

BRIAN MCGUINNESS

WAISMANN: THE WANDERING SCHOLAR

Stuart Hampshire's excellent memoir of Waismann in the *Proceedings of the British Academy* and Anthony Quinton's introduction to *Philosophical Papers* give (among other things) an affectionate portrait of an unworldly scholar alternately seeking to conform to British ways and then shunning them. The idioms and the pronunciation both slightly wrong his English itself witnessed to a profounder alienation. But it was an alienation much more seated in his character and life than that of most of the refugees that so illuminated British university life in the 30's and 40's, of whom some indeed became remarkably assimilated.

Waismann was even born a foreigner, in the Vienna of 1896, his father, a hardware manufacturer in a small way, being of Russian nationality. The boy's later schooldays fell into the period of the First World War and it is natural to suppose that this is what led to his leaving the Gymnasium and studying at home, thus avoiding also the higher fees that a foreigner had to pay. It was only after the collapse of Russia that he took his *Matura*, as an external applicant and, at the age of 21, entered the University of Vienna, where he counted as a *Nationaler* or foreigner, coming, in theory, from Odessa, his father's birthplace, and once again paying higher fees.

Waismann completed the obligatory courses of lectures in reasonable time, with some philosophy (Reininger), but mostly mathematics (Hahn among others) and physics (Thirring). (Karl Menger, a contemporary, was to comment on what a good grasp of mathematics Waismann had.) In 1922, at just this point, Schlick was called to Vienna, and struck by his teaching Waismann decided to devote himself to problems of logic and theory of knowledge. There can be no doubt that the fascination of Schlick's personality, the personal modesty and politeness, allied to an effortless clarity and self-assuredness in his judgements, which many felt and which Menger describes, had their influence on Waismann, whose later career shows that his penchant for admiration was exceptionally well developed. Curiously or significantly something similar was true of Schlick himself, who had a succession of idols—Max Planck, Einstein, Hilbert, Russell and finally Wittgenstein. In respect of the last-named Waismann was to follow in his footsteps.

Perhaps unwisely Waismann deferred the writing of his dissertation and engaged himself instead to write a major work. So he described it in 1937, but no trace of it remains, except a publisher's letter of 1925 referring to a contract for a book on Phenomenology and Space. The theme is related to parts of Schlick's *Allgemeine Erkenntnislehre*, a second edition of which appeared in that same year. But Schlick, in this edition, avoids polemic, whereas Waismann seems to have

revelled in it. Menger describes a good talk by him in a seminar of Schlick's where he sarcastically criticized a paper on geometry by Oscar Becker, a pupil of Husserl's. Why the work from which this talk no doubt came would not serve as a dissertation is not clear, and this suggests that the underlying motive was that reluctance of Waismann's to face examinations which his friends and mentors noticed and tried unsuccessfully to overcome.

Without a doctorate Waismann was unable to obtain even a modest academic position (we shall see shortly what solution Schlick found for him). He did not come from a moneyed family like Feigl; nor could he obtain a position in commerce like Felix Kaufmann, nor fall back on religious teaching in the Jewish community like Josef Schächter.

He was thus preparing for himself the life that he lived for 12 or 15 years, that of the penniless scholar, dependent on private tuition or part-time jobs, but all the more proud of his scientific work for that. Intellectual rigour and theoretical truth were the chief motives of such a life. There were a number who lived it in the Vienna of his day or in central Europe generally: you would find them also in emigration in Tel-Aviv. In England something similar might be true of writers, not so much of men of ideas, and so the discussion of ideas, and specifically of philosophy had perhaps less of passion about it there.

