



STEPHAN KÖRNER

## Stephan Körner 1913–2000

STEPHAN KÖRNER was one of the leading late twentieth-century British philosophers. His work ranged widely, from the philosophy of science and mathematics to that of ethics, law, and politics. In *Conceptual Thinking* (Cambridge, 1955) he drew a fundamental distinction between exact and inexact concepts. In his textbook *The Philosophy of Mathematics* (1960; New York, 1986) he showed how the exact concepts of pure mathematics arise from the idealisation of inexact concepts. The distinction between the logics of exact and inexact concepts again plays an important part in his book on the philosophy of science, *Experience and Theory* (London and New York, 1966). In later works, for example *Experience and Conduct* (1976) he extended his investigations of how we negotiate between idealisations and empirical practice to other fields of philosophy, such as ethics and law. Together with the physicist M. H. L. Pryce he edited an influential volume *Observation and Interpretation* (1957), the record of a conference he organised at Bristol which brought together many of the leading physicists and philosophers of science at that time. From 1972–4 he organised each year a Bristol Conference on Critical Philosophy which attracted leading philosophers in the chosen fields—*Practical Reason* (Oxford, 1974), *Explanation* (Oxford, 1975), *Philosophy of Logic* (Oxford, 1976). In addition to his scholarly work he did significant expository work. His Penguin book *Kant* (1955) played a major part in making that notoriously difficult philosopher accessible to students, and *What is Philosophy?* (1969), also for Penguin, brought philosophy to a wider audience. He played a leading role in the post-war development of the University of

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Bristol and its Philosophy Department where he held the Chair from 1952 to 1979. He also held a chair of Philosophy at Yale University from 1970 to 1984 and visiting professorships at several other universities in the USA. After he retired from the University of Bristol he held a Chair of Philosophy at the University of Graz, Austria.

Stephan was born in Ostrava, Czechoslovakia on 26 September 1913 the only son of Emil Körner and Erna Maier. From an early age he wanted to become a philosopher, but his father, a devoted secondary school teacher, whom he greatly admired, advised him to read law in order to earn a living. Stephan accepted this advice but it proved to be doubly wrong—events forced him to abandon his legal career and he made a good living as a philosopher. He went to school at the classical gymnasium in Ostrava from 1923 to 1931. He had a happy childhood, growing up at ease in two languages, Czech and German, and at home in two cultures. He later added Russian, French, Italian, and English to the languages with which he was familiar and even learned Hebrew to read the writings of Spinoza. (Of course this was biblical Hebrew and he created considerable amusement in Israel by addressing people in the language of the prophets.) This gave him a cosmopolitan approach to scholarship, which enabled him to transcend the restrictions imposed upon concepts developed against a mono-cultural background. Although he came from the German speaking part of Czechoslovakia and his schooling had been in German he chose deliberately to go to a Czech speaking university, the Charles University in Prague. In accordance with his wishes his substantial personal library went to Charles University after his death. He studied there from 1931 to 1935, graduating as a doctor of law and political science. He entered a legal practice and was delighted to win his first case, not least because the senior partner thought it was hopeless. In 1936 when he was called up for military service another piece of paternal advice proved more useful. His father said that he would be ordered to mount a horse and if he stayed on he would be accepted into the cavalry, if he fell off he would be relegated to the infantry. Some time later Stephan was able to repay his father. Leading his mounted troop through the streets he astonished his men by ordering them to give a royal salute to two passing pedestrians, his parents. He acquired such equestrian skill that he claimed to be able to ride one horse over a jump while leading three other horses beside him.

After the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1939 Stephan fled the country, having been warned by one of his father's former students, now an SS officer, that he was to be arrested the following day. Unfortunately

his parents chose to remain in Czechoslovakia and both perished in concentration camps. Stephan arrived in England thanks to the sponsorship of an Englishwoman who had never met him but to whom he was eternally grateful. He joined the Czechoslovak division of the British Army but, because there was a lengthy lull in the fighting in Western Europe he was given extended leave which enabled him, aided by a small grant, to study at Cambridge. He abandoned law and pursued his dream of studying philosophy. He was amazed, but was profoundly grateful to the university, and particularly to Professor Richard Braithwaite, for admitting him to study for a doctorate in a subject in which he had no formal qualifications. He always remembered the kindnesses great and small that were shown to him as an impoverished foreigner ('Körner, we have just been given some continental sausage. Could you show us how it should be dealt with?').

