

B. F. McGuinness, ed.

Friedrich Waismann: Causality and Logical Positivism. [Vienna Circle Institute Yearbook Volume 15]

Dordrecht and New York: Springer 2011.

369 pages

\$219.00 (cloth ISBN 978-94-007-1750-3)

This volume, which is one in a series, has aspects of an edited book and aspects of a journal issue. The last 100 pages include reviews and reports relevant to the Vienna Circle Institute. I will focus on the initial portion of the volume, pertaining to the work of Friedrich Waismann.

Waismann (1896–1959) was a polymath of fine ability but no great originality. He worked in mathematics, logic, and philosophy, primarily the latter. He was perennially underemployed, but managed to eke out an existence as a scholar through the depths of the depression and the Second World War, even while exiled in England. The story of his life is sketched by the editor, Brian McGuinness, in “Waismann: The Wandering Scholar.” Others who knew him (such as Stuart Hampshire and Anthony Quinton) have written short memoirs that have been published elsewhere, but there is no fuller biography. This volume includes five additional short “Tributes and Impressions” by some who knew him.

While Waismann was a philosopher in his own right, he is best known for his attempts to play the role of amanuensis to, or expositor of, Ludwig Wittgenstein. While these attempts began as a cooperative venture, they did not end so. And because of Wittgenstein’s eventual lack of cooperation, the products of the venture were nearly all published posthumously. The initial idea was that Waismann, working with Wittgenstein, would write a book that presented Wittgenstein’s philosophy in a more straightforward form. This was in fact announced for publication as early as 1930. But as Wittgenstein’s ideas evolved rather rapidly, each attempt at summary was deemed unacceptable, because it was thought to be out of date. Furthermore, the very notion of straightforward summary was, or increasingly became, inappropriate for the purposes of capturing how Wittgenstein thought about the issues. Waismann was in nearly constant accord with the substance of Wittgenstein’s (changing) views, but his method of approaching philosophy was not so attuned: Waismann preferred, while Wittgenstein abhorred, theories and theses.

The first published appearance of Waismann’s work with Wittgenstein was the 1965 English translation, *Principles of Linguistic Philosophy*. In 1976 the original German version appeared as *Logik, Sprache, Philosophie*. These embody, however imperfectly, what Waismann aimed to produce. But philosophers who were interested in this work were interested primarily for the illumination it cast on Wittgenstein. And since it was an illumination filtered by Waismann, attention turned to its antecedents. So there appeared *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle* (German in 1967, English translation in 1979), Waismann’s notes of conversations between Wittgenstein and some members of the Vienna Circle, running primarily from December 1929 to December 1931. Then, in 2003 appeared *The Voices of Wittgenstein: The Vienna Circle* (German and English), which contained extensive notes and writings of truly

indeterminate status—hovering somewhere between Wittgenstein and Waismann, and functioning for Waismann as drafts toward his presentation of the views.

The paper in this volume by Joachim Schulte, “Waismann as Spokesman for Wittgenstein”, contains a careful discussion of one particular example of this problem of when we are hearing Waismann and when we are hearing Wittgenstein. And there is a very extensive and even programmatic paper by Juha Manninen, titled “Waismann’s Testimony of Wittgenstein’s Fresh Starts: 1931-1935”. I call it programmatic because Manninen has discovered a great deal of archival material about Waismann’s work that has yet to be investigated in full. What we learn from Manninen’s paper is that Wittgenstein led something like philosophically parallel lives during his time in Cambridge and his time in Vienna in the 1930s. English-speaking philosophers tend to know a lot about Wittgenstein’s time and work in Cambridge, but not so much about his time and work in Vienna. This paper helps rectify the imbalance.

Waismann’s project with Wittgenstein encountered increasing friction or else inattention from Wittgenstein. It ground to a halt in 1936 with the assassination of Moritz Schlick, who had acted as an intermediary between the two. It then became more important to Waismann to publish in his own right. For this purpose he produced his *Introduction to Mathematical Thinking* (German, 1936; English translation, 1951), the only book published in his lifetime. He published a number of papers that were collected in book form after his death as *How I See Philosophy* (1968) and *Philosophical Papers* (1977). And his literary remains, lecture notes and manuscripts, have been scoured for more publications, including *Lectures on the Philosophy of Mathematics* (1982), two pieces published in *Ethics and the Will* (German, 1983; English translation in 1994), and items in the book under review.

Oddly, our book includes a reprint of “The Decline and Fall of Causality”, first published in 1959 and previously included as the last chapter in *How I See Philosophy*. Presumably this provides a point of comparison for the largest piece in our volume, a 93-page piece on “Causality”. That manuscript dates from the late 1940s or early 1950s and is based on lectures that Waismann gave at Oxford in 1947–1948. Its twelve chapters are: Hume’s Analysis of Causal Connection, The Problem of Induction, What is the Principle of Induction?, J.S. Mill’s Account, The Scientific Conception of Causality, Comments on a New Conception, The Principle of Causality, Difficulties of Determinism, Causality as Understood Connection, Insight, Motive, and Criticism of Russell’s View.

In general terms, Waismann’s concern is to look at causality in the light of modern science—both its spread into all realms of life, including the brain, and its recent incorporation of quantum mechanics. The setting for these works on causality, their relationship to Waismann’s pieces on the will and their relationship to other work being done on causality, is provided by a helpful and substantial introduction by Mathieu Marion. He makes the case, for example, that Waismann was an anti-realist, and not an eliminativist, about causation.

Wittgenstein’s own views on causation took a significant turn starting in 1937, in his notebooks, and 1938, in his lectures, when he began to question the insistence on mediating mechanisms in causality. This turn received its most infamous expression in some passages in

Zettel (e.g., §610): “Why should there not be a psychological regularity to which *no* physiological regularity corresponds? If this upsets our concepts of causality, then it is high time they were upset.”

In addition to the new piece on causality, the collection also publishes two additional items: “The Logical Force of Expressions” and “A Philosopher Looks at Kafka”. The latter was a surprise for its topic and interesting for its suggestion that the trials of Josef K. are not unlike the trials of one diagnosed with consumption (or some other serious illness).

This book is one of many edited by Brian McGuinness. While there are numerous typos, the collection itself is a labor of love. McGuinness famously researched a biography of Wittgenstein, but only published the first volume. Many have wondered when, or if, a second volume will appear. When I asked him that question in 2004, he said that there would be no second volume, but that the research that had gone into it would instead be organized around the numerous figures with whom Wittgenstein interacted or became engaged especially during the later half of his life. So it is that McGuinness has been involved with publications relating to Frank Ramsey, Ludwig Boltzmann, Hans Hahn, Moritz Schlick, Karl Menger, Felix Kaufmann, Otto Neurath, and, of course, Waismann. We can only hope that his energy will permit more such revelations.

James C. Klagge
Virginia Tech