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LIBERA PISANO

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THE POLITICAL IDEAS OF OTTO NEURATH
SCIENCE, JUDAISM, AND THE RISE OF EXPERTOCRACY

Abstract: This article examines the political ideas of Otto Neurath (1882–1945), a major figure of the Vienna Circle. As it seeks to demonstrate, even the most technical aspects of Neurath's philosophical work – the philosophy of language, the argument in favor of visual language, and the theory of protocol statements – must be read as parts of a new political religion. The political religion of the Vienna Circle was meant to erase all traces of religion and tradition. In particular, it was devised to replace Judaism, which most members stemmed from: It induced the Jews to give up their traditions and habits and become members of a rational world society led by technological planning experts. The following analyses trace Neurath's political ideas from a remote expert opinion on the Jewish colonization of Palestine to his late political treatise on expertocracy and democracy, and proceed to some of the expert writings on science, philosophy, and language from there. Neurath spoke the language of democratization, but his own authoritarian inclinations came shining through. Ultimately, he advocated for expertocratic rule in the language of democratic empowerment.

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1. *Introduction*

Scholars of German-Jewish thought between the World Wars cannot help but notice that the Weimar period is less 'historical' than other periods before and after. Not only has it an afterlife, as in certain post-war intellectual formations or in the political events of 1968, it also has retained an uncanny presence ever since. Every reader of Walter Benjamin – to name only the most obvious example – knows this appearance of being coeval, of being part of the game as it unfolds before his eyes. More than eighty years later, those writings still make the reader complicit in the moment of their creation.

But there is another history of German-Jewish thought between the World Wars, which is literally just around the corner from the great, iconic thinkers. The respective writings are hardly ever studied except by the

most hard-boiled adherents. One could almost say they're forgotten, but they have an uncanny afterlife, too – the kind of afterlife that is reserved to failed ideas.

At least when it comes to political thought, to be sure, there is hardly an idea of the Weimar era which did not fail in a decisive respect, and Jewish thinkers were no exception here. But some failures are more easily forgiven or more willingly explained away than others. The political ideas of Otto Neurath cannot be explained away, no matter how hard scholars have tried to turn Vienna Circle members into the high representatives of reason in a time of unreason[1].

We must dislocate the writings of the Vienna Circle from their ancestral home ground of scientism and recontextualize them in political philosophy. We shall enter some of the most technical details from here – the philosophy of language, the argument in favor of visual language, and the theory of protocol statements – and make them readable as parts of a political and social project. This project is not merely an extension of the philosophy of science into the world of political life. Rather, the political angle brings the presuppositions of the theoretical project to light. As has been rightfully argued, the philosophy of science itself is dependent upon the political project[2]. Furthermore, the philosophy of science is more than a theoretical program: It is also a set of world-views and eschatological hopes that had fueled the theoretical project in the first place – those elements of philosophical thought that never come to a clear theoretical exposition but express themselves in metaphors and rhetorical strategies. They are located in the 'action' of a text as it points beyond the author's argument.

The interplay between the argument and the action became especially visible in the writings of Otto Neurath, who was arguably the most vivid and the most political figure of the Circle. The action and the narrative structure of these writings show clear signs of a political religion. The political religion of the Vienna Circle was meant to erase all traces of religion. In particular, it was devised to replace Judaism, which most members stemmed from: It induced the Jews to give up their traditions and habits and become members of a rational world society. To some extent, this political religion simply

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[1] Cf. F. Stadler (ed.), *Vertriebene Vernunft: Emigration und Exil österreichischer Wissenschaft 1930-1940*, 2 vols., Münster, LIT, 2004.

[2] Cf. G. Freudenthal, *Otto Neurath: From Authoritarian Liberalism to Empiricism*, in *Knowledge and Politics: Case Studies in the Relationship between Epistemology and Political Philosophy*, ed. by M. Dascal – O. Gruengard, Boulder/San Francisco/London, Westview Press, 1989, pp. 207-240.

belongs to the arsenal of failed political ideas of the interwar period. But as should be noted, it was bound to fail by its philosophical premises. Most of all, it was limited by its narrow concept of reason.

It is hard to guess which part of 'German-Jewish' would be less acceptable to Vienna Circle protagonists themselves, but certainly neither 'German' nor 'Jewish' was how they wanted to be seen. As to German, the difference was not just geographical. They clearly saw themselves as an outgrowth and integral part of Austrian political culture, which they saw in a sharp – maybe too sharp – contrast to German political culture[3]. The Vienna Circle also never maintained a strong relation with the German language, which for many writers outside the political boundaries of Germany had created a strong bond with German culture (the case of Kafka is the most obvious example). With its characteristic historicity and ambiguity, German had always been a liability for the Vienna Circle, and no one made the transition to English more smoothly and without reservation. It is difficult to find an idea that could not have been written in *any* language, including artificial languages, symbolic languages, and the pictorial language of Otto Neurath that goes by the name of Isotype. In the first place they were philosophers of science, and they identified as members of an international movement beyond all particular traditions.

This also explains much of their reservation as to Judaism. Most of them (but not Brentano and Mach, the progenitors, or Moritz Schlick, the *Schulhaupt*) had Jewish parents – often already with a complicated story of conversions to Catholicism and/or Protestantism, which their sons continued – but none related to Judaism in any meaningful sense. And yet the Vienna Circle was *seen* as Jewish from within and without, although hardly ever in a positive way. Otto Neurath, who had a Jewish father (a convert to Catholicism), became a Protestant in 1912[4], and yet he was perceived as habitually 'half-Jewish'[5].

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[3] The strong discrimination became problematic when they sought to analyze the origins of National Socialism, as in Neurath's interpretation of Plato after WWII. See O. Neurath – J.A. Lauwerys, *Plato's Republic and German Education*, «The Journal of Education», 77 (1945) no. 907, p. 910, p. 913; cf. A. Soulez, *Does Understanding Mean Forgiveness? Otto Neurath and Plato's Republic in 1944-45*, in: *Otto Neurath: Rationalität, Planung, Vielfalt*, ed. by E. Nemeth/R. Heinrich, Vienna/Oldenbourg/Berlin, Akademie-Verlag, 1999, pp. 167-183.

[4] Cf. G. Sandner, *Otto Neurath. Eine politische Biographie*, Wien, Zsolnay, 2014, p. 58.

[5] See the report in the diary of Eugen Hoeflich (Moshe Ya'akov Ben-Gavriel) from April 1919: «Mein einstiger Nationaloekonomielehrer Dr. Otto Neurath ist in der bairischen Räterepublik Sozialisierungsminister geworden. Die Charriere eines wissenschaftlich-politi-

Scholars have occasionally emphasized the Jewishness of many Circle members, but they have largely remained clueless as to what that meant. For the most part, it was about Nazi persecution and eventual emigration, but it seemed to have little to do with the work. Historians of Vienna modernism have argued that the Circle's notion of science itself was secularized Judaism[6]. This explanation has its weaknesses, too. Tacitly but inevitably, it is built upon the presupposition that even these post-Jewish philosophers of science *were* still Jewish, so that they unwittingly or unwillingly continued a tradition they hardly even knew of. In a way, then, the secularization thesis essentializes Jewishness. But this essentialization is merely the incidental consequence of a prior misreading concerning the form of the theoretical enterprise: The theoretical project of the Vienna Circle was not a secular continuation of Judaism but an attempt to get away from Judaism. It was a new religion, an *Ersatz* religion, with many structural elements of a sect. I shall refer to the group and its core beliefs as a *political religion* below.