While he was at Cambridge he met his wife, Edith Laner, at a social gathering of Czech émigrés in London. Edith, known as Diti to friends and family, was born in Czechoslovakia, daughter of a prosperous corn miller. She came to England in 1939 as a schoolgirl, but her parents, like Stephan's, stayed in Czechoslovakia and died in concentration camps. She used her command of English, Czech, German, French, and Italian to monitor foreign broadcasts for a news agency. Company policy forbade the employment of women but her services were so valuable that her sex was concealed from upper management until her marriage and subsequent pregnancy made this impossible. She also supplemented her income by teaching English to Czech refugees. She then in two years obtained an honours degree in economics at the London School of Economics. She claimed to have never attended a lecture, because she was too busy teaching to support herself; she passed all her examinations just by studying the reading list. Stephan and Diti were married in 1944 when Stephan was back on leave but were separated almost immediately afterwards when he was recalled to take part in the campaign after the D-Day landings. It was a matter of intense personal pride that, when faced by so great a test, he proved that he had the courage and ability to play his part as an infantry sergeant in some of the bitter fighting which led to the defeat of the enemies who had devoured his country. His experience of English ways was unexpectedly useful when he returned to the army. A Czech regiment was on the verge of mutiny after having been given some 'bitter jam' and he was called in to explain that the English regarded the marmalade as a special treat. He and Diti attempted to familiarise themselves with the culture of their new homeland by reading through the

whole of English literature. Whilst he was in hospital behind the lines the doctor saw that Stephan was reading Dickens. 'We must give you an extra 24 hours here to let you finish.' During that 24 hours the Czech army was involved in a particularly ill-planned and bloody attack in which several of his friends were killed. On the anniversary of that day he would always sit somewhere by himself and remember his comrades. Like many of his generation he and Diti considered every day of their lives as the result of an unexpected reprieve.

When he was demobilised in 1946 Stephan briefly took a lowly job at Cardiff University, helping students with their German. Later in that year he was appointed to an Assistant Lectureship in Philosophy at the University of Bristol. At the interview the vice-chancellor anticipated one possible objection and ended the interview by asking 'Finally, Dr Körner, where did you learn such excellent English?' He joined a university with little more than a thousand students, and a department of three people. That was when I first met him; I was appointed Assistant Lecturer in Mathematics at the same time. We were at opposite ends of the age range; I was 20 he was 33, but his growing reputation and ability resulted in rapid promotion, and only six years later, he succeeded Guy Field as professor and head of department. By then the university had doubled in size, but the philosophy department still had only four members of staff. When he retired in 1979 he had built it up to a productive department of eleven. He was an efficient head of department who believed in delegating as far as possible and leaving his staff free to get on with their own work without interference. He was very supportive of our efforts in the mathematics department to build up a group of mathematical logicians. He believed that the study of philosophy was particularly relevant to the development of other disciplines, and set up several joint degrees. In view of his interest in logic and the philosophy of mathematics it was natural that a degree in Philosophy and Mathematics was the first of these. He had no interest in university politics for its own sake, but his intellectual eminence and transparent honesty resulted in his serving as Dean of Arts, 1965–7, and Pro-Vice Chancellor, 1968–71. His negotiating skills were invaluable during the difficult days of student sit-ins of the late 1960s and early 1970s. At one point he was approached by a group of students from his own department who presented their demands. 'First we want more continental philosophy.' 'That should be easy, already half the staff can't speak English.' His distinguished service to the university was recognised in 1986 by his election as an Honorary Fellow of the University, one of the university's most important honours.

He was an enthusiastic backer of adult education. In his early years in Bristol as an Assistant Lecturer he found the fees a useful addition to his income; he claimed to have used them to buy a stove, which he named the Hopkins stove after the tutor in the Department of Extra Mural Studies who arranged his lecture courses. But he continued to attract good audiences at his extramural lectures until after his retirement, and he gave the department strong support through his membership of Senate and other university committees. He was delighted by Tom Stoppard's portrait of a philosopher in *Jumpers* and he and the playwright enjoyed a friendship cemented by a mutual love of the intellectual life of old Vienna.