There is no need to recount here how Schlick already an admirer of the *Tractatus*, came to know Wittgenstein and introduced him to the *Tafelrunde*, as even Wittgenstein called it, meaning of course not the Schlick circle as a whole but a smaller group consisting of Carnap, Feigl, Feigl's future wife, known as *die Kasperle*, and Waismann. It was in this group that Wittgenstein dictated to Schlick his letter to Ramsey about identity (Carnap typed it and Waismann kept a carbon copy): to them too, rather than talking about philosophy, he preferred to read from Rabindranath Tagore. Wittgenstein typically had a different relation with each member of this little circle. He soon fell out with Carnap, probably not solely because of the latter's taking parapsychology seriously (after all Schlick did the same). Wittgenstein showed perhaps too much interest in *die Kasperle*, and in time Feigl too dropped out, though not before he and Waismann had induced Wittgenstein to attend a lecture or lectures by Brouwer. Waismann remained the faithful discussion partner and amanuensis for both Schlick and Wittgenstein.

This relationship was to dominate Waismann's life for at least ten years. He made his own every position of the master's and would defend even the indefensible (it was thought) at meetings of the Schlick Circle. Private pupils would even hear Wittgenstein's tones in his voice. He wrote for circulation a summary of the philosophy of the *Tractatus* (as modified prior to 1931) called *Thesen* and he gave a whole series of expositions of Wittgenstein's philosophy at meetings of the Circle. (It was the predominant theme of their discussions between 1929 and 1931, a fact more evident in minute books than in later memoirs by the participants.)

Waismann had intended to present his account of Wittgenstein's philosophy in book form as the first volume of *Schriften zur wissenschaftlichen Weltauffassung*

due to appear as early as 1929 with the title *Logik, Sprache, Philosophie*. Schlick indeed wrote a preface for it, now published in the Reclam edition of a later version of the book. It had indeed many versions, for Waismann worked on it throughout the first half of the thirties, at first on the basis of notes and conversations, then in collaboration with Wittgenstein, and then again on his own with complete discretion as to the use of material supplied by Wittgenstein. Family members recall that when Wittgenstein was in Vienna, Waismann was lost to his family. On one occasion, to be sure, Schlick got the impression that Wittgenstein had changed his mind and now meant to write the book himself, but in general down to 1937 the plan remained, as far as Waismann knew, that the task of presenting to the world this body of thought would be Waismann's, though once or twice a practically complete version was withdrawn for correction or amplification by Wittgenstein.

In the first half of the 30's Waismann wrote a number of articles, reprinted in *Philosophical Papers*, and composed his *Einführung in das mathematische Denken*. In all of these the influence of Wittgenstein is strong: nonetheless they are substantial works and it is once again puzzling that they were not presented for a doctorate until after Schlick's death.

Waismann was also extremely active didactically during these years; conducting Schlick's pro-seminar entirely on his own to the general satisfaction. His formal position was that of librarian, a very poorly paid post, so that he was obliged to give private lessons to earn a living. He himself spoke of giving assistance to foreign scholar and students attracted to Vienna by Schlick. We know also of tuition given to a nephew of Wittgenstein's, and a private seminar organized by the wife of a wealthy businessman.

In 1935 there came a threat to this position as librarian—it was a fictitious employment and Waismann had held already held it for longer than the period allowed. In 1936 the ministry excluded him for any form of employment in the faculty. How far this was due to bureaucratic impatience with a flagrant irregularity, and how far to ideological hostility to the Vienna Circle and its rejection of metaphysics is hard to say. We know that the authoritarian government had closed down the Ernst Mach Society: on the other hand Waismann when he came to England mentioned only formal grounds for the termination of his employment.

Schlick, concerned for Waismann and affronted for himself, protested that the limitations on how he might use this librarian's position were unacceptable. But a far worse blow was to follow, with the assassination of Schlick by a deluded former student on 22 June 1936. The depth of Waismann's feelings is apparent in his moving preface to the collected papers of Schlick, edited by him in the following year. During that year he conducted his pro-seminar as before and assisted the other professors in guiding the orphaned pupils of Schlick.

It was clear however that this could not long continue. His position in the faculty was gone in any case and the demand for private teaching would hardly continue in the absence of Schlick. Public comment on the death of Schlick had shown in any case that public feeling was not on the side of his style of philosophy.

