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## Vienna in the Age of Uncertainty: Science, Liberalism, and Private Life - Book Review

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analysis that focuses “on the ground.” By examining over a hundred interviews conducted over more than ten years, Brubaker and his colleagues discover that ethnicity in Cluj is not, as some might assume, a ubiquitous problem simmering on the front burner of everyday life, ready to break into violent conflict, but something that appears and disappears in the course of the flow of life situations, circumstances, and needs.

A work this rich deserves an extensive discussion, but let me raise two points that might provide points of departure. First, the book concludes that in the lives of their informants there is substantial distance between “politics” and “everyday life”; their informants, both Hungarian and Romanian, share a distaste for politics and politicians. One thing we are left wondering, however, is about the presence of *the political* in their lives. Although their informants express some degree of frustration about the difficulties in their lives and in their society, we do not get any sense of the structures of power that determine their options. This is one risk in a study so focused on the elucidation of day-to-day interactions.

My second observation is simply that despite the close focus on day-to-day interactions, the book does not provide the reader with a sense of the role ethnicity plays in the creation of persons in everyday life. I should quickly acknowledge that I understand their focus on ethnicity provided the determining criteria about what material to include in their analyses and what to ignore. I also believe this is a function of their conception of fieldwork and ethnographic method being put to sociological purposes. The information gleaned from group interviews and surveys that is then coded and sorted by software produces the image of the everyday that is built in and from speech. As the authors would I am sure be the first to agree, however, ethnicity exists also in relationship to places and objects, sounds, colors, gestures, etc., states and dispositions that require a different attitude to ethnography for their evocation. These facets of the subjective experience of ethnicity are absent from the book; and although this would have been a fascinating addition, the volume still stands on its own as an invaluable addition to our knowledge of ethnicity in Europe.

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**Coen, Deborah R.** *Vienna in the Age of Uncertainty: Science, Liberalism, and Private Life*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007. Pp. 380.  
doi:10.1017/S0067237809001052

Liberal parties fared poorly in the politics of late Habsburg Austria, yet Deborah Coen argues that nineteenth-century Austro-German liberalism should be imagined in a context larger than lost elections. We must recognize liberalism’s importance in the realms of sensibility, lifestyle, science, pedagogy, and leisure. In refreshing ways, Coen’s book revises the half-truths of Carl Schorske’s picture of Austrian liberalism as a father’s credo overwhelmed after 1880 by rebellious oedipal sons, anti-Semitism, and aesthetic modernisms. Although acknowledging elitist and utopian aspects of the liberal ethos, Coen depicts liberal strategies for navigating pre-1914 change with pronounced sympathy and claims that liberalism was more supple and less hostile to modernism and generational challenge than Schorske thought. More broadly, she expands our understanding of the scientific and philosophical imaginations in Austria, the history of ethics, and relationships between the public and private spheres.

Coen fashions a group biography of the Austrian *Bildungsbürgertum* over three generations between the 1820s and 1940s, centering on the Exner family as a scientific dynasty. This is not a stereotypical “rise and decline” tale, however, for Coen stresses the enduring aspects of the Exners’ positive achievement. The philosopher Franz Exner (1802–1853), founder of the family’s greatness, helped adapt the humanistic ideal of *Bildung* to the circumstances of the Austro-German Vormärz, linking it in his

educational theory to the antideterminist, anti-Hegelian doctrines of Johann Friedrich Herbart. Exner's ideas influenced the Austrian educational reforms of the 1850s, intended to modernize pedagogy and make instruction relevant to civic responsibility. A leitmotiv of Coen's story is the premise that liberals of the Exner stamp were positioned between Catholic dogmatism—stifling to freedom—and rising ethnic and socialist populisms—which they perceived as anarchistic and relativist.

In response, using assumptions partly drawn from the discipline of statistics, the Exners fashioned an idealized realist—though not antimodernist—aesthetic sense, and crafted an antideterministic, probabilist epistemology designed to sustain dialogues of communicative reason trending toward a consensual “perspectival objectivity” rather than hubristic certainty—a Danubian variation on Voltaire's idea that doubt is unpleasant but certainty is absurd. The peculiarly Austrian inflection of this probabilistic epistemology and ethical style was refined by Franz Exner's children—the jurist Adolf Exner, the physicists Karl and Seraphin, the physiologist Sigmund, and their sister Marie Exner von Frisch. Via teaching and sociability, this second generation nurtured probabilism within the cultivated *Bürgertum*, making it a template for academic policy, science, and legal thought.

The axis of Coen's family history is not so much Vienna as Brunnwinkl, the Exner's summer retreat in the Salzkammergut. Brunnwinkl was not an escapist refuge from real-world change of the sort famously depicted in Schorske's reading of Stifter's *Der Nachsommer*. It was a site where privacy and sociability interlaced with public concerns in discussions with such neighbors and visitors as Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, Theodor Billroth, and Gottfried Keller. The children learned to esteem the contingent dynamics of nature, and scientific projects were conceptualized and carried out. The ethos of probabilism and respect for chance and uncertainty were honed, Coen asserts, by interactions with the Alpine weather and ecology and by the practical skills of hunters and farmers in negotiating nature's contingences.

In chapters informed by familiarity with current thought on objectivity and the history of science, Coen shows how liberal and probabilistic assumptions bore prolific fruit in the research fields of the second and third generation Exners and their students like Erwin Schrödinger and Fritz Kohlrausch: brain science, color perception theory, theoretical physics, meteorology, and insect behavior, to cite a few examples. Two Exners—Adolf and Seraphin—became rectors of the University of Vienna before 1914, where they defended academic freedom, humanistic values, and the ideal of “political *Bildung*.” In what might be read as an ironic “fall” of the family heritage, some children nurtured at Brunnwinkl became Nazi supporters in the 1930s. Yet Coen sustains the positive thrust of her narrative, explaining this in terms of conditions spawned by the Great War and the Depression, not generational rebellion or contradictions within the liberal ethos (345–46).

Coen has a storyteller's instincts, and sometimes her tale's symmetry may seem a bit too neat. She might be more thorough in documenting the precise importance of hunter and farmer models for the Exners' probabilist orientation, as well as the correlation between the *Sommerfrische* tradition, the Exners' life strategies, and those of the refined *Bürgertum* as a whole. Yet she has written a most impressive first book that brings us dramatically closer to solving the Rubik's Cube of liberalism's history in Austria.

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**Dietrich-Daum, Elizabeth.** *Die “Wiener Krankheit”: eine Sozialgeschichte der Tuberkulose in Österreich.* Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2007. Pp. 397, maps, tables.

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Tuberculosis has occupied a prominent place in the modern human disease hierarchy. Flourishing in the slums of industrial cities, it has been seen as a paradigmatic disease of the modern era, politicized