EMPIRICISM AND SOCIOLOGY

VIENNA CIRCLE COLLECTION

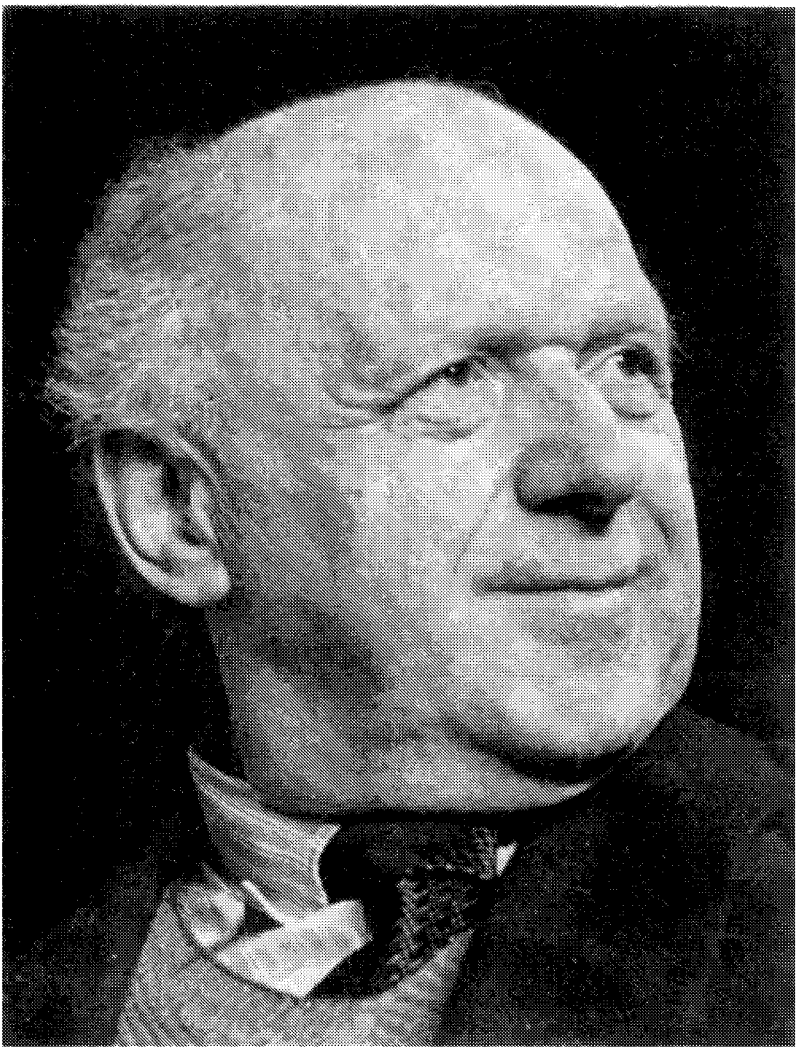
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VOLUME 1



Otto Neurath on December 21, 1945.

OTTO NEURATH

EMPIRICISM AND SOCIOLOGY

Edited by

MARIE NEURATH *and* ROBERT S. COHEN

With a Selection of Biographical and Autobiographical Sketches



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VIENNA CIRCLE COLLECTION

The Vienna Circle was a discussion group of philosophically interested specialists who came together in 1923 and from 1925 to 1936 met regularly once a week in an institute of Vienna University. These gatherings were conducted by Moritz Schlick, the physicist and philosopher who was appointed professor of the philosophy of inductive sciences in 1922. Over the years, members included Hans Hahn, Otto Neurath, Philipp Frank, Viktor Kraft, Herbert Feigl, Friedrich Waismann, Rudolf Carnap, Kurt Gödel, Karl Menger, Bela Juhos and others. There was no conscious aim of radically revising traditional views on the task and place of philosophy, but the members were on the whole well aware that current findings of research into the foundations of logic, mathematics and the natural sciences had important philosophic consequences. Among subjects for discussion were Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, the possibility of reducing all concepts of science to what is directly given in experience, the setting up of a criterion of meaningfulness for non-logical utterances, the character of the basic propositions of empirical science, and the devising of a meta-language for the syntactic analysis of scientific language systems.