The year did however see Waismann finally promoted Doctor of Philosophy on the basis of the works already mentioned. Robert Reininger managed in six months what Schlick had not contrived to bring about in many years.

It now fell to Waismann to complete and publish his work as the only testimony now possible to “our philosophy”, as he called it, that of Schlick, Wittgenstein and himself. He judged, rightly, that Wittgenstein himself would never publish and only overlooked the possibility of posthumous publication by others. (It is ironical to reflect that those editors are the successors of Waismann.) The German text was given to Springer and then, for political reasons, to a Dutch publishing house. In the end proofs and manuscript were lost in the war. Carnap advised him to get it set up in type straightaway. (Carnap feared, though he did not say as much to Waismann, a further intervention by Wittgenstein. It is perhaps also significant that he thought the contribution of the rest of the Circle other than Schlick and Wittgenstein - understated in the book.)

By this time (mid-1937) Waismann clearly had to look abroad for employment and in the autumn he went to Cambridge to give talks for a term on the theory that this would serve as a launching pad, enabling him with good luck to find a post somewhere outside Austria (or of course Germany). The invitation in 1937 was perhaps indirectly connected with the fact that Wittgenstein had gone away. The little money that he had received for his university lectures until 1936 was now freed and the application of it to refugees seemed a natural one. Karl Popper in fact was the first intended recipient, but he was offered a post in New Zealand—the launching pad was not needed for him. Various well wishers, including Hayek suggested the diversion to Waismann. The small university contribution was supplemented, as in so many cases, by the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning.

Waismann made his bow in Cambridge (Wittgenstein was not there) to a mixed reception, since his thoughts (being much based on Wittgenstein’s) seemed familiar and his English was not as fluent as it later became (though always with engaging idiolexemes). The manuscripts of his lectures are even touching: they contain corrections of the English in G. E. Moore’s hand and (only approximate) indications of English pronunciation in Waismann’s. Here as elsewhere we see that in Waismann’s reception in England there was much not to complain about. The worsening situation in Austria made him want to remain, and prolongation for a term was approved. With the annexation of Austria during that term, Waismann became in truth a refugee. His mind was bent on remaining where he was and bringing over his wife and child. Again with help from the SPSL they eventually came, under the condition (it was of a type necessary at the time) that his wife would help Mrs Braithwaite with an expected child. With all good will it was not a situation to which she, or Mrs Braithwaite, were well-suited.

Shortly after Waismann’s arrival in Cambridge Wittgenstein returned. He had been in England from 1929 to 1936, but not, except in an extended sense, as a refugee: if anything he was fleeing himself and his family. Then at the end of his

Fellowship, his seven years up, as it were, he went, like some Flying Dutchman, to Norway and had, for all we know, no intention of coming back to England at all. His return at this point seems to have been motivated by the need to make some disposition as to his papers. His thoughts alternated between placing them in Trinity Library for future generations or alternatively digesting them into a book and published it. He had indeed at the end of 1936 and 1937 respectively dictated drafts of the first two parts—separated by later editorial policy. Then, as he had in fact done after the completion of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein meant to take up some other occupation.

With the annexation of Austria his liberty of action was considerably abridged: he too had become perforce a refugee, though he passionately rejected the name. He had been visiting Ireland and thought of staying there, but it became clear that in reality he had best hopes for employment (academic employment at that) and citizenship in England. Even the publication of his book became now advisable rather than a mere option. The idea of returning to Austria and suffering with his family only engaged him briefly: he could help them better from outside. (In fact they in the end escaped relatively intact, though this was in advance far from evident.) Previously, when lectureships had been advertised in Cambridge, he had not applied. Now he offered his services gratis, thus releasing for Waismann—and this is a point crucial for judging his attitude—the few funds available. In the event, funds were found for both of them—for the academic year 1938-9 only. In the Easter Term of 1938 Wittgenstein gave a small class, unpaid.

