Rethinking Popper
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Karl Popper was a radically influential philosopher in the past century, ever questioning, stimulating, inventive, rational and humane, always curious, always critical. Almost every aspect of human existence was within his range, in principle and recurrently in practice, and open to his sharp and unremitting questioning. Epistemology, logic, political economy and social theory, the history of ideas, scientific method, the relation between body and the mind, on and on. His *Logic of Scientific Discovery* challenged the dominating views on method, logic, and science developed by the Vienna Circle. His stunning *Open Society and Its Enemies* in mid-century set a standard for decades of critical admiration, for enthusiasm or rejection. He was a thoughtful gadfly to all.

The significance of Popper’s thought, its diversity and its impact on a wide range of intellectual themes, provided the primary stimulus for putting together this book. The principal aim is not to approach Popper’s philosophy as a museum piece in a retrospective way but to emphasize its relevance in today’s world and to show that it is a source of lively debate within contemporary philosophical discourse.

Popper visited Prague in 1994, and talked with Vaclav Havel. With admiration for the philosopher whom he called “a wise old man”, Havel said Popper led the inquiry “why it was so difficult for the idea of an open society to prevail against wave after wave of tribalism”. The plain relevance of Popper’s inquiries for tribalisms of the twenty-first century, together with the tasks of extending, perhaps revising, the central roles of affirmation and negation in Popperian studies, led to the convening of an international conference in Prague in September 2007.

The response was immense and more than 90 participants from 31 countries attended the meeting. Wide as the international interest shown here is, we can draw attention also to vigorous Popperian studies in other lands: Brazil, China, Greece, India, Korea, Mexico, Pakistan, Russia, Union of South Africa, Taiwan, and Turkey. Several talks return to traditional Popperian issues in the theory of knowledge, such as the critique of induction, the non-justificationist understanding of rationality and scientific method, the demarcation controversy, and the growth of knowledge. Going further afield, other papers reflect Popper’s remarkable influence in education, economics, management, engineering, jurisprudence, psychology, physics, biology, and ethics. Ten of the 11 invited speakers have contributed their papers to this volume. (To our regret, copyright restriction prevents our including
the contribution of David Miller, but we have added Zuzana Parusniková’s careful review of his recent book.)

The papers in this book are divided into four parts. Part I deals with general questions of rationality, logic, and science. Part II deals with central issues in epistemology and methodology and their bearing on Popper’s conception of evolution. Inevitably, the topics in these two parts overlap to some extent since his key concept of the imperative of falsification (criticism) is formative for both reason and scientific method. Part III focuses on his social philosophy and looks at the inspiration that the principles of the open society, methodological individualism, and piecemeal social engineering can offer the world today. Finally, papers in Part IV apply Popper’s ideas in other fields of study such as ethics, economics, and education.

We send this book out to the world of scientists and scholars with the hope its contents will lead to more informed criticism of Popper’s ideas, and thereby enhance their public recognition.

Zuzana Parusniková
Robert S. Cohen