

## # Vale: Joseph Agassi (1927-2023)

Joseph Agassi, the prolific Israeli historian, philosopher and sociologist of science, a noted student of Karl Popper, and a scholar with the widest political, cultural and educational interests—died on 22 January aged 95.

Agassi graduated in physics and philosophy from The Hebrew University, then completed the MSc degree in physics (1951). In 1952 he went to London University (the LSE) to study, and work as a research assistant, with Karl Popper. He graduated PhD in 1956. An account of Agassi's career and publications is [HERE](#). A Wikipedia entry, that usefully has 50+ downloadable Agassi papers, is [HERE](#).

Agassi articulated, refined, expanded and defended Popper's research programme of Critical Rationalism. He thrived on intellectual exchange, through publications, in conferences and in animated conversations. He had continuing engagements with a range of top-rank philosophers and social scientists, and with any student who wanted a serious communication or asked a probing question.

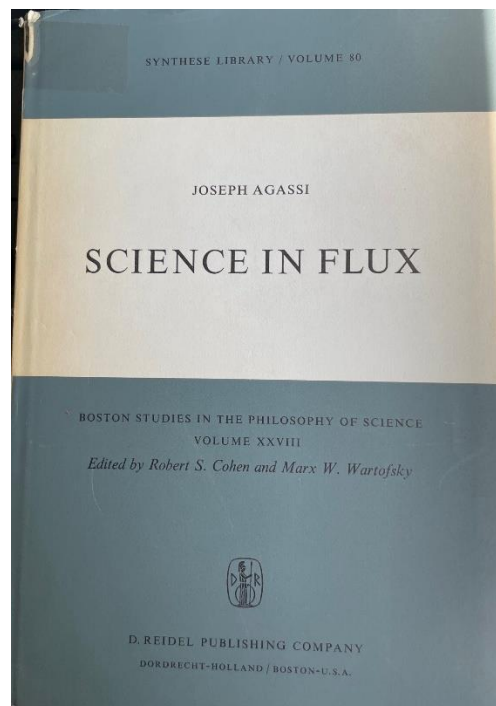
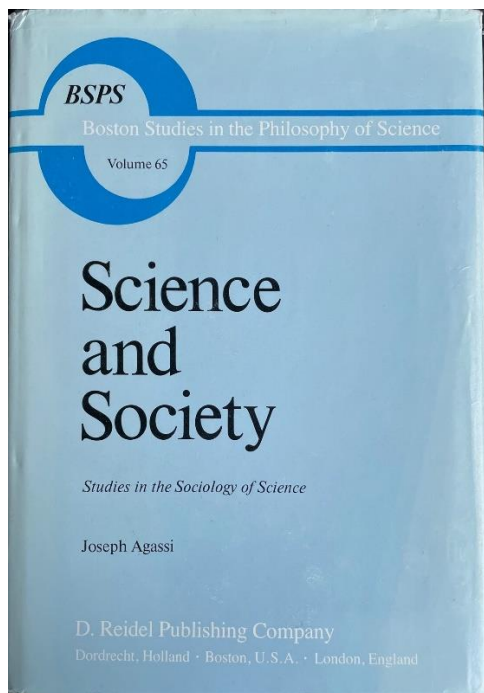
Among numerous philosophers with whom he engaged was [Mario Bunge](#) who also spent time in Popper's LSE department and who became a personal friend. Bunge, in his so-informative Memoirs, says of Agassi: 'I believe Joseph is Popper's best pupil, and one of the few who neither flattered nor betrayed him' (p.139). And 'He was Popper's most lucid, loyal, and yet independent student' (p.368).



*Marx Wartofsky, Joseph Agassi, Mario Bunge. Boston University HPS Department, 1978.*

*Photo: Charlie Sawyer*

[Robert Cohen](#) was another philosopher friend and colleague with whom Agassi taught and researched at Boston University's HPS Centre. He contributed a number of important volumes to Cohen's *Boston Studies* series, and gave presentations in the Boston Colloquium.



One of the twenty papers in the second collection well captures Agassi's orientation to HPS:

'The Nature of Scientific Problems and Their Roots in Metaphysics' (pp.208-239).

A 580-page, 42-chapter *Boston Studies* volume, *Encouraging Openness*, commemorated his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Agassi had life-long interests in education: both the improvement of science teaching and learning, and the wider Enlightenment Project's justification of science education as the prime vehicle for cultural and social betterment. He wrote pieces for children that cultivated scientific interest and competence. A collection of 25 of his education papers published over a 45-year period was published in 2014: *The Hazard Called Education* (Springer).



Ian Winchester, in his essay '[Joseph Agassi's Educational Thoughts](#)', published in the above *Encouraging Openness*, writes: 'For over 50 years, Joseph Agassi has thought and written about education'. And observes:

... what struck me most about Joseph's educational thinking was its being direct and to the point.