Anti-Semites pushed the button of 'positivism' to create a link between the Vienna Circle and Judaism. The quintessential 'positivist' in the Nazi imagination dealt with the given only; he lacked the sense for metaphysical depth that stemmed from the essence of blood and soil. He was the philosophical role model of the 'rootless cosmopolitan' – another figure from the arsenal of anti-Semitic stereotypes, which played a major role in the Soviet campaign against Jewish intellectuals after WWII. In all cases the anti-Jewish imagination created a direct link between the Jews' lack of rootedness in the autochthonous national culture and their alleged cosmopolitan political radicalism.

By the mid-1930s positivism was to such an extent seen as a 'Jewish' trait that even non-Jewish members of the Vienna Circle were perceived as Jews. The link was created by their alleged adherence to the positivistic

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schen Hochstaplers. Als ich – sein Schüler – überzeugter marxistischer Sozialist war – war er Sozialistenfresser par excellance [sic!], heute ist er Oberkommunist. Ein Bekannter, der vor einem halben Jahr noch mit ihm zusammengearbeitet hatte, sagte dasselbe. Wissenschaftliche Kreise lehnten, wie ich höre ihn als Charlatan ab. Er scheint mir aber trotzdem als fähiger, aber sprunghaft denkender Mensch, der viele gute Gedanken hat, nicht aber die Möglichkeit in sich der Consequenz. Er ist eben ein Bastard semitischen und arischen Geistes. (Seine Mutter soll eine deutsche Gräfin gewesen sein.)» (E. Hoeflich, *Tagebücher 1915-1927*, Vienna, Böhlau, 1999, p. 70). Following this description, the social *persona* of the 'half-Jew' is that of an opportunist. Theodor W. Adorno, another perceived 'half-Jew', was described in similar terms.

[6] Cf. S. Beller, *Vienna and the Jews: A Cultural History*, Cambridge – New York, Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 88-121, esp. pp. 94-95.

method. This nefarious semantic coupling reached its climax in the murder of Moritz Schlick by a former student in 1936, which was justified in a fascist paper as an act of national self-defense against the impertinence of Jewish positivism[7].

But positivism had been a political religion long before anti-Semites paid attention – after all, its founder August Comte had inaugurated positivistic churches and built a positivistic religion upon the principles of order and progress[8]. Hence there is no need to force a link between positivism and political religion; and the group around Schlick clearly saw themselves in the positivistic lineage. Joining the positivistic sect was a way for Jews to leave Judaism behind, or to fuse it with a new ideology and lifestyle.

2. *Jüdische Planwirtschaft in Palästina (1921)*

The link between science, Judaism, and the political ideas of Otto Neurath is well visible in a relatively remote text, namely, his pseudonymous study *Jüdische Planwirtschaft in Palästina* (Jewish Planning Economy in Palestine), written as a commissioned work in 1920 and published as a brochure in 1921[9]. The almost forgotten text, with its unique setting and rhetorical structure, is nothing short of spectacular. It documents how Neurath, the alleged 'half-Jew' by birth and perceived habitus, sought to rid himself of all visible traces of Judaism. He projected himself as a non-Jewish and purely non-political planning expert advising the Jews on how to settle in Palestine. But he also described how the Jewish dream of returning to Zion would come true through superior economic planning. This theopolitical excess in the closing pages of the little brochure is the point where the genuine model of religion

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[7] The case is documented in F. Stadler, *The Vienna Circle: Studies in the Origins, Development, and Influence of Logical Empiricism*, Cham, Springer, 2015, pp. 600-630; see especially pp. 602-606.

[8] Cf. A. Comte, *The Catechism of Positive Religion Or Summary Exposition of the Universal Religion Thirteen Systematic Conversations Between a Woman and a Priest of Humanity*, Cambridge – New York, Cambridge University Press, 2009; Id., *A General View of Positivism*, Cambridge – New York, Cambridge University Press, 2009.

[9] K. Wilhelm, *Jüdische Planwirtschaft in Palästina. Ein gesellschaftstechnisches Gutachten*, Berlin, Welt-Verlag, 1921. 'Karl Wilhelm' were Neurath's two middle names. – The genesis of this work has by and large remained mysterious. Neurath's recent biographer Günther Sandner speculated that the study came into being through Neurath's acquaintance with Carl Ballod, a German Zionist who had published his work *Palästina als jüdisches Ansiedlungsgebiet* in 1918 (Sandner, *Otto Neurath*, pp. 150-52).

and politics comes into sight. From here we shall be in a good position to map Neurath's late political treatise on expertocracy and democracy, and proceed to some of the expert writings on science, philosophy, and language. This procedure not only reiterates the claim that the philosophy of science in Neurath and his colleagues is dependent upon a political program. It also shows that the Vienna Circle, just as virtually all groups and figures in continental thought at the time, had a Jewish problem, too. Neurath's encounter with Judaism – and his characteristic distortions and omissions – brings to light the predispositions of his own theoretical enterprise.

For the largest part, Neurath's 1921 study on Jewish colonization is propaganda for his favored economic policy, namely, for a planned economy (*Planwirtschaft*) as opposed to capitalism. The latter went by the contemptible name of a 'wild economy' (*Wildwirtschaft*). Neurath was but one of a number of scientists and intellectuals at the time who fancied some sort of a planned economy as the principal alternative to the capitalist model, but no one understood the task of planning more rigidly and hierarchically than him. And just like other socio-economic visionaries of the time (think of Franz Oppenheimer) he seamlessly went from scholar to activist and back. The iconic figure that combined these roles was the expert, and this is exactly how Neurath wanted to be seen.

In a way Neurath was not a philosopher in the narrower sense, and he never really set foot in the world of academic philosophy. He was a social activist, an economist, an educator, and the creator of the visual language Isotype. And yet his contributions to the philosophical project of the Vienna Circle were genuine, and he also had some sense for the *eros* of theory. But in the first place he was an expert – a social planning expert – and that was difficult to reconcile with the task of the philosopher to know that he or she knows nothing. The expert combined the superior standpoint of the theoretical man with the confidence of the practical man who knows how to get things done. And most of all, he or she was situated beyond politics.

Neurath had first assumed the role of the expert for his legal defense when he was put on trial for his participation in the Bavarian *Räterepublik*, the short-lived revolutionary government of 1919. As he argued, he had become a minister of socialization as an apolitical advisor, and his main goal had been to mitigate the revolutionary policies. This line of defense was visibly tactical, but it was more than that. When Neurath had joined the revolutionary government, he did so upon the condition that he would maintain the role of an apolitical expert. And indeed, the plan he had proposed to the Socialist government was little different from the plan he had presented to the Austrian

military during WWI[10]. The line of defense was little successful, and Neurath was eventually sentenced to an 18-months prison term, which he, however, never served. The time of his legal limbo between his indictment and trial and his eventual departure to Vienna is the period when he wrote his expert opinion on the Jewish colonization of Palestine.