He was in great demand as a speaker at conferences and as an invited lecturer at numerous universities. He held visiting professorships at Brown (fall 1957), Yale (fall 1960), Texas (fall 1964), and Indiana (fall 1967). He was elected to the British Academy in 1967 and in that year gave their Dawes Hicks lecture on 'Kant's Conception of Freedom'. In 1971 he gave the Eddington Memorial lecture in Cambridge on 'Abstraction in Science and Morals'. From 1970 to 1984 he held a regular professorship at Yale as well as Bristol, and thereafter returned for some weeks each year to check the progress of the doctoral students whose dissertations he was directing. He had many students in his seminars there and they were especially enthusiastic about his range of expertise—from logic and mathematics to political theory and categorial frameworks—as well as his capacity for clarity and concern for students. This post at Yale was made even more attractive by the presence there of the eminent mathematical logician Abraham Robinson. Stephan and Abraham had been refugee students together in Cambridge and now set up a seminar on the philosophy of mathematics. Although many people attended the seminar it was clear that the two organisers would have been just as happy in each other's company had no one else turned up. Stephan also had a long association with the Institut für Philosophie of the Karl-Franzens University in Graz, Austria. He visited there in the summer term of 1980, was appointed an Honorary Professor in 1982 and from then until 1987 visited every summer term, teaching a broad range of lecture courses and seminars and participating in a joint discussion group with the department of philosophy of law. Stephan's lectures had an additional attraction for native German speakers since he spoke beautiful 'pre-war academic German' with clauses, sub-clauses, and verbs all in exactly the right place. In 1984 the University of Graz awarded him an Honorary Doctorate of Philosophy, in 1981 the University of Belfast awarded him the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Literature, and in 1991 his old college

in Cambridge, Trinity Hall, made him an Honorary Fellow. This honorary fellowship was a delight to Stephan, not only because of the kindness of the College in taking him as a student when he was an unknown refugee, but because his son Tom was a fellow in mathematics there. He was president of the British Society for the Philosophy of Science, 1965–6, of the Aristotelian Society, 1966, of the International Union for the history and Philosophy of Science, 1968–70 and of its division for Logic, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science, 1968–72 and 1983 when he presided over its Seventh International Congress in Salzburg, and of the Mind Association 1973. He was the editor of *Ratio*, 1961–80, and of the philosophy section of Hutchinson's University Library since 1969, a member of the editorial board of *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, *Analysis*, and *Metaphilosophy*, and a member of the council of the Royal Institute for Philosophy.

Cambridge philosophy, when he went there in 1939 as a postgraduate student, was influenced by Wittgenstein, to such an extent, he said,<sup>1</sup> that

C. D. Broad eventually gave up attending meetings of the Cambridge Philosophical Society. For whatever subject was being treated, the discussion was completely dominated by Wittgenstein. The guest speakers from Oxford and other universities often brought only apparently new ideas to Cambridge—mostly they were ideas which in the neighbourhood of the Vienna Circle were so well known that they seemed hardly worth mentioning. Even A. J. Ayer's book *Language, Truth and Logic*, which many English teachers and students of philosophy saw as a revolutionary new approach, was in fact only a popularisation of Austrian Logical Positivism. I sometimes ask myself why—apart from the kindness of my supervisor R. B. Braithwaite—I was accepted as a research student despite my low philosophical qualifications. The answer to this question seems to be that at that time my philosophical knowledge had at least the merit of being almost completely derived from the writings of the Vienna Circle; and so my English sounded Austrian to the English . . .

He certainly did not accept the Wittgensteinian thesis that there are no genuine philosophical problems, only puzzles:

Wittgenstein taught me to see that one of the tasks of philosophy is to describe modes of thought or, as he calls them, language games, and that this description is an empirical undertaking or, in his words, belongs to natural history. While taking into consideration the importance of this anthropological branch of philosophy one must not—and I do not—follow Wittgenstein also in the assertion that this is the only legitimate task of philosophy. When Wittgenstein for example condemns speculative metaphysics as 'language running idle', he forgets that many metaphysical theories—such as the atomistic theory of

<sup>1</sup> In his acceptance speech for his Honorary Doctorate at Graz 1984.

Democritus—which began as a speculation, were later incorporated into scientific theories.

He was much more influenced by his supervisor, R. B. Braithwaite; and his Ph.D. thesis *Propositions asserting relations of entailment* was an exercise in symbolic logic extending C. I. Lewis's work on Strict Implication. It was as much mathematics as philosophy with proofs of formal theorems. Further work on entailment followed and then in 1951 he published in *Mind* his first article 'Ostensive Predicates', on the importance of the distinction between exact and inexact concepts:

PHILOSOPHERS frequently fail to distinguish between the precise description of imprecise relationships and the replacement of imprecise relationships by more precise ones. A failure to make this distinction seems to strengthen two opposite mistakes in philosophical method. These are the misdirection of inexact relationships as if they were exact and the erroneous belief that imprecise relationships require imprecise descriptions. The purpose of this article, which is mainly to describe imprecise relationships in a precise manner, is to consider the logic of ostensive predicates for its own sake and to show its relevance to some wider philosophical questions.