He met with Waismann already in the Lent Term of that year and even showed him some of his work, but both men were desperate and preoccupied, and the relation did not flourish. In the past they had worked together, Wittgenstein had found tutorial work for Waismann, Waismann had checked the safe custody of Wittgenstein's manuscripts in Vienna, but now, "The man became fat", said Wittgenstein in his dismissive way, no doubt with a grain of truth, for Waismann at this juncture did have too high expectations—for want perhaps of anything else. (The SPSL had many similar cases.) Braithwaite, who saw the egoism and lack of sense of reality, tried to persuade Waismann to go to Oxford, where his views would be new, but Waismann insisted on the possibilities at Cambridge—some lecturer might be appointed to succeed Moore and Waismann could apply for the post thus left vacant, and so on. Actually the professorship went to Wittgenstein himself (no one foresaw this before the beginning of 1939) and so no lectureship was vacated, even supposing Waismann might have obtained one.

Waismann thought his relative lack of success at Cambridge was due to Wittgenstein's influence—that Wittgenstein had forbidden his pupils to go to Waismann, and had cut him in the street: Braithwaite thought there was some paranoia here. In the relevant period Wittgenstein was in no position to help Waismann—both of them were at risk of drowning together and as far as friends or foundations in England were concerned Wittgenstein was plying them with requests for his old Professor in Berlin and for other cases that his family or connexions brought him.

He was also constantly travelling in the campaign to save his family. Of an actual disservice to Waismann or any influence on appointing bodies there can have been no question, for Wittgenstein was not on any of them.

It is natural to suppose that the issue of the publication of Waismann's *summa* created a difficult atmosphere between the two men. For many reasons, including the necessity to establish his name in the English-speaking world, Waismann wished to publish this in translation and C. K. Ogden accepted it for his series (the very series in which the *Tractatus* had appeared). In these years 1937-9 Waismann perhaps too much cried up the value of this book (now called *Principles of Linguistic Philosophy*—the new edition is to be preferred) perhaps not so much from vanity as from a need to present himself in the most favourable light in letters applying for posts or for help towards obtaining one. In the preface, however, which escaped the book's posthumous editors, he speaks very explicitly of the book's dependence on ideas and material that Wittgenstein had put at his disposal.

This of course Wittgenstein was not to know. The book and its translation was being discussed in Cambridge at the time and perhaps helped to provoke Wittgenstein's bitter reference in his preface to mangled accounts of his ideas that were in circulation. (This remark was written in autumn 1938.) Waismann several times told Ogden that the book was nearly ready but in the middle of the War he abandoned it: he had long been complaining about the inadequacy of the translation and Neurath for one supposed this to be the reason. Wittgenstein's easily inferred hostility and a growing aversion from some (though some only) of Wittgenstein's ideas may also have played a role. At all events its publication was posthumous and, though some of the corrections to the galleys (a stage it reached in 1939) are considerably later, there is no indication that Waismann himself seriously contemplated reviving the book.

Waismann met the general Cambridge situation with some petulance—lie would lecture only to mathematicians (this is strangely misrepresented by Turing's biographer) or he would not lecture at all (which made things difficult for his sponsors). In the end he decided to accept an offer from Oxford, and he went there as the war broke out. It was risky for an enemy alien to travel in those very days, but for once Waismann's lack of a sense of reality stood him in good stead. At exactly the same time Wittgenstein took up the chair at Cambridge, a post lie probably would not have sought but for the political situation.

The war was a time of deep unhappiness for Wittgenstein—his family at risk, the death of his friend Skinner, his total rejection of the British wartime attitude. There was a breakthrough only in January 1944 when he went to Swansea (the Welsh were more tolerable than the English!) and again began writing. Waismann fared no better—his lectures were a success at Oxford, but he thought his colleagues fell below his intellectual standards and wrote bitter little epigrams about them. Yet he was handled with the utmost consideration (at one time colleagues there—probably in fact just Henry Price—arranged for him to be supported for a while by private subscription, given anonymously though the SPSL). What Witt-

genstein said of himself at the beginning of the First World War was perhaps true of both these very different characters, “I feel profoundly German”. The seriousness of England, the point of it, escaped them, though to be sure there were some excuses for this. In Waismann’s case there was even internment.