Although the study does not specify its target audience, it is virtually addressed to the Zionist leadership. The plan he presented is hardly different from the plans he had presented to the Austrian military *and* to the Bavarian revolutionaries. But Neurath needed to make an effort to apply his program to the Zionist cause and appeal to Jewish sentiments in order to win the Zionists over for his program. This propaganda effort is exceedingly *rhetorical*, and this can easily mislead the reader to believe that the subject matter is without any Jewish substance. But paradoxically it was the rhetorical excess of his propaganda piece where he spelled out his views on Judaism, the Jewish people, and the relation between religion and politics more openly than anywhere else. As he presented his cause, «socio-technological construction» would serve to make the oldest Jewish utopias come true[11]. It would be self-evident for the Jews to adopt this principle «inasmuch as the new Palestine originates in efforts that do not strive for profit but for a community. Whoever donates for Palestine, whoever acts for Palestine, wishes more or less decidedly a new life on a new earth»[12]. To turn these wishes from dreams into reality, all aspects of Jewish settlement – including immigration, housing construction, and agriculture – were to be subjected to the principle of full-fledged economic planning. The Zionist cause needed «an economic brain that keeps the whole organism in order», and this brain would be an «expert organization» (*Sachverständigenorganisation*). This expert organization would encompass four different types of experts: accounting experts, labor experts, management experts, and technological experts. The technological experts would also be socio-technological experts. These latter experts (who are apparently modeled upon Neurath himself) have both partial and total expertise: They are technological experts alongside the accounting, labor, and management experts; but in their capacity as «socio-technological experts» they rise above the fate of mere partial expertise and become meta-experts. The main task of meta-experts is to check the impact of expert measures on the macro-economy[13].

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[10] Cf. *ibidem*, pp. 133-36.
[11] Wilhelm, *Jüdische Planwirtschaft in Palästina*, p. 6.
[12] *Ibidem*, p. 5.
[13] *Ibidem*, pp. 18-19.

As Neurath further outlined, the new planned economy of the Jews would presuppose the comprehensive use of statistics. Local organizations would create positions for statistic referencing that would continuously run the economic data through a model of business statistics. Statistical surveys needed to be carried out according to a «unified plan», so that they would ultimately result in «a comprehensive universal statistic»[14]. For the planning expert, even the loftiest messianic hopes could only become reality if a measureless amount of economic data and numbers would be available at any given moment. Often these explanations seem to border on self-parody, but Neurath was completely unironic.

Most strikingly, his «socio-technological» solution to the Jewish question is untouched by the critique of technology as it emerged at the time. In the wake of WWI, the destructive potential of technology had become visible for everyone who had eyes to see, and that also affected the grand visions of how technology would mold the future of mankind. Neurath's perception was different. As he recounted from times of war in the closing section of his brochure, he had been assigned with the task of organizing food for a Jewish town or shtetl (*Judenstadt*), which was devoid of any peasants in its surroundings. In this case of emergency – thus he reported – he set up a scheme of Jewish farming that, despite initial Jewish reservations to farm labor, became a success. The tale is instructive for several reasons – most notably perhaps for the way he expressly identified as 'a non-Jew' advising the Jews on how to get things done[15], but also for the underlying scheme of a real-life problem and a purely technical and organizational solution. Again, Neurath had solved the Jewish question by way of superior social technology, or at least this is how he saw himself.

Greater, more complex organizations are more likely to resist the can-do attitude of the social engineer. The more complex, the more they demonstrate the limits of technological solvability. For technology is hardly as neutral as Neurath imagined: it reproduces the problems and contradictions of modern societies. Neurath imagined that superior planning would 'multiply' the abilities which are prevalent in an organization, but he did not account for the possibility that the same would go for the inabilities. In other words, social development is not necessarily progressive. And hence it is questionable whether the problems and contradictions of modern societies can be disposed of by organization, or by the great schemes of changeability. For changes also create negative effects that possibly outweigh the positive ones.

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[14] *Ibidem*, p. 19.
[15] *Ibidem*, p. 28.

Neurath's disregard for the possible side effects of his proposed policies became well visible where he spelled out his ideas on Judaism and the Jews. After all, Neurath had a general theory of economic planning, but he needed to show how the Jews in particular would benefit if they were to adopt it. The overall strategy was to demonstrate that the new society organized around a planned economy would absorb the old Jewish traits and reconcile them with the demands of the future. In other words, it was a discourse on radical Jewish modernization, and this modernization process would be undialectically and marvelously successful. But Neurath felt that a few traits and habits of the Jews stood in his way, who in their perceived stubbornness were not entirely ready for his project. To begin with, there were only few Jewish men who were even capable of such modernization. And «by the way», he noted, the Jews «are regarded by many as not only little organized, but also little organizable (…). The Jew commonly has less trust in central organizations than in his own determination to reach his goals in some, be it the most convoluted way»[16]. It is not clear to what extent Neurath was aware that he touched upon a core element of Jewish communal life here: the lack of centralization, or the non-existence of a Jewish pope, and hence the traditional suspicion against central authorities. But he sensed with the zeal of the missionary that his attempts to convert the Jews would be met with resistance.

Other alleged Jewish traits are clearly taken from the arsenal of anti-Semitic imagery on Jewish traders and hagglers. In particular, Neurath had subscribed to Karl Marx's depiction of the Jews in *Zur Judenfrage* (1843), the ambiguous document of mid-nineteenth century Jewish anti-Semitism with its imagery of the Jews as contemptible hucksters and money-makers[17]. Neurath adopted this imagery in a rather formal sense, so that he could present his project as an alternative. But thereby he bought into the content of Marx's depiction: By evoking the Marxian narrative to present economic planning as a remedy to Jewish huckstering and money-making, he had tacitly bought into the imagery of Jewish huckstering and money-making. With this rhetorical scoop some of the gravest anti-Jewish stereotypes of modernity had silently entered his own theory of Jewish modernization:

Apart from the fact that, under the new economic order, the Jews would show new aspects of their character [*Wesen*], two facts are not to be lost sight of, first,

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[16] *Ibidem*, p. 25.
[17] See my *Marx, Nietzsche, Freud: Towards a History of 'Theory' in Modern Jewish History*, in: *Language as Bridge and Border: Cultural and Social Constellations in the German-Jewish Context*, ed. by S. Sander, Berlin, Hentrich & Hentrich, 2015, pp. 225-240, especially pp. 231-233.

that many basic traits [*Grundanlagen*] that today reveal themselves in commercial transactions and trade could later be applied to devising new technical methods and clever interconnections [*geschickte Verknüpfungen*], then, that Jews of all sorts, among them large groups, are averse to all trade and haggling. The planned economy would assign those people hitherto standing aside a task within the new order[18].

Neurath linked the notions of trading and haggling with the Jews' 'character' (*Wesen*, literally: essence) here to argue that this essence would fundamentally change «under the new economic order». Hence the socio-technological utopia seems to entail an act of profane conversion. Rather than huckstering and money-making, the Jews would now indulge in technical and organizational work and become part of a new planning elite. But not all men could be admitted to the elite, and «large groups (…) hitherto standing aside» would be left out.