Quite a lot of his subsequent work is devoted to this same purpose, showing the relevance of the logic of inexact predicates or concepts to the philosophies of mathematics, of science, of ethics, and law. Ostensive concepts are those like 'table' ('is a table' is the corresponding predicate) which are defined or determined by giving examples of tables and non-tables. However many examples are given there will always be borderline cases, e.g. a small stool. Most of the concepts of ordinary experience (like 'red' or 'tree') and law (like 'conspiracy' or 'fraud') are inexact, have borderline cases, unlike the concepts of mathematics, such as 'even integer'. So inexact predicates cannot be dealt with using classical logic with its two truth-values 'true' and 'false' but need at least a third truth-value 'neutral'. Indeed if the gradation is continuous a fuzzy logic using all real values between 0 (false) and 1 (true) would appear to be a more precise tool. This would now be a fashionable way to proceed but it is only a theoretical possibility; actually assigning such truth-values would be unfeasible. Even for concepts such as 'wealthy' or 'near' which could in some way be numerically measured, the actual way truth values might be derived from these measures is fairly arbitrary. For most concepts the best you could do would be to rely on a voting system, giving the proposition 'This small stool is a table' a truth value equal to the proportion of people in some chosen group who agreed that it was true. Stephan did not follow that unrewarding

route in search of greater precision<sup>2</sup> but chose to stay with the simpler classification into three truth-values: true, false, and neutral. The truth of compound propositions was governed by two principles. Firstly, ‘p and q’ is false if one or more of p, q is false, and ‘p or q’ is true if one or more of p, q is true. Secondly, once a compound proposition has been evaluated as true or false, this value is unchanged when any neutral component is sharpened to true or false. That is sufficient to determine the truth tables for ‘and’ and ‘or’. He did not investigate the mathematical properties of this three valued logic any further than he needed in order to discuss the relevance of inexact concepts to philosophical problems but J. P. Cleave did much work on the logic of inexact concepts.<sup>3</sup> In 1955 in *Conceptual Thinking* Stephan studied the impact of this inexactness of concepts on a very wide range of problems. As examples of ‘conceptual thinking’ he gives:

The person who expounds a mathematical proof and equally the person who follows the exposition is thinking conceptually. So is the person who is engaged in any kind of classification; as also the judge who applies a legal statute to a state of affairs. Any child who uses a colour-word correctly proves himself thereby a conceptual thinker.

Later he suggests a minimal definition of ‘conceptual thinker’ as ‘accepter of ostensive concepts’. Of course they will also accept some non-ostensive concepts, e.g. mathematical ones such as integer or ellipse, and philosophical ones such as proposition, concept, judgement. Stephan offers an account of how we may move from ostensive concepts to non-ostensive ones and back again to the world of experience. He contrasts the sharpening of ostensive concepts by adding new rules with the replacement of ostensive concepts by non-ostensive ones. If all the exemplifications of ‘raven’ qualify as ‘black’ by the existing rules then we can without inconsistency add a new rule that nothing is to be called a ‘not-black raven’. But if the exemplifying sets of ‘visual circle’ and ‘visual ellipse’ overlap then we cannot consistently add a new rule to the effect that nothing is to be called both a ‘visual circle’ and a ‘visual ellipse’. If we want to move towards the exact non-overlapping concepts of ‘geometrical circle’ and ‘geometrical ellipse’ we must at some stage replace an ostensive concept

<sup>2</sup> But with the mathematician Ali Fröhlich he started work on a book *A Mathematical Theory of Ostensive Predicates* using topological methods. That seemed to be a fruitful and more appropriate approach than fuzzy logic, but the book never appeared and the project seems to have been abandoned.

<sup>3</sup> See Cleave ‘Logic and Inexactness’ in Jan T. J. Szrednicki (ed.), *Stephan Körner—Philosophical Analysis and Reconstruction* (Dordrecht, 1987), pp. 137–59.

by a non-ostensive one. For Stephan the exact concepts of pure mathematics arise from the idealisation of those inexact concepts that can be applied to experience. His 1960 textbook on the *Philosophy of Mathematics* focuses on the metaphysical question how applied mathematics is possible:

To sum up our discussion of applied mathematics: the ‘application’ to perception of pure mathematics, which is logically distinct from perception, consists in a more or less strictly regulated activity involving (i) the replacement of empirical concepts and propositions by mathematical, (ii) the deduction of consequences from the mathematical premises so provided and (iii) the replacement of some of the deduced mathematical propositions by empirical. One might add (iv) the experimental confirmation of the last-mentioned propositions—which, however is the task of the experimental scientists rather than the theoretical.

