

Sami Pihlström, Friedrich Stadler, Niels Weidtmann (eds.)

*Logical Empiricism and Pragmatism*

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The first part of this *Vienna Circle Yearbook* presents the proceedings of a conference on “Logical Empiricism and Pragmatism”, which took place in Vienna in November of 2013. It includes the 21<sup>st</sup> *Vienna Circle Lecture* on “Eino Kaila and The Vienna Circle” given by Ilkka Niiniluoto during the conference. The second part gives a report on a finished research project on logical empiricism in Berlin and Vienna (Günther Sandner and Christian Pape) and book reviews. - The conference, which featured several key scholars in the field, is part of a trilateral cooperation project “Science, Culture, and Society”, organized by the *Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies*, the *Tübingen Forum Scientiarum* and the *Institute Vienna Circle*.

The opening contribution is by Friedrich Stadler who in 1991 founded the Institute Vienna Circle, which has ever since been the center of studies on logical empiricism. Referring to Mach’s *Popular Scientific Lectures* (1895, first published in an English version) Stadler shows in his contribution that Mach had independently developed ideas close to pragmatism.

Massimo Ferrari gives an illuminating account of the role that William James’ pragmatism played in the Vienna Circle. It reflects the diverging reception James’s pragmatist philosophical position, especially his theory of truth, received in Germany, on the one hand, and in Vienna, on the other. While in Germany his *psychology* was held in high esteem, almost everybody who talked about his *philosophy* rejected it. In Vienna, in contrast, things were different. Ernst Mach and Wilhelm Jerusalem, who had also translated James’ *Pragmatism*, had paved the way for a favorable and constructive reception of James’ philosophy among Austrians like Frank and Hahn, and, above all, Neurath. Schlick, however, coming from Germany, completely rejected already in his *Habilitationsschrift* of 1910 James’ theory of truth. Ferrari claims that later (Schlick had already been murdered) “Pragmatism and Logical Empiricism were indeed travel companions”, when Logical Empiricism went into exile “from Europe to the United States” (p. 38). The role played by Carnap remains somewhat underexposed in Ferrari’s account. Moreover, this well-informed

and sometimes even witty presentation would have certainly benefited from a linguistic revision by a native speaker of English.

While in Ferrari's presentation "truth" is the leading concept for presenting the relation between the Vienna Circle and William James, Donata Romizi chooses "scientific determinism" as the leitmotiv, and the French philosophers Charles Renouvier, Émile Boutroux and Henri Bergson as heroes on the European side, and James and Peirce, on the American. More than other contributions, this profound analysis shows that the relationship between American Pragmatism and European philosophy was everything but a one-way road. While European epistemology these days consists mostly in taking up topics and methods set in the Anglophone world, particularly in the US, and "discussing" them in the Anglophone "top journals", things were different 150 years ago. As Romizi shows, Charles Renouvier's "anti-deterministic philosophy had such an impact on the young William James that one might almost speak of a 'spiritual healing' (p. 51).

Giovanni Rubeis' contribution focuses on a John Dewey "instrumentalism". He shows that Dewey's "instrumentalism" is best understood not as a scientific method, but rather by following Larry Laudan's idea that "science is basically a problem-solving enterprise rather than a quest for certainty or truth" (p. 80). This epistemological "instrumentalism" is compatible with Dewey's naïve realism. Although Dewey was very important among pragmatists, his ideas had little resonance in logical empiricism. Only the late Reichenbach saw similarities.

Thomas Uebel shows convincingly that in the "First Vienna Circle" the "sympathies for pragmatism on the part of some of" its members [Frank, Hahn, Neurath] were based to a large extent on their appreciation of the work of [...] Central European philosopher-scientists rather than merely (on) the then prominent key text of pragmatism" (p. 83), i.e. William James' *Pragmatism* (1907). (Peirce remained largely neglected until the publication of his *Collected Papers* in the thirties). In the beginning, the Viennese trio regarded pragmatism not as a philosophy of science but rather as a sort of *Weltanschauung*, for which they felt some sympathies. When they later in their own fully formed philosophy of science positions "stressed (pragmatism's) instrumentalism vis-à-vis theories and its anti-correspondentism vis-à-vis truth" (p. 98) they were "predisposed" for doing so because of their familiarity with the work of especially Mach and Boltzmann.