In 1929 the philosophical ideas of the Vienna Circle were brought to the notice of the world at large. In that year appeared a pamphlet entitled: *Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung – Der Wiener Kreis*, in which philosophy was denied the status of an independent science and instead interpreted as an activity of clarification within the various sciences, either by way of analysis of the meaning of concepts and judgements, or by the structural analysis of scientific languages.

From then on the Vienna Circle developed an intense activity, offering the public ample opportunity to get acquainted with the views of the Vienna empiricists.

Under the editorship of Carnap and Reichenbach, the latter representing the *Gesellschaft für empirische Philosophie* in Berlin, the journal *Erkenntnis* was published; Carnap, Neurath and Hahn as co-editors

published *Einheitswissenschaft*, a series of pamphlets, and Schlick and Frank the monographs *Schriften zur wissenschaftlichen Weltauffassung*. Congresses were organized, and led to valuable contacts with similarly inspired groups and individual sympathisers abroad; first the congresses of epistemology of exact science (1929 and 1930) and then from 1934 to 1939 the congresses for the unity of science.

However, the group in Vienna gradually broke up. In 1930 Feigl went to the United States, in 1931 Carnap left for Prague, moving on to the U.S. in 1936. In 1934 Hans Hahn died and Neurath fled to The Netherlands. In 1936 Schlick, whose views were less radical than those of some other members of the Vienna Circle and who during the last years of his life complained of the dogmatic attitude of some fellow members of the Circle, was murdered by a student and the meetings came to an end. Thanks to the cooperation of the scattered members under the stimulating leadership of Otto Neurath, the publications continued till 1939 and further congresses were organized.

Logical positivism, or logical empiricism, as the Vienna Circle's philosophic position is usually called, may be described roughly as a synthesis of three elements: the traditional empiricism and positivism of Hume, Mill and Mach, the logical theories of Russell, and the philosophical and logical views of Wittgenstein. Logical empiricism thus recognizes only two kinds of meaningful utterances: the analytic judgements of mathematics and logic, which give no knowledge of reality, and the synthetic judgements of empirical science. Because of its interpretation of mathematical judgements as tautologous one might describe logical empiricism as a purified empiricism; or, to use the formulation preferred by Schlick, an empiricism that denies the possibility of a priori synthetic judgements.

Because of the great range of its activities, the Vienna Circle's influence extended beyond philosophy in the strict sense. Its effects, direct or indirect, can be seen in all those formal and empirical sciences whose structure and methodology and the problems of whose foundations were discussed by the Vienna Circle.

The chief importance of logical empiricism for the history of philosophy lay in the vigour with which it pointed out the necessity and the value of examining the scope and bounds of significant discourse, a task which some of its adherents attempted in a grand and systematic manner. Its

influence was greatest where the tradition of philosophy was already attuned to the new ideas it propounded, as for example in Great Britain and in the United States, where Carnap, Feigl, Gödel, Menger, Reichenbach, Frank and Hempel were able to work. Its reception was slower and is perhaps still not complete in areas where philosophy is traditionally more speculative, as in Continental Europe other than Scandinavia.

On the whole, however, the distinctive insights of this philosophical movement have passed into the main corpus of thought of analytical philosophy, which in the process of working them out or reacting against them has moved on to fresh problems in the philosophy of science, mathematics, language, and other areas. Thus the time is now ripe to study logical empiricism and the Vienna Circle in particular as part of the history of philosophy, a particularly important part since its study will lead to a renewed and critical examination of some central features of present-day philosophical thinking that are usually taken for granted.

The notion of a series of books on the Vienna Circle and related groups arose some years ago at the Institute for Foundational Research, University of Amsterdam, where H. L. Mulder began to build up a Vienna Circle archive. This archive has since been able to acquire almost all the literary remains of Schlick and Neurath. It is not intended to publish this material *in toto*, nor to republish all the work of members or sympathisers with the Vienna Circle, much of which has of course been reprinted anyway.

What the editors and the publisher visualize is basically a series of anthologies translated into English of the most important work of single members, which should contain besides a detailed essay on the man a complete bibliography of his work.

Moreover, the series is to be completed with translations of certain works produced by members of the Vienna Circle or particularly influential in it, that the editors consider of special scientific or historical importance. Finally, there is to be some hitherto unpublished material, above all letters, drawn from the archive.