Stephan’s book *Kant* (1955) was one of the first post-war books to attempt to make the ideas of that notoriously difficult philosopher accessible to English-speaking students. In his foreword A. J. Ayer wrote:

What he has achieved is to give, in a remarkably small compass, a general conspectus of Kant’s thought and to relate it to some issues in contemporary philosophy.

Indeed Stephan himself suggested it might also serve as a general introduction to philosophy. He saw the centre of Kant’s philosophy to be his attempt to derive the possibility of intelligible experience from built-in features of our conceptual system. This view (which in effect sees the canonical introduction of Kant to be Kant’s own *Prolegomena*) is not perhaps the only possible interpretation of Kant or of the whole of Kant. Stephan’s central objection to Kant’s metaphysics was that while Kant was correct in believing that we require an overriding conceptual framework in order to make sense of our experience, his mistake was to suppose that we may single out just one such framework from a number of competing possibilities. Much of Stephan’s later work was devoted to the investigation of the structure and function of the possible variety of such frameworks. This started in 1966 in the first chapter of his book on the philosophy of science *Experience and Theory*, and was developed in more detail in 1969 in chapters 11–13 of *What is Philosophy* where he introduced the term *categorial framework*. In the 1970 monograph *Categorial Frameworks* he expounds the notion:

The steps leading to the definition of a categorial framework are first, a discussion of the classification of all entities with special emphasis on the difference between arbitrary classes and natural kinds; second, a preliminary examination of the relations holding, on the one hand, between the ‘categories’ or maximal kinds of a natural classification and, on the other hand between the maximal

kinds and their subordinate genera; third, a general characterization of the attributes the joint possession of which is a necessary and sufficient condition of an entity's being a member of the maximal kind, and of the attributes the joint possession of which is a necessary and sufficient condition of an entity's being a distinct, individual member of a maximal kind; fourth, a discussion of the logical assumptions involved in the categorization of all entities into maximal kinds and of the constitution and individuation of their members.

Kant's 'Transcendental Deduction of the Categories' can be regarded as a 'proof' that a particular categorial framework involving twelve Categories is necessarily employed in making objective empirical judgements. In his article 'The Impossibility of Transcendental Deductions'<sup>4</sup> Stephan generalises this notion of transcendental deduction to include any 'logically sound demonstration of the reasons why a particular categorial schema is not only in fact, but also necessarily employed, in differentiating a region of experience', and shows that no such transcendental deduction can be successful. He felt the tendency to attempt such demonstrations was still deplorably widespread, and examined some recent versions in 'Transcendental Tendencies in Recent Philosophy'.<sup>5</sup> Although he felt that time had shown Kant to be wrong on this issue, he considered himself part of the Kantian tradition. Other philosophers whose point of view he found particularly sympathetic included Leibniz and Cusanus but he read philosophers of many different traditions and schools with undisguised pleasure.

The Colston Research Society Symposium *Observation and Interpretation* which Stephan organised in Bristol in 1957 was an important meeting which brought leading philosophers and physicists together to discuss the philosophy of physics. Most of the discussion was about the philosophy of quantum mechanics, which was at that time in an active state of development, particularly in Bristol. In 1955 the young polymath Paul Feyerabend had, on the strength of recommendations from Karl Popper and Erwin Schrödinger, been appointed to a lectureship in Stephan's department and was working on the philosophy of quantum mechanics. David Bohm was working on hidden variable theories of quantum mechanics in the physics department where the Nobel Prize winner Cecil Powell had built up a world famous school of nuclear physics.

Stephan's own contributions to the philosophy of science started in 1953 with 'On Laws of Nature' (*Mind*, 62, 216–29) and continued with

<sup>4</sup> *Monist*, 51 (1967), 317–31.