Neurath felt that the greatest threat to his ideas was to be found in the Jewish character, its «resistance» to central planning and subordination, and its proclivity towards «lengthy debates». He needed to convince the Jews that there would be no way around «a higher authority provided with a certain level of absolute power»[19]. This new entity would be the Central Economic Office (*Zentralwirtschaftsamt*), and it would take over the place formerly occupied by the one and only God. What could entice the Jews to put their faith (and possibly their survival as Jews) in such an expert Office, given their strict prohibition against the worship of profane beings as divine? As Neurath himself saw the problem, the key was superior expertise and organization: «The better this entity is organized, the more experts and the more unerring subordinates it has at its disposal, the easier will those coming from outside subordinate themselves to it»[20].

These lines restate the astonishingly simple and consistent core idea of Neurath's social theory, but they also provide a glimpse of the grave political problem that this theory faced. Neurath sought to build a new society organized around a strict hierarchy of experts and subordinates. This societal structure would avoid what he contemptuously called the «long-winded explanations» and «eternal compromise negotiations» of cooperative self-administration. Instead – so the quote above suggests – people would act reasonably and subordinate their egos to the common cause of the new society.

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[18] Wilhelm, *Jüdische Planwirtschaft in Palästina*, p. 25.
[19] *Ibidem*, p. 26.
[20] *Ibidem*.

The problem is that people do not always act reasonably, especially when it comes to their own social status and their share in the new society. Moreover, they may not altogether be impressed by the expert for good reasons, and they may be right to assume that the expert, too, does not always act reasonably. Speaking crudely political, he may cling to failed ideas that would rather obfuscate his factual expertise. In one way or another, Neurath's social theory faces the political question par excellence, i.e., the question of authority. It is not by coincidence that the problem of authority became so well visible in a treatise on Jewish politics. Jewish tradition has its own way of facing the legitimacy of political authority. Its question was how human authority must be structured as required by divine and scriptural authority[21]. It has nurtured a suspicion against mere-worldly authority, which may feed upon a strong sense for the difference between divine and mundane worship.

Neurath had little grasp of the Jewish tradition and its different notions of justice, political authority, and communal life. But he, too, sensed that something was different here, and this provoked him further to spell out his own ideas on Judaism and Jewish behavior. As seen above, his main issue with the Jews was their stubbornness – their 'resistance' to central planning and 'subordination'. If he wanted to convince the Jews of his project, he needed to change their hearts and convert them to the new religion of economic planning altogether. He needed to appeal to the highest Jewish emotions and, at the same time, provide them with a glimpse of their eternal fate if they were to miss the chance. As he wrote: «Particularly among the Zionists there are many who yearn and hope that the new Zion will bring about a redemption of Jewry from the spirit of trade and haggling»[22]. The reference to the 'new Zion' is equivocal. It could be that the planned economy is the means to bring about the new Zion, like the eye of the needle through which the camel must pass; or it could be that the planned economy *is* the new Zion that replaces the old. In any case, he presented the Jews with a clear choice between planned economy and 'wild' economy, and he framed it as the alternative between the highest and the lowest. It was an either/or situation of the highest order – redemption or condemnation – and Neurath announced that «the day is well near» when a decision would be imminent.

With this blunt reference to the Last Judgment, Neurath had long abandoned the discourse of an expert advice to the Zionist leadership. Instead he had turned expertocracy into a political religion. This awkward move

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[21] Cf. M. Walzer – M. Lorberbaum – N. J. Zohar, *The Jewish Political Tradition*, vol. 1: *Authority*, New Haven (CT) – London, Yale University Press, 2000.

[22] Wilhelm, *Jüdische Planwirtschaft in Palästina*, p. 27.

revealed some of the paradoxes of expertocracy. As Neurath emphasized, the expert assumes a knowledge that everyone could achieve in principle; but his expertocratic discourse is replete with prophetic tones, and prophetic knowledge is difficult to attain. Expertise is a secular type of knowledge, but Neurath's expert is visibly situated between God and man. At last, he is a technocrat with a strong disdain for theory and deliberation, and hence he is not a philosopher; but short of a divine mission, only superior philosophical insight could legitimate his prophetic knowledge. As it were, there is no way to legitimate the expert as a foundational political figure: he lacked the political authority that would entice people into subordination. Neurath had seen a chance to win the Jews over for his new society by founding it as a political religion, but the lack of legitimate political authority and the preponderance of demagogic rhetoric was too easily visible. With their alleged stubbornness and their unmistakable sense for the difference between true and false prophets, the Jews chose to ignore that there was an imminent decision to be made.

Neurath's ideas never played any role in the Zionist discourse – as it were, nobody even bothered to refute them. But just as he had proposed them to the Austrian military, the Bavarian revolutionary government and the Zionists, he did not just give up on them now. After a long period of latency, he sought to rebuild them for the post-WWII order in Europe. If failed political ideas had a strange afterlife in the history of the 20th century, a more general political treatise could perhaps make his ideas immortal. There was a little chance that he could sneak his expertocratic project into the new political order.

3. *Democracy and Expertocracy: Neurath's Late Political Treatise*

Neurath did manage to sneak his major contribution to political theory into a little-read essay on visual education. This setting is fitting, for he had long advocated for visual education as the most important tool for the democratization of knowledge, and hence as a major political task. But his late manuscript *Visual Education*, written in Austrian pidgin English and not completed by Neurath, presents the political thinker unchained[23].

Visual Education addresses the relation between expertocracy and democracy. The text has been understood as the document of a hesitating turn to

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[23] O. Neurath, *Visual Education – Humanisation versus Popularisation*, ed. by J. Manninen, in: *Encyclopedia and Utopia: The Life and Work of Otto Neurath (1882-1945)*, ed. by E. Nemeth – F. Stadler, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1996, pp. 245-335.

liberal democracy. It has also been claimed that he never advocated for an absolute expertocracy. Rather, expert opinions would be possible solutions, on which democratic decisions would have to be made[24]. It suffices to listen to what he had to say to modify his view. Neurath sought to adjust his radical views to the emerging political order – just in time to play a role in the restructuring of education et cetera. His untimely death in December 1945 prevented any such involvement, but the unfinished manuscript shows his ambition: He wrote the piece with regard to the political order of post-war Europe, which was presumably liberal democratic.

One of Neurath's greatest concerns was the role of expert knowledge in a democracy. What use would liberal democracy have for the expert, like himself, «who knows everything and makes decisions»?[25] And how could the common man be held in check so as to allow for the continuation of expertocracy? Neurath's full answer is unmatched in its charming frankness: «It is not in the interests of a government, even a democratic one, that the common man should be too well-informed. Democracy is, in fact, a continual struggle between the expert who knows everything and makes decisions, and the common man with just enough information to hold the power of the expert in check»[26]. As he continued, the big question of his time was whether expert decisions would be accepted or not. After all, «what is called democracy implies the rejection of experts in making decision[s]»[27] – but Neurath envisioned that the democratic order would be rebuilt as an expertocracy.