One difference between the two men was, as we have seen, on the issue of the parentage of ideas: Wittgenstein all the more fiercely defensive of his priority because he was reluctant to publish, Waismann more concerned to publish to the world an ideal philosophy which he never considered his own. The one was interested only in originality, the other only in the truth: philosophy is a subject that favours just such a tension, a subject where the Kuhnian model functions. Yet in another respect the two men were alike—in passionate affirmation of intellectual standards (even if these differed). Wittgenstein never thought of accommodating or reserving his judgements on such matters to allow for external factors. Nor did Waismann—the present writer has seen him welcome an eminent Polish logician to Oxford by castigating the errors of the Polish school. The two *were* Germans, after all, and we should form our expectations of them in that light: there is indeed perhaps something to be learnt from it. (That they were also Austrians, of different kinds, does not detract from this fact.).

Waismann had considerable success after the war, developing themes like the open texture of concepts, language strata, alternative logics, where he (as Ryle said of himself) had “learned much from Wittgenstein”—but could develop it independently. It is heartening to think of Herbert Hart bicycling out to Keble to hear lectures that have left their mark on the philosophy of law, and there were other examples. But Ryle, Berlin, Hampshire—Waismann’s later literary executors—when they came back from the war had little success in overcoming his sense of isolation from institutional Oxford. There was a positive side to this, since his need for human contact led him to befriend individuals young or old who also stood a little outside it. But against many—Carnap, Polish logicians, above all Wittgenstein—a resentment remained: as the day closed he must gird himself to carry on alone the battle for “our philosophy”. In a notable meeting of an Oxford essay society (the Socratic Club) in 1947 he renounced positivism and developed the theme that clarity was riot enough. It was the supposed positivism of the *Tractatus* and the early Vienna Circle that he was rejecting. Actually his own position was not so different from Wittgenstein’s at the time. Gordon Baker has shown that when Waismann came to sum up his thoughts in “How I see Philosophy” (1956), he was using unselfconsciously, perhaps unconsciously, notes taken down in conversations with Wittgenstein twenty years before.

Ein tief Gemüt bestimmt sich selbst zum Leid: perhaps these two men were of a temperament to suffer in any case, but Wittgenstein was additionally scarred by two wars, one spent in the dangers and grim choices of combat, the second in anxiety; Waismann by an accumulation of personal tragedy which finally left practically no member of his family alive—or even dead in the course of nature. In early 1938 all of this, or the threat of it, hung over their meetings, in a country

and amongst people with no such preoccupations, and it makes prickliness and a degree of *Teilnahmslosigkeit* (the characteristic Wittgensteinian term for lack of concern for another's problems) more than intelligible.

Contingent factors operate: others—younger men—made better exiles. Popper is an example: from his first salary in Canterbury he sent subscriptions to SPSL for his wife and himself. A fine gesture, and already English in style (for those times): one sees him on his way to becoming Sir Karl. Wittgenstein gave too, of course, but with careful consideration of how it was to be used, of what was best for the intended beneficiary in all his awkward particularity. In general he insisted, as ever, on preserving and following his own individual judgement. Waismann, who in fact contributed much by his very singularity, still thought at the end of finding some country better suited to him, and the only one that seemed serious enough (though he could not in fact go there) was Germany.

The above account is based, apart from slight personal acquaintance, on useful talks with friends of Waismann's, the late Karl Menger for the Vienna period, Stuart Hampshire and the late Isaiah Berlin for Oxford and others, but also on researches in the university archives of Vienna, Oxford, and Cambridge, in the records of the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning, kept in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, as are Waismann's own papers, and in Carnap's correspondence with Waismann, Schlick and Neurath, held in the library of the University of Pittsburgh.

via di Montechiaro 24
53100 Siena
Italy
brian.mcguinness@queens.ox.ac.uk