

In Memoriam Elisabeth Leinfellner (1938-2010) and Werner Leinfellner (1921-2010)

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On 4 January 2010 Elisabeth Leinfellner died, and only three months later, on 6 April, Werner Leinfellner passed. Both were remarkable intellectuals and strongly devoted to their scientific work. Both were engaged in many projects, co-organized several outstanding symposia and meetings and thus helped establish communication among scientists and philosophers from all over the world. Most remarkably, in 1976 they co-founded the Austrian Wittgenstein Society and the International Wittgenstein Symposia in Kirchberg am Wechsel (Lower Austria) that, by now, have taken place more than thirty times and brought together researchers from all continents and all scientific and philosophical disciplines. Elisabeth and Werner Leinfellner initially lived and worked in Austria, but spent almost twenty years of their academic careers in the United States. In 1986 they returned to Austria, but continued lecturing at American universities at different occasions.

Elisabeth Leinfellner was born in 1938. She was trained as a linguist, but was also very much interested in philosophical questions. Actually, she had wide-ranged interests, and her work covers problems, concepts and approaches in semantics, text linguistics, rhetoric, political discourse, and philosophy of language and its history. Particularly, she focused on Ludwig Wittgenstein and the philosopher and writer Fritz Mauthner. However, she also published on causality and language, on Habermas' theory of communicative competence from a linguistic point of view and on William Ockham's and Franz Brentano's work in the light of semantics. Her book on euphemism in political language (*Der Euphemismus in der politischen Sprache*) deserves particular attention. Also, she co-authored a book on Ludwig

Wittgenstein as a primary-school teacher in Lower Austria. Finally, it should be mentioned that she drew our attention to texts and their meanings as evolutionary systems.

Since Elisabeth and Werner Leinfellner's biographies intertwined not only at a personal, but also at a scientific level, it should not come as a surprise that they co-authored some publications, most notably a book on ontology, systems theory and semantics (*Ontologie, Systemtheorie und Semantik*). This comprehensive, scholarly written volume is an original attempt to connect the traditional philosophical field of ontology with a cognitive-recursive semantics. It includes 477 pages and reflects the authors' broad knowledge in different rather specialized disciplines as well as their abilities to synthesize ideas. The book bridges the abyss between ordinary language and the language of theories. It demonstrates that both are governed by the same semantic regularities.

Werner Leinfellner was born in 1921. He studied chemistry and philosophy, but his main interest was philosophy, especially epistemology and philosophy of science. However, he never lost his close contact to the natural sciences. Early in his career, Werner Leinfellner published two books on the genesis of theory and on the structure of scientific theories (*Die Entstehung der Theorie* and *Struktur und Aufbau wissenschaftlicher Theorien*). Most remarkable is his introduction to epistemology and philosophy of science (*Einführung in die Erkenntnis- und Wissenschaftstheorie*). This book was published in three editions; about 65 000 copies were sold, and it was for some time the widest-spread introductory text to modern epistemology and philosophy of science in German speaking countries.

Werner Leinfellner did also some pioneering work in game and decision theory which is documented by numerous of his papers. Shortly after he and his wife had moved to the United States, he founded the international journal *Theory and Decision* and the international book series *Theory and Decision Library* which, in the meantime, includes many dozens of prestigious volumes. Later in his career he was very much attracted by evolutionary theory

and evolutionary epistemology, and gave evolutionary thinking a fresh impetus from a game-theoretic point of view.

It must not be forgotten that Werner Leinfellner was also interested in social philosophy and ethics. In his perspective, a human society is an institution having the task to solve conflicts in an optimal way. He applied decision and game theory to the study of social systems and thus showed how optimal conflict solution can be rendered possible. Consequently, he considered ethics as applied science. He referred to Moritz Schlick's social ethics and emphasized that social motives and success increase our happiness. Hence, he argued that moral systems have to be based on a knowledge of human preferences and desires and must include positive stimuli (and not just commands and prohibitions).

Werner Leinfellner's oeuvre stands in stark contrast to traditional, idealistic philosophy. Inspired by the leading figures of the Vienna Circle, it is a serious – and successful – attempt to establish philosophy on scientific grounds and to avoid all types of obscurantism. It shows, what “philosophy in action” really means.

Here it is, of course, not possible to give a comprehensive account of Elisabeth and Werner Leinfellner's work. Regarding Werner, we want to hint at two issues of *La Nuova Critica* (36, 37-38, 2000, 2001); they were dedicated to him at the occasion of his 80th birthday.

However, it should be pointed out, that Elisabeth and Werner Leinfellner were not only distinguished scholars, but also distinguished personalities. They were both cooperative and always ready to help. They were always busy, but at the same time accessible. They were very social, not at all complicated, and it was a pleasure to meet them. Both were a source of intellectual inspiration, even if the conversation was centered on trivial every-day matters. Both were open minded in the best humanist tradition. Anyone who had the privilege to know them or even to consider them as friends, will keep them in best remembrance.