans. Karl Popper (London: Hutchinson, 1959).

³ Helmut Spinner, *Popper und die Politik* (Berlin: Dietz, 1978).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-89055-7 - Karl Popper - The Formative Years, 1902-1945: Politics and Philosophy in Interwar Vienna

Malachi Haim Hacoen

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2

Karl Popper – The Formative Years, 1902–1945

before the fall of communism. He has been less of a household name in the United States than in Europe, and his influence among English and North American philosophers has always lagged behind his following among the educated public, but recent surveys of scholarly literature on totalitarianism and on social science methodology found him mentioned more often than any philosopher, including Hannah Arendt, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Thomas Kuhn.⁴ Having always been at odds with the prevailing philosophical fashions – whether analytic philosophy, existentialism, or neomarxism – his popularity at any one period may not have matched that of the contemporary gurus, but the public interest in his work has remained high for half a century and is on the rise. No debate on the philosophy of science today takes place without a mention of his ideas.

I have endeavored to trace the formation of Popper's philosophy and to resolve many of the riddles that have preoccupied Popper's students about the young philosopher and his early works. I hope that the Popperians find interest in my account of the fin-de-siècle and interwar Viennese milieus and marvel, as I do, at how Popper struggled with problems, failing as often as succeeding, always with unparalleled ingenuity. My book is not directed, however, primarily to the Popperians. Nor do I simply wish to redress the current political imbalance in the reception of Popper's work. To be sure, I take exception with the uses to which the political right, in Austria no less, has put Popper. Recovering the historical Popper, whether the committed young socialist or the old, more conservative, Popper who remained supportive of the welfare state, is the best antidote to the political misappropriation of his work. But I have little to say to the right. My major audience is the academic left that has been, in my view, on the wrong track since it took the poststructuralist turn in the late 1970s. I hope to convince them that Popper saw more clearly than they have through the philosophical and political problems preoccupying them and that he provides a more promising direction in the search for answers. In short, I hope that Popper can help the academic left set a new progressive liberal agenda that will seek to recoup the social losses of the last two decades.

In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, a book that heralded the post-structuralist turn in the United States, Richard Rorty celebrated non-

⁴ Peter Hedström, Richard Swedberg, and Lars Udéhn ("Popper's Situational Analysis and Contemporary Sociology," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 28 [1998]: 342–3) surveyed the five leading sociology journals in the United States, Britain, France, Germany, and Italy (1960–96). Popper was mentioned more frequently than Thomas Kuhn, Carl Hempel, or Ludwig Wittgenstein. He trailed Kuhn badly in the United States but led greatly in Germany and slightly in Britain, and was about equal in France and almost so in Italy. Christian Fleck, "Sieg der *Offenen Gesellschaft?*" in *Heinrich Gomperz, Karl Popper und die Österreichische Philosophie*, ed. Martin Seiler and Friedrich Stadler (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), pp. 201–22 includes some statistics on references to *The Open Society* and Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: HBJ, 1951).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-89055-7 - Karl Popper - The Formative Years, 1902-1945: Politics and Philosophy in Interwar Vienna

Malachi Haim Hacoen

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

3

foundationalist philosophy, philosophy that no longer sought a firm foundation in unshakable truths but, rather, recognized its practices as pragmatic communal conventions.⁵ Nonfoundationalism reflected the crisis of representation, the recognition that language not only described the world but also created it. Subjects did not conceive of objects; rather, subjectivity and objectivity were themselves historically contingent discursive chimeras, a product of modern philosophy since Descartes. The postmodern rid itself of them. Rorty used Dewey, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein to illustrate nonfoundationalist options. Had he used Popper, he might have saved the contemporary academy some detours. Contemporary debates are a *déjà vu* to anyone familiar with the fin-de-siècle and interwar scenes, especially in Vienna. Popper and his interwar interlocutors recognized “poststructuralist” dilemmas – they simply opted for different solutions. I am eager to recommend their solutions as against poststructuralist ones.