Historically speaking, expert rule – the rule of the few that would be free of legal and constitutional restrictions, and unhinged by the will of the people – was a major goal of the great progressive philosophical politics. A certain lack of democratic control was essential for those programs, for in one way or another, they all sought to empower a few to enact their own agendas, no matter how they sought to reframe these agendas as the general will. Since they could not get rid of democracy altogether, they needed to circumvent democratic institutions or put them into use for the experts. And most importantly, they needed to disempower the people while speaking the language of empowerment. With the characteristic ambiguities in his articulation, Neurath's political ideas can still pass off as democratic. To arrive at a more precise understanding of these ideas, we must see them in the wider context of his stance on science, knowledge and education.

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[24] Cf. Sandner, *Otto Neurath*, p. 11.
[25] Neurath, *Visual Education*, p. 251.
[26] *Ibidem*.
[27] *Ibidem*.

A major idea of the Vienna Circle had been the project of the unification of science, with a unified language, through which scientists would «form a kind of workers' republic of letters, no matter how much else may divide them as men»[28]. From the beginning this program in the philosophy of science also had clear political ramifications. It was the basis for a progressive reconstruction of society. The question was to what extent the projected unity of science could provide a sustainable model for the unification of society *qua* science. Upon first sight, by 1945 Neurath had significantly moved away from his earlier ideas on the unification of science. The new word that marked this shift was «orchestration». It was a souvenir from Neurath's debate with Horace Kallen, the heavy-weight champion of pluralism, who had criticized the socio-political implications of Neurath's philosophy of science[29]. As he suspected, the program of the unification of science would «neither diminish nor harmonize differences, but add several more to those already existing». The main line of argument runs as follows:

> A program of 'unification', to be successful, must assign or impose an invariant meaning to the multiple-intentioned term 'science'; it must select, fix, insulate against change, and impose, one language as against many others; with immutable terms and immutable denotations for all its terms, and one exclusive logic pattern for any and all arrangements of its terms. The proponents of the program, further, would have to establish themselves in a position to exact conformity and to control education. They would need in the twentieth century much the same powers and privileges which certain schoolmen enjoyed in the thirteenth[30].

Without these powers, the universal language would suffer the same fate as Esperanto and other patterns of unification: «It would be just another language competing with its alternatives for survival (…). To cause one of these patterns of unification to prevail exclusively, it would have to be imposed»[31]. Kallen suggested the notion of «orchestration» instead of «unification», for the former would allow for a diversity of methods and instruments: «Orchestrations would sustain and enhance the right to be different»[32].

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[28] O. Neurath, *Unified Science and Psychology*, in: *Unified Science: The Vienna Circle Monograph Series originally edited by Otto Neurath, now in an English edition*, ed. by B. McGuiness, Dordrecht, D. Reidel, 1987, p. 23.

[29] H. Kallen, *The Meanings of "Unity" Among the Sciences, Once More*, «Philosophy and Phenomenological Research», Vol. 6, No. 4 (Jun., 1946), pp. 493-496.

[30] *Ibidem*, p. 494.

[31] *Ibidem*, pp. 494-495.

[32] *Ibidem*, p. 496.

Neurath willingly adopted the idea of «orchestration» from Kallen, but the way he employed the term was the opposite from what Kallen had argued. Neurath basically acknowledged the multiplicity of opinions, preferences, and ways of life in modern societies, only to place himself in the role of a conductor who would organize this multiplicity into a unisonous body. As he saw the matter, «human beings and their behavior» must be «orchestrated»[33]. Such orchestration would presuppose a common language, and this language needed to be simple. Neurath had turned Kallen's notion of «orchestration» entirely upside down.

It is useful to follow the course of argument closely here. Neurath first used Kallen's term to restate the positivistic mantra of neutral and simple language from a somewhat different angle: «Differences are smaller when we speak of trees, water, stars, moon, pleasure, pain, dog, light, darkness etc.»[34]. The statement may not seem much controversial, but the consequences in fact are. Neurath dismissed political knowledge in favor of factual knowledge, and codified that this type of factual knowledge must be the basis for interactions between people. He created a nexus between simple language and pictorial language, and advocated for the use of pictorial language (or hieroglyphics) for the transmission of knowledge. On this basis he explicated the political edge of the transmission of knowledge.

4. *Esotericism*

For the most part Neurath had *silently* maintained one educational program of the uneducated and another for the most educated (i.e., the Vienna Circle and its *potential* members and allies). In his late political treatise, he spoke openly of a secret knowledge for initiates and a knowledge for «the illiterates»[35]. The latter knowledge, transmitted in hieroglyphics, was the minimum of knowledge that was necessary for the functioning of democracy. The other knowledge is reserved to «certain people». Although nothing in principle prevented other people from acquiring this knowledge, the difference was principal: «there are two kinds of knowledge, exoteric and esoteric knowledge»[36].

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[33] Neurath, *Visual Education*, p. 250. See also O. Neurath, *The Orchestration of the Sciences by the Encyclopedism of Logical Empiricism*, in: Id., *Philosophical Papers 1913-1946*, Dordrecht – Boston – Lancaster, D. Reidel, 1983, pp. 230-242.

[34] Neurath, *Visual Education*, p. 252.

[35] *Ibidem*, p. 254.

[36] *Ibidem*.

Neurath sought to describe the democratization of knowledge as a continuous turn *away* from esotericism. But paradoxically he reiterated esotericism as a center piece of his own theory of knowledge. There may be speculation, then, as to whether Neurath treated the subject matter of esoteric knowledge esoterically – and that is, with regard to two kinds of readers. Following the classic description by Leo Strauss, then, his political treatise belongs to

> a peculiar type of literature, in which the truth about all crucial things is presented exclusively between the lines. That literature is addressed, not to all readers, but to trustworthy and intelligent readers only. It has all the advantages of private communication without having its greatest disadvantage – that it reaches only the writer's acquaintances[37].

Most readers would be eased off by Neurath's initial explanation of esoteric knowledge and his somewhat boring examples of witchcraft and priests or the use of Latin. The other readers would be alarmed by this banality and hence pay full attention to the next paragraph. Here Neurath sought to redefine the term 'knowledge' to get rid of its ambiguity. As he defined it now, the term described «a more or less connected group of statements and arguments of a factual kind. Therefore, we use the term knowledge as more or less synonymous with empiricist knowledge, as an element of an *international folklore*»[38].

Perhaps the statement was unfinished and is therefore not fully attributable. It could also be deficient due to issues with English-language proficiency (so that 'empiricist' was supposed to be 'empirical'). But as it stands, it is nothing less than spectacular. First, it reduces the wide range of human knowledge to 'empiricist knowledge', i.e., knowledge provided by logical empiricists, especially those from the Vienna Circle. This highest knowledge 'more or less' absorbs all other knowledge, esoteric or exoteric. Second, the statement relegates the highest knowledge to some 'folklore' created by a particular group of men. Neurath was right to assume that, upon the epistemological premises of the Vienna Circle, his teaching would be mere 'folklore' – but how could he argue, then, that his teaching was superior to other teachings? Why needed all serious knowledge be 'empiricist' knowledge if empiricism was nothing but 'folklore'? How can logical empiricism claim to govern the dissemination of human knowledge upon these premis-

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[37] L. Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Chicago (IL), The University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 25.