The whole series of about 30 volumes will be published between 1973 and 1980. Each volume will be available in hardbound as well as in paperbound editions.

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PREFACE

I

On the last day of his life, Otto Neurath had given help to a Chinese philosopher who was writing about Schlick. Only an hour before his death he said to me: "Nobody will do such a thing for me." My answer then was: "Never mind, you have Bilston, isn't that better?" There were consultations in new housing schemes, an exhibition, and hopes for a fruitful relationship of longer duration.

I did not dream at that time that I would one day work on a book like this. The idea came from Horace M. Kallen, of the New School for Social Research, New York, years later; to encourage me he sent me his selection from William James' writings.

Later I met Robert S. Cohen. Carnap had sent him to me with the message: "If you want to find out what my political views were in the twenties and thirties, read Otto Neurath's books and articles of that time; his views were also mine." In this way Robert Cohen became acquainted with Otto Neurath. Even more: he became interested; and when I asked him, would he help me as an editor of an Otto Neurath volume, he agreed at once.

In previous years I had already asked a number of Otto Neurath's friends to write down for me what they especially remembered about him. I had not thought of adding anything myself. I did so only at a later stage, and this was entirely due to Robert Cohen's and his wife Robin's encouragement.

Our co-operation has been going on for many years; it started long before Henk Mulder launched the Vienna Circle Collection. I am happy that our book becomes the first volume of the series; I am also grateful and proud to have Robert Cohen as my co-editor. Philipp Frank, who knew him well, and who was Otto Neurath's life-long friend, greatly approved of this choice.

MARIE NEURATH

II

I never met Otto Neurath, but he was a hero of sorts to me. With him, philosophy could be scientific but not divorced from social discontent and political action. With him, economics and sociology could be empirical and analytic while retaining their historical ground. With him, understanding science meant also understanding its history, its actual byways and alternative forks in the conceptual road, and it meant understanding by the everyday citizen, not only the academic specialist. With him, socialist economic planning grew from hard experience with war economy, which he saw was as natural to capitalism as its fascist twin.

Neurath wrote with reason throughout his life, especially when the odds were stacked against decency; and when is reason more needed than in times of low probability? He argued with his friends, all the time, with rigor and with zest (and I responded to his writings in the same way, I hoped). And he organized! For Vienna, of course; for the socialist movement there and in Bavaria briefly; for public housing in Vienna and in England; for public enlightenment – in ethics as well as in science and economics; and for international collaboration toward humane scholarship in the rational understanding of science.

Why only a hero 'of sorts'? He knew his achievement was to pioneer, not to finish. A world collapsed, and Neurath knew its rot before most, but he did not find a path to genuine resistance, nor did he see far enough to the politics of reconstruction and transformation. Yet we have so far learned too little from his pioneering.

The joy of Otto Neurath's life in this sad century was in his love. For me it has been reflected deeply within and by Marie Neurath, whose intelligence, courage and spirit I admire and respect.

R. S. COHEN

OTTO NEURATH: PRINCIPAL DATES

1882	born on 10th December in Vienna
1901–1905	universities in Vienna and Berlin, Dr. Phil. (Berlin)
1906	military service
1907	married to Anna Schapire (until her death in 1911)
1907–1914	teacher at *Neue Wiener Handelsakademie*, Vienna
1911–1913	travels in Eastern Europe and Balkans, contract with Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
1911	birth of son Paul
1912	married to Olga Hahn (until her death in 1937)
1914–1918	war service at Eastern front and in Vienna, also *habilitation* at Heidelberg University, and call to direct a Museum on War Economy in Leipzig
1919	Munich, Central Planning Office; trial; return to Vienna
1919–1924	active participation in housing movement in Vienna, foundation of the Museum for Housing and Town Planning
1924–1934	foundation and direction of the Social and Economic Museum in Vienna
1929	Vienna Circle manifesto
1933	foundation of the International Foundation for Visual Education at the Hague
1934–1940	at the Hague, Holland; continuation of visual education (ISOTYPE), organization of the International Unity of Science movement
1940	flight to England and internment
1941–1945	Oxford
1941	married to Marie Reidemeister
1945	died on 22nd December, in Oxford, England