“Where we believed that we were standing on firm and safe ground,” said Popper, “all things are, in truth, insecure and in a state of flux.”⁶ “Objectivity” meant intersubjectivity: Rationality was a product of critical debate, criticism the acid test of political and scientific rationality. Acknowledging linguistic self-referentiality – statements and reality could not be compared – Popper permitted experience to inform theory (language) through falsification. One statement about experience could contradict another:

[K]nowledge of the world is . . . to some extent . . . our invention. [S]o far idealism [or, he might have added, poststructuralism] is right. *But* it is not only an invention. . . . [O]ur theories are inventions for certain purposes and whether or not they fit the purposes *does not* depend on us. There are thus two elements in knowledge. Our experience (realism) tests and selects theories. This is not a criticism of Kant but just [an] illustration.⁷

Falsification in an experiment was conventional – it depended on a public consensus that an event actually occurred and that it contradicted a proposed theory – but it was not arbitrary: A decision to accept a refutation was informed, albeit not determined, by logic and methodology. We can and do learn from experience, especially from errors. This idea distinguishes Popper from the poststructuralists. He suggests a promising direction in the search for knowledge: a modified conventionalism that sheds absolutism, but safeguards rationalism.

Establishing free public debate as the *conditio sine qua non* of the Open

⁵ Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.

⁶ Karl Popper, “The Logic of the Social Sciences,” in Theodor W. Adorno et al., *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, trans. Glyn Adey and David Frisby (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 87.

⁷ Canterbury College lectures, 1941, Hoover Institute Archives, Karl Popper Papers, box 366, file 24. Henceforth: Popper Archives (box no., file no.). The catalog is now available electronically through The Karl Popper Web: www.eeng.dcu.ie/~tkpw/.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-89055-7 - Karl Popper - The Formative Years, 1902-1945: Politics and Philosophy in Interwar Vienna

Malachi Haim Hacoen

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Society, Popper innovated on a familiar liberal motif, shared by thinkers as different as Immanuel Kant, Germaine de Staël, François Guizot, John Stuart Mill, and Jürgen Habermas. Including him with Habermas in the same genealogy may seem surprising. Their exchanges were hostile and exemplified what critical dialogue should *not* be like.⁸ To the young Habermas, Popper was a positivist; to Popper, Habermas was a “Hegelian,” a representative of German obscurantism. Both misunderstood each other. Both were Kantian liberals, using variations of the ideal speech situation to provide a nonfoundationalist criterion of rationality and envision a deliberative democracy.⁹ Habermas, engaged in Germany’s political battles, has been more keenly aware than Popper of the socioeconomic and political preconditions for restoring the public sphere in postwar Europe. The burden of German politics, however, prevented Habermas until recently from espousing a vision similar to Popper’s Open Society. In the Federal Republic, conservatives appropriated the liberal discourses of social technology and *Rechtsstaat* to fight the cold war and obstruct democratization and socialization. Just as one needed to be (and Popper was) a radical socialist in interwar Central Europe in order to promote the Open Society, so also was Habermas in postwar West Germany. By the early 1990s, however, Habermas brought together the *Rechtsstaat* and the *Sozialstaat*, constitutionalism and social reform, making the previously implicit explicit: Like Popper, he was a progressive cosmopolitan liberal, a bridge builder between liberalism and socialism.¹⁰

Not as well versed in natural science as Popper, and accepting of Max Weber’s and Max Horkheimer’s dark vision of “rationalization,” Habermas was content to let the “positivist” view of natural science stand. He assigned natural science to “instrumental reason,” radically separated instrumental and communicative rationality, and castigated Popper as a positivist who extended instrumental rationality to the social life world, the field of communicative action. Habermas achieved a pluralism of life spheres, or “a functionally differentiated society,” but only at the cost of homogenizing each life sphere and giving up on emancipatory technology.¹¹ Popper

⁸ Jürgen Habermas, “A Positivistically Bisected Rationalism,” and Karl Popper, “Reason or Revolution?” both in Theodor Adorno et al., *The Positivist Dispute*; Popper, “Against Big Words,” in his *In Search of a Better World* (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974); Karl Popper, *The Open Society*, chaps. 23–4. Jeremy Shearmur draws further parallels in his admirable *The Political Thought of Karl Popper* (London: Routledge, 1996), esp. pp. 165–6.

¹⁰ Ernst Forsthoff, ed., *Rechtstaatlichkeit und Sozialstaatlichkeit: Aufsätze und Essays* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968); Arnold Gehlen, “Antropologische Ansicht der Technik,” in *Technik im technischen Zeitalter*, ed. Hans Freyer et al. (Düsseldorf: Schilling, 1965); Jürgen Habermas, *Faktizität und Geltung: Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaats* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992). Matthew Specter’s dissertation in progress evoked these reflections.