[38] Neurath, *Visual Education*, p. 255.

es? Neurath had little to offer to solve the issue by way of a logical argument. Instead, he resorted to the political foundation of his project to make up for its logical void. The 'transfer of knowledge' is a political substitute for a coherent theory of knowledge.

Transfer of knowledge can mean many things, so it is crucial to see what Neurath wanted it to mean. While he remained somewhat flexible as to the exact definition, the hard core was the idea that «certain statements and arguments» would be transferred from the educated to the uneducated, from literates to illiterates, to allow for the latters' minimal participation in democracy. «One may speak of *democratization of knowledge*»[39]. In this respect Neurath was a genuine social democrat who deeply cared about the poor and uneducated, even as he spoke about 'illiterates' and 'sub-literates' in the language of a cultural snob. At one point he explained that his theory concerns «not only backward children, illiterates, adults with other handicaps, deaf-mutes, but also normal people»[40]. His main focus, though, was on illiterates – and this is striking at a time when, in the U.S., for example, illiteracy dropped from 2,7 to 2,5% during the 1940s. Exact numbers may not reflect the social problems and individual sufferings of those who could indeed not read and write in high-literacy societies. Nevertheless, the statistical evidence suggests that Neurath's strong focus on illiteracy was anachronistic. It was at least in part an untimely remainder of his social democratic upbringing in 19th-century Austria. But it also served his theoretical project. For it created a set of asymmetric counter-concepts pondering to the socialist creed. Most notably, it erected a clear and insurmountable barrier between the expert who 'knows everything' and the illiterate masses who need to be taught (or visually shown) what they, according to the expert's opinion, need to know.

The strong focus on illiteracy hence supports and justifies a particular understanding of education. Most notably, it is the opposite of liberal education, which would aim to help illiterates become literates. It is authoritarian education, in which expert educators decide in advance what the illiterates need to be taught in order to understand the measures prescribed by social engineers and administrators. Characteristically, Neurath remained silent about the transition from illiteracy to literacy. Bluntly speaking, Neurath 'needed' the illiterate masses as an assumption for his own theory to work. But he also sensed that his readers could call him out on the issue, so he needed

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[39] *Ibidem*.
[40] *Ibidem*, p. 266.

to get around it somehow. He did so with the help of a three-step subsidiary argument: First he admitted that illiteracy was indeed no longer a big issue in Western societies; then he maintained that, however, no common standard of reading and writing exists; and at last he claimed that an 'intellectual jargon' had created new frontiers which are less obvious but as pernicious as the old one[41].

Despite the all-too obvious shift in the argument, Neurath most likely *really* believed that the endeavor to «convey scientific knowledge to the masses» was the right strategy «to close the gap» between the masses and the initiates like himself[42]. In this case he was merely blind to the adverse effects of the program, for in a crucial respect it would rather seem to widen the gap. But blindness is only one possible explanation, and there could as well be a political strategy at work here. Following Neurath's earlier evocation of esotericism, mass education is the exoteric side of knowledge, and expert knowledge is the esoteric side. Mass education is then actually not an attempt to democratize knowledge, so that the highest possible number of people would be empowered to participate in the deliberation on the common good and in decision-making. It is devised so as to ensure that the masses *cannot* participate – after all, they are being taught only as much as the expert wants them to know, broken down into pictorial language. If there is a way to full democratic participation from here, Neurath did not outline it.

There is too little in his writings to say whether Neurath was serious about esotericism (or whether he even knew what he was doing), but there is some advantage to the explanation that he outlined a secret teaching «between the lines» (Leo Strauss)[43]. If there is such a secret teaching, it advocates for expertocracy in the language of democratic empowerment. The argument for this reading is strongly supported by the weakness of the alternative reading, according to which Neurath was merely blind. He was certainly blind in some crucial political respect, but the amount of blindness seems just a tad too great here to be credible.

But no matter which model one wishes to follow, either the extraordinary amount of blindness or the prevalence of a secret teaching is due to the prevalence of a political agenda. This agenda became all the more virulent because it did no longer come with a real political prospect. As Neurath declared, the question of visual education would be particularly virulent «in view of a future world community», but he immediately added: «Whatever

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41 *Ibidem*, pp. 255-256.
42 *Ibidem*, p. 257.
43 Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, p. 25.

the future may be»[44]. There is a pattern in these words that runs through much of philosophical thought at the time: the simultaneity of hard progressivism and doubts in progress was not characteristic for Neurath alone. But wherever it popped up with such vigor, it announced that something had gone terribly wrong.

5. *Science and Politics*

Neurath was caught between a rock and a hard place. His entire theory culminated in a future world society, but it was less clear than ever that the future would bring about such a world society. He sought a way out of this dilemma by rephrasing his project as «preparatory work» for the future world society. In other words, he subordinated his theoretical project to a progressive political cause, but this cause was lost from the beginning. Neurath knew it was lost, and he followed it with the resoluteness of the Cartesian wanderer, who feared that any change of direction could put him in great trouble[45].

Neurath told this story again and again throughout his work, from *The Lost Wanderers of Descartes and the Auxiliary Motive* (1913) to the late treatise *Visual Education*, but over the years some of the epistemological optimism was lost. As he used the story, it was a parable of decision-making under the conditions of uncertainty and imperfectibility; and he thought that it captured the mindset of empiricist philosophers: «they do not want to be wavering cowards but courageous men of action». These lines appear to suggest that the crisis of reason could be overcome by 'stamina'. The men of action, thus Neurath continued, would act like Cartesian wanderers «who decide that it is better to go on in one direction even if they don't know whether it is the right one»[46]. Neurath sought to transplant the Cartesian wanderers into the night of European philosophy in the 1940s, the crisis of rationalism. He presupposed that the epistemic preconditions of the Cartesian project were still given in this situation. Descartes had good reasons to have the wanderers move on: «even if they do not end up precisely where they want to be, they will eventually reach somewhere where they will most likely be better off than the middle of a forest»[47]. This expectation was apt for the epistemic situation

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[44] Neurath, *Visual Education*, p. 262.
[45] R. Descartes, *A Discourse on the Method*, part three, trans. I. Maclean, Oxford – New York, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 22.
[46] Neurath, *Visual Education*, p. 286.
[47] Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, p. 22.

of early modern philosophy, in which knowledge was essentially thought of as being man-made. Man merely needed to move on to build the new foundation that all rationalism had hitherto lacked. The story had a different meaning in 1945, during the crisis of rationalism. European man no longer knew in which direction he was moving, but as Neurath suggested, he had to move on anyway. Neurath's wayfarer had nothing left to lose, and he no longer had an idea of right and wrong. But even if he had no clue what he was doing, he needed to do it rather than be a coward.

Neurath stopped his Cartesian reflections halfway to evade the consequences. The political over-determination of his teaching was perhaps not the only possible strategy to compensate for its epistemic under-determination, but colloquially speaking, it was a logical one. The politicization of philosophy is a response to the crisis of its foundations. Philosophies become political religions once their inner theoretical coherence is destroyed. Often it seems that only the promise of future progress kept Neurath's teaching together.

