

From a letter to A.S.E., March 22nd 1940.

What happens with me, is that I am not so deeply impressed by the alleged grand philosophical revelations which especially quantum mechanics is supposed to have brought us. I am just about 10 - 15 years older than most of the enthusiastic champions of that new positivistic out-look - and I was born and educated in Vienna with E. Mach's teaching and personality still pervading the atmosphere. I was devoted to his writings, which I read practically all before I could know a word of the 1913-Bohr theory - maybe about the same time when we were initiated into the restricted theory of relativity. Just as strong or even stronger than Mach's was in this time in Vienna the after-effect of the great Boltzmann, whose splendid pupil and admirer Hasenöhrle had just taken Boltzmann's chair (so cruelly evacuated a year before, 1906). Both Boltzmann and Mach were, as you know, just as much interested in philosophy, more especially in epistemology as they were in physics, in fact all their later writing was pervaded by the epistemological ("erkenntnistheoretisch") out-look. Their views were not the same. But filled with a great admiration of the candid and incorruptible struggle for truth in both of them, we did not consider them irreconcilable. Boltzmann's idea consisted in forming absolutely clear, almost naïvely clear and detailed "pictures" - mainly in order to be quite sure of avoiding contradictory assumptions. Mach's ideal was the cautious synthesis of observational facts that can, if desired, be traced back till to the plain, crude sensual perception (pointer reading). He was most anxious not to contaminate this absolutely reliable timber with any other one of a more doubtful origin.

However, we decided for ourselves, that these were just different methods of attack and that one was quite permitted to follow one or the other provided one did not lose sight of the important principles that were more strongly emphasized by the followers of the other one, respectively.

You easily imagine, Sir Arthur, that with these antecedents one