¹¹ Jürgen Habermas, *Technik und Wissenschaft als “Ideologie”* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1968); *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984–7).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-89055-7 - Karl Popper - The Formative Years, 1902-1945: Politics and Philosophy in Interwar Vienna

Malachi Haim Hacoen

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

5

refused to split the life of reason or action, or give up on the “scientific worldview” that he had inherited from the Viennese late enlightenment (*Spätaufklärung*):

Science is nothing but enlightened and responsible common sense – common sense broadened by imaginative critical thinking. But it is more. It represents our wish to know, our hope of emancipating ourselves from ignorance and narrow-mindedness, from fear and superstition. . . . The nuclear bomb [has], I think, shown us the shallowness of the worship of science as an “instrument,” of our “command over nature”: . . . [T]his command, this control, is apt to be self-defeating, and apt to enslave us rather than to make us free – if it does not do away with us altogether.¹²

Only restoration of the “tradition of rationality” could save us from science as a means of control. This meant reclaiming science and philosophy for the public from the experts and the professionals. Long before cultural studies began deconstructing science, Popper countered philosophers’ and scientists’ claims of expertise. There was no philosophical or scientific method, he said. Every person was a problem solver; hence, every person was a philosopher-scientist. Demystifying science, he never gave up on the growth of knowledge and its emancipatory potential. Habermas regarded Marxism and psychoanalysis as emancipatory sciences, removing obstacles to liberation by calling attention to them. Popper’s science performed a similar function – but did more: It guided social engineering in reconstructing society. The rules obtaining in the ideal scientific and political communities were similar – those making free criticism possible. To be sure, there were differences. In science, hypotheses, not humans, died, and so permanent revolution was welcomed. Politics should not likewise experiment with human lives. Social engineering must be piecemeal. Still, science and politics worked hand in hand to enable humans to take charge of their destiny, and thereby complete the Enlightenment project.

The Popper emerging from the previous paragraphs may not be the one most people have known over the past half century. The obscurity of his early life in Vienna, the cold war, his growing conservatism in the postwar years, and his disinterest in engaging most contemporary philosophers are largely to blame. Born and buried in Vienna, he was the foremost philosopher to carry the legacy of Viennese progressivism to the postwar trans-Atlantic world. His cosmopolitanism originated as a solution to the dilemmas of ethnic identity faced by the assimilated Jewish-Viennese intelligentsia. His Open Society expressed their hopes of integration into a community that discounted religion, ethnicity, and nationality.¹³ During World

¹² Karl Popper, *Realism and the Aim of Science* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), p. 260.

¹³ Malachi Hacoen, “Dilemmas of Cosmopolitanism: Karl Popper, Jewish Identity, and ‘Central European Culture,’” *Journal of Modern History* 71 (1999): 105–49.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-89055-7 - Karl Popper - The Formative Years, 1902-1945: Politics and Philosophy in Interwar Vienna

Malachi Haim Hacoen

Excerpt

[More information](#)

War II in his New Zealand exile, he drew a vision of a cosmopolitan empire that reflected the Viennese progressives' lost hopes for the Habsburg monarchy. The empire had its counterpart in a cosmopolitan scientific community laboring for human progress. Fascism destroyed cosmopolitan science and democratic politics in Central Europe. The progressive Viennese imagination preserved them as universal ideals in exile.

During the interwar years, Popper was involved in socialist reform and in Viennese circles developing scientific philosophy. He began as an unorthodox socialist and a critic of logical positivism, the philosophy of the Vienna Circle. The circle's efforts to transform philosophy into science, the defeat of Austrian socialism, and the collapse of Central European democracies were the major experiences informing his philosophy. Reception of his work in the postwar trans-Atlantic world occurred in radically different contexts. Red Vienna vanished from memory; the postwar Austrian socialists preferred to forget their Marxist predecessors. Communism, not fascism, became the overwhelming political issue. The circle's emigration to the West, and the triumph of analytic philosophy in the Anglo-American academy, transformed positivism from a Central European movement into a trans-Atlantic one. The "fugue of exile's disruptions" severed the thread connecting Popper to Austria.¹⁴