<sup>5</sup> *Journal of Philosophy*, 63 (1966), 551–61.

many more articles and the 1966 book *Experience and Theory*. As noted above that starts with the observation that there are many different ways of differentiating the world of empirical experience or, as he puts it, many different categorial frameworks. For example one might use categories of movable things and immovable spatial regions, alternatively of spatial regions with certain qualities such as distributions of densities, gravitational or electromagnetic fields. He goes on to argue that all empirical propositions are inexact by virtue of involving ostensive concepts, and hence to deny the common view that the predictions of scientific theories are empirical propositions:<sup>6</sup>

It is usual to picture a hypothetico-deductive system as a hierarchy with the logico-mathematical and substantive postulates at the top, and at least some empirical propositions at the bottom. The predicates of the system are similarly either formal or substantive—the substantive predicates being again either empirical or non-empirical. In other words a hypothetico-deductive system which unifies a field of experience contains, on the orthodox view, three kinds of propositions and concepts, namely formal, empirical and theoretical ones.

The hierarchy is, according to received opinion, directly linked to experience (to the empirical world of observation and experiment) for the simple reason that at least some of the propositions and concepts at the basis are assumed to be empirical.

. . . Two main propositions are defended: Either (i) theoretical propositions and concepts are held to be reducible to logical functions of empirical ones; or (ii) theoretical propositions and concepts are regarded as not reducible to logical functions of empirical ones, but as merely auxiliary notions without empirical meaning.

. . . It should, I think be clear by now that I reject both these doctrines in favour of the view that all concepts and propositions which occur in scientific theories are theoretical, since the (unmodified) two-valued logic, in which scientific theories are embedded, admits no inexact or internally inexact predicates. This rejection, however, must be qualified in two respects and so protected against any charge of pedantry. Firstly for dealing with most, if not all, scientific and with many logico-philosophical problems it is not necessary to distinguish between, say, an inexact resemblance predicate and its exact theoretical counterpart. An inquiry which is concerned with scientific and extra-scientific thinking can safely ignore this distinction, once it is acknowledged. Moreover scientific inquiry is unlikely to suffer by ignoring it altogether.

Thus a scientific theory can make predictions about mathematically idealised rigid bodies, but not about the rigid objects we encounter, though for most practical purposes we can assume they apply to these.

<sup>6</sup> *Explanation and Theory*, pp. 88–9.

*Experience and Conduct* (1979) is Stephan's account of practical thinking, how we make or should make decisions about courses of action involving concepts such as morality, justice, welfare, or prudence. This is a very searching investigation into the logical relations between preferences, attitudes, and beliefs about such courses of action and between them and principles of morality, legality, and prudence. It is distinguished by the depth of the analysis. He sees one source of the conflict between practical attitudes, which corresponds to logical inconsistency between beliefs, to be the way in which practical attitudes may themselves become objects of other practical attitudes. So he stratifies a person's attitudes into levels, attitudes of the  $(n+1)$ th level being attitudes towards  $n$ th level attitudes. For example a person might have a second level anti-attitude towards his first level pro-attitude to smoking. This could be a practical attitude, i.e. one that he is capable of implementing, for someone who is undergoing aversion therapy against smoking. But it would by his own standards be irrational. This stratification gives rise to a very complex structure with many different ways in which attitudes may conflict with each other; Stephan distinguishes opposition, discordance, incongruence. He argues that stratification affects and vitiates accounts of combining individual preferences into social welfare. 'Thus it is simply a gross error to regard the principle of the maximisation of first level preferences as the supreme principle of rational conduct.' For example he rejects Arrow's famous theorem on the impossibility of combining individual preferences into a social ordering satisfying certain conditions which seem to be intuitively obvious, on the grounds that one of the conditions 'is immoral or unclear'. That condition is the Pareto principle to the effect that if the alternative  $x$  is preferred to  $y$  by every individual then the social ordering must rank  $x$  above  $y$ . It would be immoral if applied only to the first level preferences of a society where all members of the society had a first level preference for smoking which conflicted with their higher level moral principles. If it attempted to take account of both first and higher level preferences of the individuals it would be unclear whether the first level preference shared by all individuals or the higher level moral preference should become the social preference. [Though one could apply it separately to both and come to the conclusion that the society, like all its members, had an irrational conflict between its first and second level preferences.]

He sees a parallel between the way a scientific theory replaces inexact empirical concepts by exact idealizations in such a way that treating the empirical concepts as if they were the idealized ones is justifiable in certain contexts, and what he calls 'practical idealization'. That is a way of making

greater harmony between one's morality and one's conduct by the imaginative replacement of one's actual by an ideal way of life that can to some extent be approximated by one's conduct. The influence of his early training as a lawyer is evident in much of his philosophy but it makes his discussion of the way legal and public moral institutions modify each other and the extent to which it is reasonable break the law to express moral disapproval of the social order which it protects, particularly informative.