But not everything is political. It was in part the prevalence of a few core ideas, in part the tireless propagation of these ideas and the often aggressive disputes with others that created the unmistakable coherence of Neurath's philosophy. Neurath sought to argue that the teaching of the Vienna Circle is not a *Weltanschauung*, a comprehensive world-view, but actually it was precisely that. His line was that the notion of 'world' was part of the metaphysical language he and his comrades worked to overcome. As he argued, 'world' was only «the daily growing sphere of science»[48]. The «yearning for a complete world-view» was part of the problem the Vienna Circle meant to solve by demonstrating its meaninglessness[49]. Any notion of a world beyond the constructed world of unified science would eventually disappear.

The substitute term «scientific world-conception», as it was propagated in the 1929 manifesto *Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung*, plays upon the semantic difference between *Anschauung* (view) and *Auffassung* (conception). The programmatic text, written mainly by Neurath, describes the task and the core beliefs as follows:

> the search for a neutral system of formulae, for a symbolism freed from the slag of historical languages; and also, the search for a total system of concepts. Neatness and clarity are striven for, and dark distances and unfathomable depths rejected.

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[48] O. Neurath, *Ways of the Scientific World-Conception*, in: Id., *Philosophical Papers 1913-1946*, p. 33.

[49] O. Neurath, *Anti-Spengler*, in: *Empiricism and Sociology*, ed. by M. Neurath – R. S. Cohen, Dordrecht, D. Reidel, 1973, p. 162.

In science there are no 'depths'; there is surface everywhere: all experience forms a complex network, which cannot always be surveyed and can often be grasped only in parts. Everything is accessible to man; and man is the measure of all things[50].

The quote enumerates all the main articles of faith, except for the one that organized them into the whole of a 'world-conception', and that was the enmity toward metaphysics. Generally speaking, excluding or eliminating things that would not fit into the framework of unified science was a major component of the unified science project. But nothing compared to metaphysics when it came to stuff that needed to be eliminated. Metaphysics seemed to be everywhere, but most of all it resided in language. In the orthodox interpretation of the *linguistic turn*, any philosophy was 'metaphysical' unless it subscribed to the notion that sentences refer only to sentences. Any statement that would not avoid any references to extralinguistic objects belonged to «lyric poetry or music» but not philosophy[51].

The polemics against metaphysics has sometimes overshadowed the constructive side of the anti-metaphysical stance. There was a tremendous amount of energy invested, however, into the development and use of a language that would no longer be metaphysical. This endeavor is documented in the technical discussions on 'protocol sentences' or 'protocol statements' (*Protokollsätze*), which formed the hard core of the Vienna Circle's work during the early 1930s. Hence, we are trespassing on the Circle's home ground, the philosophy of science. But the debates on protocol sentences, too, are replete with political ramifications. We can easily see this in Neurath's article *Unified Science and Psychology* (1932), which shows the task of exclusion or elimination in its procedural seriality and stringency:

A sentence we exclude because it contradicts an accepted sentence is what we call a *false* sentence. Every new protocol sentence is compared with our stock of protocol sentences as well as with non-protocol sentences (…) which we happen to have at hand. If a contradiction appears (…) we either cut out the new sentence or alter the existing structure[52].

There seems to be a political dimension in this description. It evokes an imagined community of scientists ('we') following the procedure. Neurath

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[50] O. Neurath et al., *The Scientific Conception of the World: The Vienna Circle*, in: *Empiricism and Sociology*, p. 306.

[51] *Ibidem*, p. 307.

[52] Neurath, *Unified Science and Psychology*, in: *Unified Science*, p. 5.

committed to the possibility that the structure would be altered in the course of the procedure, but he did not say in which cases. When would the stock of 'accepted sentences' be modified to allow for a different type of sentence? If the decision is made solely by reference to the imagined community of scientists (and hence with a proclivity toward excluding non-members), the procedure lacks any rational criteria. This state of things is not a by-product but an integral part of the new science envisioned by Neurath. As he continued: «if a genuine sentence contradicts accepted genuine sentences and is sacrificed, we call it 'false'. (…) There is no court of appeals *outside* the totality of sentences»[53]. In this post-metaphysical tribunal, even genuine sentences are being 'sacrificed' and eliminated simply because they contradict the 'totality' of previously accepted sentences. Moreover, the culprits are being denied access to a functioning appeals system – and this denial follows from the highest principles of science itself. For as Carnap had stated, science as such is nothing but «the totality of accepted sentences». As he explained, the logic of science no longer refers to things at all. «Rather, the object of the logic of science is science itself as an ordered complex of sentences»[54].

Carnap had kept statements such as these within the limits of science. It was Neurath who provided the political context. Most of all, the idea served as a means to set the terms of discussion. In particular, it could be employed to exclude others from the debate. As he continued: «The important thing now is that we can continue our discussion about 'true' and 'false' without having to defend ourselves further against the denial of the logic of our scientific language, against glossogonal senselessness, and similar distractions, since these troublemakers have been eliminated from the outset»[55]. With this exclusion completed, the debate could continue according to internal rules alone. Neurath had successfully 'eliminated' all possible objections in advance. He could now define the technical details without any distractions from the real world.

To continue with the technical outline from here, Neurath defined that protocol statements document certain perceptions, rather than make a direct statement. As the example in the text goes: «Otto's protocol at 3.17 p.m. was: Otto's verbalized thought at 3.16 was: A man 1.87 meters tall, who was perceived by Otto, was in the room at 3.15 p.m.»[56]. Neurath found that this

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[53] *Ibidem*, p. 6.
[54] R. Carnap, *The Task of the Logic of Science*, in: *Unified Science*, p. 46.
[55] Neurath, *Unified Science and Psychology*, in: *Unified Science*, p. 6.
[56] *Ibidem*, p. 2.

example was extremely important and full of far-reaching implications, so he repeated it with slight alterations in punctuation and with a different object of reference in another article: «Otto's protocol at 3:17 o'clock: [Otto's speech thinking at 3:16 o'clock was: (at 3:15 o'clock there was a table in the room perceived by Otto)]»[57]. The emphasis is on the notion that the protocol sentence must contain the name of a person observing an occurrence rather than describe an occurrence. This would only be the starting point, and there would be further refinement and de-metaphysification.

Neurath built his outline upon the work of Rudolf Carnap, who described three kinds of object sentences: (1) genuine object sentences, which refer to extralinguistic objects («The rose is red»); (2) pseudo-object sentences or «sentences in the material mode of speech», i.e., sentences that seem to refer to extralinguistic objects but are actually sentences about their linguistic designation («A rose is a thing»); and (3) syntactic sentences, or sentences in the formal mode of speech («The word 'rose' is a designation for a thing»). The problem for Carnap was the second type, i.e., sentences in the material mode of speech. As he explained, they «create the illusion of a reference to objects where no such reference is made. Hence, they lead easily to unclarities and pseudo-problems, even contradictions». The material mode of speech needed to be avoided at all costs[58].

The theory was only at the beginning, but Carnap as well as Neurath believed in the great service that the Vienna Circle was already doing to humanity: «We are thus healing the split that has divided science till now». The only real obstacles were «emotional attitudes», which had the effect «of slowing down scientific progress» by «delaying the insight» into the new reality created by the work of the Circle[59]. Moritz Schlick had voiced similar expectations around 1930: «I am persuaded that we are at present in the midst of an altogether final change in philosophy, and are justly entitled to consider the fruitless conflict of systems at an end». As he believed, «the change now in progress [is] a really final one»[60].