Popper launched his critique of the Vienna Circle from a marginal Kantian perspective foreign to logical positivism. He developed his philosophy in dialogue with the circle, but he adamantly refused to take their linguistic turn. His critique of positivism constituted a Kantian rejoinder. Against their platform for linguistic reform, he counterposed a revolutionary epistemology that rehabilitated philosophy, and even metaphysics, and made the search for ever-uncertain yet "true" knowledge a compelling task. The circle regarded his work as contributing to their scientific philosophy and made publication of his book, *Logik der Forschung*, possible. The book appeared in the circle's famed *Schriften zur Wissenschaftlichen Weltauffassung* (Writings on the Scientific Conception of the World) series. Most discussions of Popper's philosophy of science in the immediate postwar period relied on the secondary reports of Vienna Circle émigrés. Popper protested to no end that he was their critic, not their friend, but his protests were in vain. What he called the "Positivist Legend" emerged.

Likewise, the reception of his political philosophy had little to do with its original intent. It was Red Vienna, not Soviet communism, that provided the grounds for his critique of Marx. When writing *The Open Society*, he knew next to nothing about the Soviet Union. He felt ambivalent about the Austrian socialist party whose policies he deemed suicidal. Fascism, he thought, reflected a primeval urge to return to the closed "tribal" society, and Marxist mistakes prevented the working class from resisting effectively

¹⁴ Breyten Breytenbach, "The Long March from Hearth to Heart," *Social Research* 58 (1991): 81.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-89055-7 - Karl Popper - The Formative Years, 1902-1945: Politics and Philosophy in Interwar Vienna

Malachi Haim Hacoen

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction

7

the fascist assault on democracy. Historians have corroborated much of his critique: Socialist trust in the Marxist grand narrative was a major reason that the Austrian socialists did not take up arms early to defend parliamentary democracy. Popper proposed a “United Front” of socialists and liberals to combat the prospective resurgence of fascism in postwar Central Europe. Within two years of the publication of *The Open Society*, he discovered that he had actually written the platform for the postwar Social Democratic Consensus in the West, a consensus that legislated for the welfare state and mobilized to contain communism.

During the cold war, Popper made a few naive pronouncements on deterrence and the free world that may reflect badly on his political philosophy.¹⁵ Conceding that he had never anticipated the Soviet expansion in Europe, he gave, nonetheless, his blessings to appropriating *The Open Society* for containment. As the postwar economic miracle diminished poverty in Western democracies, his reform enthusiasm waned. Increasingly secluded in his house in Buckinghamshire, west of London, he devoted himself to the philosophy of science, paying little attention to social theory, all the more so because he thought little of its current proponents. His growing conservatism and retreat from politics obscured *The Open Society*'s radical potential. The work was subject to trenchant critiques from the left and, worse, false liberal affirmations that the “West” approximated Popper's utopia. Precisely because the “West” was not, and is not, an open society, Popper's liberal utopia is relevant today. He refused to give up on cosmopolitanism in the bipolar world, when *Machtpolitik* (power politics) seemed the order of the day. Almost alone among postwar liberals, he retained a belief in an international legal order, and challenged national self-determination. His vision has regained relevance today.

The cold war is over, and analytic philosophy has long been in decline. The cold warrior and critic of logical positivism is dead. But he never was the only Popper. The intellectual and political circumstances that brought Popper his great renown may turn out, upon examination, to have distorted his legacy. My biography restores Popper to fin-de-siècle Vienna and interwar Central Europe, the vanished world of the assimilated Jewish intelligentsia. By historicizing Popper, I hope to recover the legacy of progressive and socialist Vienna for the post-cold war world. That which history tore apart historiography cannot mend. There may never be a revival of the flourishing cultures of cosmopolitan Habsburg centers. Central European cosmopolitanism represented the dreams of ethnopolitics' losers. They went into exile, or up Auschwitz's chimneys in flames. Historians can only work

¹⁵ Popper, “The History of Our Time: An Optimist's View,” in his *Conjectures and Refutations* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), pp. 364–76; “What Does the West Believe In?” (1959), in *In Search of a Better World*, pp. 204–22; “Zum Thema Freiheit,” *Die Philosophie und die Wissenschaften*, ed. Ernst Oldemeyer (Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hain, 1967), pp. 1–12.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-89055-7 - Karl Popper - The Formative Years, 1902-1945: Politics and Philosophy in Interwar Vienna

Malachi Haim Hacoen

Excerpt

[More information](#)

8

Karl Popper – The Formative Years, 1902–1945

toward realizing their dreams in different contexts. This is what I have attempted to do.