Heikki Koskinen's contribution does not deal with logical empiricism but seeks to systematically construe a "pragmatic and rationally responsible account of theorizing" (p. 103). This means for him to somehow connect *a priori* reasoning with the empirical world. Alluding to Jonathan Lowe's "armchair problem", he firstly aims at "responsibly restraining forms of *a priori specula-*

tion”, and secondly at “combining metaphysical speculation with *empirical considerations* [...] from everyday experience and scientific theory” (p. 105). The latter possibility was, as we know, strictly ruled out by the anti-metaphysics of logical empiricism. Based on considerations put forward by Quine, Koskinen gives an interesting proposal to “rationally” overcome the “armchair problem”.

Matthias Neuber focuses on Herbert Feigl’s attempt to defend his “semantic realism” with the help of Wilfred Sellars’ conception of “pure pragmatics”. Feigl’s attempt already found little support among contemporary thinkers like Ernest Nagel. Neuber succeeds in giving Feigl’s approach, based on his later writings, a new twist that builds on the concepts of confirmation and first person-focused qualia for securing the factual reference of theoretical terms. But this is, as Neuber correctly notes, “a *consistent* empiricist rather than a *hybrid* realist-empiricist approach to science and scientific theory construction” (p. 136), close to Bas van Fraassen. Neuber concludes: “On the whole, the idea of a pure pragmatics waits to be reconsidered.” (p. 136).

In his contribution “On the Viennese Background of Harvard Neopragmatism” Sami Pihlström supplies a historical analysis that does not focus – as other papers in this volume do – on the close links between logical empiricism and pragmatism. He is more interested in the fact that these links “have been influential, albeit often implicitly, in the emergence of what is today known as >neopragmatism<” (p. 139). Mediating figures were, among others, C. I. Lewis, Nagel, Morris and Quine. According to Pihlström, one should also not neglect “the *internal self-critical development*” of logical empiricists after their emigration from Europe “that led to positions relatively close to the naturalistic, fallibilistic pragmatism that had been developed by Dewey, Nagel, Lewis, and Morris” (p. 141). Pihlström then shows how Putnam’s Neopragmatism is closely connected with Carnapian ideas, especially relating to “tolerance” and linguistic frameworks. Apart from that, one should also keep in mind that the Viennese Wittgenstein contributed to the “Viennese background” of Neopragmatism, even if he was anything but a logical empiricist. Pihlström’s contribution closes with a presentation of Morton White’s “holistic pragmatism”, formulating a sort of research program: “Pragmatism is at its best when it flexibly engages in collaboration with other philosophical orientations – including not only analytic philosophy but also phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical theory, and other approaches – while maintaining its own identity.” (p. 162).

Maria Carla Galavotti presents the thesis “that the debate on the foundations of probability that took place in the first decades of the twentieth century is permeated with a cluster of ideas that form the kernel of pragmatism” (p. 167). This is all the more remarkable as among the pragmatists only Peirce

and Lewis cared about probability. Galavotti first gives an overview of the various basic traits of pragmatism that we find again in one way or the other in the attempts to define probability. It is Peirce who “anticipated the so-called *propensity theory*” (p. 170) by claiming that probability is a dispositional property (propensity) pertaining to objects. Popper, in turn, defined probability as propensity of events. – Nagel’s alternative of the “truth frequency theory of probability” is “very much in tune with pragmatism” as well (p. 171). The same is true for Reichenbach’s frequency interpretation. Galavotti closes by delineating the influence of pragmatism on the conceptions of subjective probability with Frank Ramsey and Bruno de Finetti.

Ilkka Niiniluoto’s “Vienna Circle Lecture” deals with “Eino Kaila and the Vienna Circle”. Eino Kaila (1890-1958), “the leading Finnish philosopher in the first half of the twentieth century” (p. 185), who was at the same time a psychologist spent longer periods of time in Vienna 1929, 1932, and 1934. Here he was in particularly close contact with Carnap and Schlick, and on his last visit with the psychologists Charlotte and Karl Bühler. It seems that it was Kaila, a most colorful personality who, in 1926, had coined “logical empiricism” a name for his own philosophical standpoint that shared with the Viennese the anti-metaphysical orientation and the affinity to the methods and results of science. He objected, however, to Carnap’s attempt to limit philosophy to a logical syntax of language in favor of a realist approach. On the institutional level, Kaila’s appointment to the chair of Theoretical Philosophy in Helsinki (1930) laid the ground for a small country such as Finland with a population today of 5.5 million, figuring among the big players in theoretical philosophy on an international level.

This book is highly recommended to everybody interested in the history of pragmatism with its many variants and its interactions with logical empiricism. Several authors make clear that still a lot of work remains to be done in order to see more clearly the interconnections between the most important currents in theoretical philosophy in the last century. Missing is, for example, Carl Gustav Hempel, who with his pragmatic turn in the mid-1960s arrived at a position that he called “pragmatic empiricism”.

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