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[57] Neurath, *Protocol Statements* (1932), in: *Philosophical Papers*, p. 93.
[58] Carnap, *The Task of the Logic of Science*, pp. 53-55.
[59] *Ibidem*, pp. 58-60.
[60] M. Schlick, *The Turning-Point in Philosophy*, in: *Philosophical Papers*, vol. II (1925-1936), Dordrecht – Boston – London, D. Reidel, 1979, pp. 154-60, p. 155; cf. Schlick, *The Future of Philosophy*, in: *Die Wiener Zeit: Aufsätze, Beiträge, Rezensionen 1926-1936*, Gesamtausgabe, div. I, vol. 6, Vienna – New York, Springer, 2008, pp. 297-303, p. 298: «we are witnessing the beginning of a new era of philosophy, (…) its future will be very different from its past, which has been so full of pitiful failures, vain struggles, and futile disputes».

In hindsight it seems dubious how this theoretical innovation could have served as the basis for a progressive reconstruction of philosophy and society. How could the well-being of philosophy and social life depend upon the abandonment of statements in the material speech-mode? The prohibition on sentences that *possibly* lead to a conflation of object sentences and syntactic sentences cannot be understood on purely scientific grounds. It has many characteristics of a political religion, loosely secularizing the theological notion of a pure language. The new teaching was envisioned as the foundation of a rational society. But this society would hardly be rational, because its scientific basis was too limited to carry the burden of political expectations. Most likely, the new society would reproduce the contradictions that were prevalent in the old society, or it would create new contradictions that were not featured in the old society.

6. *Conclusion*

A political religion is a teaching that can only reassure itself in a political act. It seeks to articulate and assert itself in the violent exclusion of others – of language, metaphysics, religion, tradition and literally anything that would not fit into the new society. Acts of exclusion come in many forms, and often they appear to be relatively harmless. But even the most harmless act of exclusion would require an expertocratic committee, or a giant censorship board, to be decided. The decision of this board would not be rational, but it would be uncontestable.

Neurath's conflations of political ideas and technological metaphors are not always easy to detect. Often the technological metaphors are devised to cover up the political framework of an idea. We see this pattern in his vision of «a scientific cleaning machine into which protocol statements are thrown». This machine would «clean the stock of protocol statements thrown in and make a bell ring when a 'contradiction' appears»[61]. The technological metaphor is of course far from innocent. To spin it just a tad further, we must imagine that the speaker would receive a slap whenever he speaks in the material mode, and receive a treat by the social engineer when he maintained the formal mode of speech. The reminiscence of Pavlov's dog experiments is obvious. Neurath largely hid the punitive elements in the background and emphasized the virtues of encouragement and good will. «Men are induced

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[61] Neurath, *Protocol Statements*, p. 98.

to give up senseless sentences and freed from metaphysics», Neurath explained[62]. Often, he appealed to group values and called on others to join the movement[63]. The loneliness of the philosopher of old stood in a sharp contrast to the community of scientists using the new language and method. This imagery suggests that the advent of a post-traditional community was imminent, which would replace the *communio* of believers. Members of this community would communicate in protocol sentences, whereas those clinging to the material mode of speech would dwell outside of the community.

Horace Kallen was wrong in one respect: the Vienna Circle needed not *force* their teaching down anyone's throat. They combined the silent threat of being left out with the prospect of being spared. Being left out was a consequence of being backward, stemming oneself against the wave of the future. Being spared meant being part of a community, and beside the religious undertones, that also meant job prospects in the future world of academic philosophy. Schlick's odd claim that 'sooner or later' *his* view of philosophy would «be generally adopted»[64] was also a warning to colleagues and young aspirants not to miss the opportunity. But most of all, it propagated the idea that the advent of the truly universal philosophy was imminent. In reality, however, it was utterly incompatible with the pursuit of philosophy.

True, that the teachings of the Vienna Circle did not gain the wide traction it ostensibly deserved had much to do with the political persecution and expulsion of its members. After all, the Circle in its institutional form as the *Verein Ernst Mach* was dissolved by the Austrian regime, and its former members spread to various places of exile. But long before these outer circumstances began to play out, the remodeling of its teachings into a universal political religion had begun to show its internal limitations.

The point where the philosophy of science, the political ideas of Otto Neurath, and the secular religion of the Vienna Circle coincide is the concept of a rational society that would be free from all contradictions. The new unified science would provide the basis for a progressive reconstruction of society. Scientific reason and unified language would create a rational world society. Most notably, this world society would no longer be shackled by premises of tradition and origin. All visible signs of difference would be erased, just as Jews would no longer be visible as Jews. But the concept of

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[62] *Ibidem*, p. 9.
[63] Cf. *ibidem*, p. 22.
[64] Schlick, *The Future of Philosophy*, p. 302. As Schlick continued, philosophy would even «no longer be divided into different branches such as ethics, aesthetics, and so on» (pp. 302-303).

reason was not reasonable, and its scope was too narrow to bear the weight of Neurath's political and social claims. The socio-political theory never exerted any realistic political influence. Faced with the choice between the dreams of social engineering experts and the exigencies of real politics, people chose wisely.

As a matter of course, the Vienna Circle denied that there was a political teaching in the first place. At least exoterically the school largely adopted the habit of scientific professionalism in order to avoid persecution. In the 1930s Schlick sought to convince the Austrian authorities that the Circle was entirely apolitical, and that any link between its work and social democratic policies were completely baseless[65]. This strategy was a grand failure, for everyone could see that the Circle did stand for certain policies (even as there were outliers in the political specter). Former Vienna Circle members tried the same strategy in a second phase of persecution, during the McCarthy era in the U.S., when the FBI opened a file on Carnap and began to investigate the teachings from a Cold War perspective. As a response the group (which had long morphed from a circle into a decentral network) lost its political edge, and by and large transformed itself into an ordinary philosophy of science[66]. Furthermore, its members now were no longer perceived as 'Jewish philosophers'. In the United States philosophers of science could be philosophers *and* Jews, but they did not become recognizable as 'Jewish philosophers' however conceived. This situation changed only with Hilary Putnam, a pupil of Reichenbach, who began to face the tension between philosophy and Judaism at some point in his life and acquainted himself with the philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, and Emanuel Levinas[67].

PHILIPP VON WUSSOW
Goethe Universität Frankfurt am Main, Germany
philippvonwussow@gmail.com

[65] Cf. D. Borchers, *"Worüber man nicht reden kann, darüber muss man schweigen." Zur Vertreibung der Wissenschaftlichen Weltauffassung im 'Dritten Reich' und zu ihrer Bedeutung für die Entwicklung der analytischen Philosophie*, in: *Philosophie im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. by H. J. Sandkühler, Hamburg, Meiner, 2009, pp. 323-340: pp. 332-333.

[66] Cf. *ibidem*; G. A. Reisch, *How the Cold War Transformed Philosophy of Science: To the Icy Slopes of Logic*, 2nd ed., Cambridge – New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

[67] H. Putnam, *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life: Rosenzweig, Buber, Levinas, Wittgenstein*, Bloomington – Indianapolis (IN), Indiana University Press, 2008.