CONTEXT, BIOGRAPHY, AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN
POPPER SCHOLARSHIP

Having begun my work on Popper in the mid-1980s, I faced major difficulties in reconstructing his intellectual biography. I first considered him a member of the postwar liberal cohort, but quickly discovered that the two foundational texts, *The Open Society* and *The Poverty of Historicism*, made no sense when read in the cold war context.¹⁶ One had to go back to interwar Vienna to find their roots. This was more easily undertaken than done. A young generation of Austrian scholars, usually on the left and on the margins of Austrian universities, was only then beginning to turn out the wonderful works that, in the past two decades, have recovered interwar Viennese culture. Popper's archives were not available yet, and his *Autobiography*, anachronistic on some issues, scarce in historical detail on others, proved less helpful than I had hoped.¹⁷ I interviewed Popper once, for four hours, and he was kind and hospitable, but he did not remember very well the interwar years and seemed reluctant to talk about them. I read his 1928 dissertation and his articles, published from 1925 to 1931, in two organs of the Austrian school reform movement. They made it clear that the *Autobiography* could not have accurately described his intellectual progress, but in as much as they touched on unfamiliar problems and contexts, they left me as much in the dark as before. There was no choice but to follow leads in Popper's works and *Autobiography*, delve into interwar Viennese culture and politics, and reconstruct the institutional and discursive contexts relevant to his work from scratch.

I soon recognized that I was writing as much a book on interwar Viennese culture as on Popper. Biography opened a window to intellectual milieus that repeatedly surprised me with their richness, sophistication, and creativity. Interwar Vienna, capital of a tiny republic, could not compete with Habsburg Vienna for social and political splendor, but it was its intellectual match. As in fin-de-siècle years, intellectual innovation took place mostly in circles on the academy's margins, not at the university itself. Their economic base was, however, thinner; the socialist municipality substituted only partially for lost private funds. With limited resources, in a

¹⁶ Karl Popper, "The Poverty of Historicism, I, II, III," *Economica* 11–12 (1944–5): 86–103, 119–37, 69–89; *The Poverty of Historicism* (London: Routledge, 1957).

¹⁷ *Unended Quest: An Intellectual Autobiography* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1976). Henceforth: *Autobiography*. This is a slightly revised version of the original, published in the first Popper volume of the Library of Living Philosophers: *The Philosophy of Karl Popper*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp, 2 vols. (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1974), 1:3–181.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-89055-7 - Karl Popper - The Formative Years, 1902-1945: Politics and Philosophy in Interwar Vienna

Malachi Haim Hacoen

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction

9

tense political atmosphere suffused with anti-Semitism, these circles created much of what the postwar trans-Atlantic world would recognize as its own art history, economics, jurisprudence, mathematics, music, philosophy, political theory, sociology – and the list is by no means complete. Popper worked on the margins of these circles. Always a stranger in his homeland, he saw more presciently than most Austrian intellectuals what was in store for Central Europe and left early in 1937, joining the intellectual migration that enriched the Anglo-American academy and turned Vienna into an intellectual province.¹⁸

The various pieces of the biographical puzzle gradually fell into place. The picture that formed was surprising. It sharply diverged from both the autobiographical self-portrait and the familiar antileftist polemicist and disgruntled positivist. Whence, I wondered, the divergence? The disjunction between interwar Central Europe and the postwar trans-Atlantic world surely formed part of the explanation, but it seemed insufficient. The reception of other émigrés' works did not seem to raise as many problems. Further coincidences, I discovered, complicated the Popper reception. The sequence of publication of his English works upset the chronology of their formation and accentuated the chasm between the contexts of formation and reception. Until 1957, "The Poverty of Historicism," his treatise on planning and social science methodology, was buried in wartime issues of the journal *Economica*. Until *Logik der Forschung* appeared in English in 1959, his philosophy of science was known primarily through hearsay. His three-volume *Postscript to The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, written in the 1950s, remained unpublished until the early 1980s.¹⁹ Until his archives opened in November 1990, his early manuscripts were inaccessible even to researchers. Much of the evidence for his intellectual trajectory was unavailable for a long time and, when it became available, seemed to speak to concerns widely different from the original ones.