Stephan wrote one or two articles on the philosophy of religion from his humanist viewpoint. In 'On Making Room for Faith'<sup>7</sup> he discusses the problem of the compatibility of science with morality and religion. He ends up with the view that belief in free will is neither supported nor contradicted by science, since the applicability of science to experience is limited to contexts in which decisions play no part. However:

Although belief in science is compatible with the belief in moral responsibility and in God, as the creator of the world, it is not compatible with the belief in miracles. For this belief implies that there are no laws of nature in the strict sense, but only alleged laws of nature the full formulation of which requires the additional clause: 'Provided that no miracle happens'. The religious person, of course, has no qualms about adding this clause. For to be religious is to hold, among other things, that whatever is incompatible with one's religious beliefs, is false.

To me, if I may conclude with a personal remark, the main value of any religion consists in its moral teaching. If God exists, and has the perfections which are ascribed to him, then he must be much more concerned with man's fulfilling his moral duties and following worthy ideals, than with his religious belief, disbelief or agnosticism.

However in order to reach these conclusions Stephan felt the need to explain the notion of exact and inexact concepts and their role in scientific theories. This obviously bewildered the editor:

The foregoing paper demonstrates some of the difficulties to be encountered when we ask for a dialogue between philosophy and theology to be established as part of the curriculum of a modern British university.

Stephan's last book, *Metaphysics: its Structure and Function* 1984, is, apart from a short chapter on aesthetic attitudes ('the sketch of a book which is unlikely to be written'), a wide ranging survey of his latest views on metaphysics as it relates to ethics, politics, mathematics, science and even, with gently sceptical sensitivity, mystical religion. He adopts the traditional terminology that distinguishes between 'immanent' and 'transcendental' metaphysics:<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> J. Coulson (ed.), *Theology and the University* (1964), chap. 6, pp. 236–47.

<sup>8</sup> *Metaphysics: its Structure and Function*, pp. 47–8.

The term ‘immanent philosophy’ is here, in accordance with traditional terminology, understood as referring to inquiries into the supreme principles governing one’s own and other people’s beliefs about the world of intersubjectively interpreted experience, as well as one’s own or other people’s attitudes towards this world. . . . The term ‘transcendent philosophy’, on the other hand, refers to attempts at grasping the nature of this reality and at answering questions which cannot be answered without a grasp of it.

A person’s metaphysical beliefs will be based on his supreme cognitive and practical principles and hence on his categorial framework and general morality. Stephan here reiterates his early view that there is a plurality of such categorial frameworks and moralities. He exhibits their general structure and shows that a great many of them share common cores. He argues that the fact that people can understand other people’s categorial frameworks shows that different categorial frameworks can—in a more or less distorted manner—be represented by each other, and that this suggests that each of them is a distorted representation of transcendent reality. Unlike most philosophers he took great care to distinguish between his account of the possible variety of metaphysical systems and the one he adopted himself. It seems appropriate to end this very brief sketch of his philosophical work with the description of his own metaphysics with which he ends this last book:<sup>9</sup>

The logic underlying my categorial framework is finitist and inexact, admitting of various kinds of idealizing exactifications and infinitization. Its maximal kinds are persons, animals and inanimate things—linked to the results of the sciences. . . . My personal morality implies a preference for representative democracy, approval of any strengthening of institutions which protect society from violations of personal freedom, from illness, political oppression, economic exploitation and undereducation. . . .

My transcendental metaphysics is a version of perspectivism according to which various categorial frameworks are different perspectives of transcendent reality. . . .

As to the issue between determinism and indeterminism, I believe (and am pleased) that a good case can be made for a strong sense of human freedom and for a conception of man as Goethe’s ‘little God of the world’ rather than a completely programmed *homunculus*.

I am agnostic about the existence of a perfect being and of immortal souls because I do not understand the key terms used in statements and arguments in which their existence is asserted or allegedly proved. I do not, however, deny the possibility that some future experience of a wholly new kind may give meaning to these terms.

. . .

<sup>9</sup> *Metaphysics: its Structure and Function*, pp. 232–3 and 221.

I, naturally, sometimes wonder how understanding and accepting a belief in the existence of a perfect being and of immortal souls would affect my categorial framework and my morality. Since I would probably regard these beliefs as speculative interpretations of experiences which, at best, can be characterized only negatively or analogically, the new framework would, I assume, not differ greatly from my present one. My morality would, I think, not change in content, though I might be enabled better to overcome any moral weakness. My transcendent metaphysics would, very likely, change out of all recognition. And the mere possibility of a theodicy would help to alleviate any feelings of despair and inadequacy in the face of human misery and wickedness and would serve as a most welcome ground for cosmic optimism.