Popper regarded his 1920s work on psychology and pedagogy as immature, made few references to it until his *Autobiography* (1974), and was reluctant to have others read it.²⁰ In 1929, he moved from cognitive psychology

¹⁸ Friedrich Stadler, ed., *Vertriebene Vernunft*, 2 vols. (Vienna: Jugend und Volk, 1987–8); *Vertreibung der Vernunft: The Cultural Exodus from Austria*, ed. Friedrich Stadler and Peter Weibl, 2d ed. (New York: Springer, 1995) includes comprehensive biographical indexes on the Austrian migration. The older collection, Bernard Bailyn and Donald Fleming, eds., *The Intellectual Migration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969) also includes essays on Austrian intellectuals.

¹⁹ The *Postscript* came out as *Realism and the Aim of Science; The Open Universe; Quantum Theory and the Schism in Physics* (London: Hutchinson, 1981–2).

²⁰ Popper had the only copy of the incomplete 1927 thesis " 'Gewohnheit' und 'Gesetzlerlebnis' in der Erziehung" (Popper archives [12, 11]). The 1928 dissertation was available through the University of Vienna: "Zur Methodenfrage der Denkpsychologie" (Ph.D. diss., 1928). The Austrian National Library (ÖNB) seems to be the only one to have the complete *Die Quelle*, where Popper published three of his four articles on psychology and pedagogy. (The Dollfuss government banned this school reform organ in 1934.)

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-89055-7 - Karl Popper - The Formative Years, 1902-1945: Politics and Philosophy in Interwar Vienna

Malachi Haim Hacoen

Excerpt

[More information](#)

to the logic of science. His geometry thesis, signaling the move, became accessible only when his archives opened.²¹ His first book, *Die beiden Grundprobleme der Erkenntnistheorie* (The two fundamental problems of epistemology), written between 1930 and 1932, remained unpublished until 1979.²² It is still not available in English. Reading *Grundprobleme*, one sees Popper's novel vision of science emerging from his critique of Kant and his epigones, Jakob Fries and Leonard Nelson. *Logik der Forschung* radically compressed this critique, and then to make things worse, took a quarter of a century to appear in English. During the time that elapsed, Popper's philosophy came to form part of logical positivist discourse. The positivists knew and cared nothing about Fries and Nelson, and Popper himself forgot about them.²³ His published work seemed to obscure, rather than illuminate, the intellectual transformations that he had undergone as a young intellectual.

Popper helped the confusion by first omitting historical signposts from his work, then reconstructing his intellectual autobiography in a manner that concealed most turns and dead ends. While writing "The Poverty of Historicism" in New Zealand, he was already reshaping Central European discourses so as to make them relevant also to Western Europe, rarely mentioning Viennese intellectuals and seldom referring to Central European methodological controversies (*Methodenstreit*). He had conceived of "Poverty" before leaving Europe; he wrote a draft in New Zealand before the war, and rewrote most of the work for publication in 1944–5, after he had already completed *The Open Society*. Most people read "Poverty" only when it was published as a book, dedicated to the victims of Nazism and communism. As it came out the year after the Soviet repression of the Hungarian and Polish uprisings, and as Popper had the reputation of Marx's foremost critic, it became another contribution to the cold war. Many of Popper's arguments made little sense in this context – but no other existed. A book formed at three intervals, in between cultures, with moving targets of criticism and few historical markers represented a nightmare for the historian seeking to identify its "original" aims.

Popper has not found his biographer until now and has rarely been the subject of historical study. In the boundless literature on his ideas, there is not one historical monograph. His breadth of interests would not deter historians – we often write about fields in which we have less than ade-

²¹ "Axiome, Definitionen und Postulate der Geometrie," 2 vols., Popper Archives (4, 6).

²² Ed. Troels Eggers Hansen (Tübingen: Mohr, 1979). Popper completed only the first volume of *Die beiden Grundprobleme* on induction. The second, on demarcation, was never completed. Hansen collected in *Grundprobleme* all extant material, dating from late 1932 and early 1933. In July 1933, Popper began work on *Logik der Forschung*. See my discussion in Chapters 5–6.

²³ He mentioned them in *Autobiography*, pp. 74–5, 85, and in "Julius Kraft: 1898–1960," *Ratio* 4 (1962): 2–10, but it is not clear that he was fully cognizant of the role they played in his intellectual development. Compare: *Die beiden Grundprobleme*, Section 11; *Logik der Forschung*, Sections 25, 29.