Stephan was a very handsome man with an old fashioned Central European charm of manner, a droll sense of humour, and very regular habits. His students could set their watches by his time of arrival in the morning and at lectures, and he always took coffee at a local café with friends and colleagues at 11 a.m., leaving promptly at 11.50. In Austria he regularly had Wiener Schnitzel, defending his habit with Wittgenstein's dictum that 'It doesn't matter what it tastes like, the main point is that it is always the same.' He had an abiding delight in philosophy and up to the end of his life regularly attended staff research seminars. He will be remembered by his friends for his generosity and warmth of feeling. His devotion to his wife Diti was one of the most endearing things about him. He used to say, 'Diti does everything, but leaves the philosophy to me'. She had a very distinguished career in voluntary work. She became chair of the south western regional health authority in 1976 and was chosen in 1980 to chair a full-scale review of health service information. The resulting system of information management bears her name. It earned her a CBE in 1984. She also chaired the magistrates' bench in Bristol 1987–90. The University of Bristol awarded her the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws in July 1986. They were very proud of the achievements of their children and when Ann's husband Sydney Altman was awarded a Nobel Prize for chemistry Diti had a T-shirt printed with the words 'My son-in-law is a Nobel laureate'.

Stephan's philosophical views in *Experience and Conduct* were echoed in his own conduct. The philosopher Broad wrote an autobiographical note in which he gave an unsparing account of his own inner life. Stephan's son Tom remembers his father saying that the note gave him even more respect for Broad who had always managed to behave well in spite of inner urgings to unworthy conduct. Stephan distinguished carefully between things which were important like his family, friends and the life of the intellect and things which might be enjoyable (and which

should therefore be enjoyed) but which were ultimately unimportant. He took great pleasure in the comfortable home that Diti provided for him but when he lived alone in Yale his rooms had a monastic simplicity. He greatly relished ice cream and recognition (in about equal measure) but could have relinquished either without a moment's regret. Both he and Diti had a strong sense of public duty, but this was combined with a feeling that individuals were to be valued as individuals. They treated everybody from beggars to government ministers and from children to Nobel Prize winners as equals.

His actions were always informed by the spirit of the enlightenment but there was more of the romantic about his feelings than generally appeared. He knew much of classic German poetry by heart (he could also sing every popular German song of the 1920s and 1930s) and wrote poetry in his youth. (Even afterwards, in accordance with continental custom, he would write a poem for Diti on each of her birthdays.) Diti was a very witty woman and they shared a keen sense of the ridiculous. Tom remembers a home filled with love and laughter. When Stephan and Diti discovered that she was suffering from a terminal illness they chose to die together. They were both deeply committed to a clear-eyed view of life and death. Tom says Stephan held three important philosophical principles. 'The first was Aristotle's view that one should do right because it is in one's nature. The second was from Kant, who said to do only that which you wish to be adopted in universal law, and the third was the utilitarian principle of the greatest good for the greatest number. My father felt that if what you wanted to do agreed with all three then do it. And he disagreed with Kant that it was wrong to take one's own life.' And so on 18 August 2000, they made sure their affairs were in scrupulous order, procured some tablets and, for the last time, did what they thought was proper. They left detailed instructions for the funeral at a local crematorium attended by their family and very many friends from the university, the health service and the judiciary. In accordance with Stephan's final wishes Schubert's *Trout Quintet* was played. This was the favourite piece of music of Stephan and his father. Professor Kenneth Ingham gave a moving address, Tom read a passage from Leibniz and, although they were non-believers, Diti had asked for the Kaddish (Hebrew prayer for mourners) which was read by Sydney Altman. We left saddened by the sudden loss of two very good friends but heartened by the memory of two lives so full of achievement.

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Obituaries appeared in *The Times*, 23 August 2000, the *Guardian*, 30 August 2000, by Andrew Harrison, and in *Erkenntnis*, also by Andrew Harrison. Two commentaries on his works, and his reply to them were:

Haller, Rudolf (ed.), *Beiträge zur Philosophie von Stephan Körner* (Amsterdam, 1983). Körner, Stephan, Some clarifications and replies, *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, 27 (1986), 1–25.

Srzednicki, Jan T. J. (ed.), *Stephan Körner—Philosophical Analysis and Reconstruction* (Dordrecht, 1987) contains bibliography, pp. 161–7.



