

The State of Research on Logical Empiricism On the 100th Anniversary of the Vienna Circle

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Last year marked the centenary of the founding of the Vienna Circle, which went on to become one of the key centers of logical empiricism. Over time, the movement has been perceived in widely differing ways, the most influential being the critique that emerged in the 1950s, leading prominent figures in the philosophy of science to declare the death of logical empiricism. However, the past 35 years have witnessed a distinct shift, exemplified by the title of a book that appeared at the very beginning this period: *Rediscovering the Forgotten Vienna Circle*. While this work focused primarily on Neurath, it was followed by numerous studies on other figures associated with logical empiricism. In this time, including recent years, our understanding of the movement and the literature surrounding it have been significantly enriched.

This conference seeks, on the one hand, to highlight the impact of this process, focusing primarily on the key areas of scientific activity pursued by members of the Vienna Circle and the Berlin School—logic, philosophy of language, linguistics, the philosophy of mathematics, methodology, and the philosophy, history, and sociology of science. On the other hand, it aims to explore how the understanding and reception of the scientific conception of the world—particularly the social dimension of the neopositivist programme—have evolved over time.

Friday (May 16, 2025)

Aula (Collegium Humanicum, pl. Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej 4)

Chair: Artur Koterski

10:20 Introduction

10:30–11:15 Thomas Uebel (University of Manchester)

Pragmatism and the Vienna Circle, 1928-1932: A Cautionary Tale

11:20–12:05 Christian Damböck (University of Vienna)

The Development of Otto Neurath's Views on Democracy

12:05–12:25 Coffee break

Chair: Ulrich Arnsward

12:25–12:55 Başak Aray (Boğaziçi Üniversitesi, Istanbul)

Vienna Circle in the International Auxiliary Language Movement

13:00–13:45 Christoph Limbeck-Lilienau (University of Vienna)
Waismann on Open Texture and the Nature of Concepts

13:45–14:00 Coffee break

Chair: Georg Schiemer

14:00–14:45 Matteo Collodel (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia)
Feyerabend and the Alleged Conservatism of Logical Empiricism

14:50–15:10 Artur Koterski (UMCS)
Eckehart Köhler (1939–2023) in memoriam

Saturday (May 17, 2025)

Room 4 (Collegium Humanicum, pl. Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej 4)

Chair: Thomas Uebel

10:30–11:15 Jan Woleński (WSliZ Rzeszów)
The Reception of the Vienna Circle in Poland / online talk on Zoom

11:20–12:05 Anna Brożek (University of Warsaw)
Interpersonal and Intertextual Connections between the Vienna Circle and the
Lvov-Warsaw School: The Current Stage of Research

12:05–12:25 Coffee break

Chair: Christian Damböck

12:25–13:10 Friedrich Stadler (University of Vienna)
New Light on Schlick / online talk on Zoom

13:15–13:45 Ulrich Arnswald (University of Innsbruck / University of Kaiserslautern-
Landau / Oles Honchar Dnipro National University)
»The Whole Modern Conception of the World is Founded on the Illusion That the So-
called Laws of Nature are the Explanations of Natural Phenomena.« (TLP 6.371) – The
Core of the Debate Between Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle

13:45–14:00 Coffee break

Chair: Matteo Collodel

14:00–14:45 Georg Schiemer (University of Vienna)
From Hilbert's Program to Carnap's Wissenschaftslogik

14:50–15:20 Paweł Kawalec (KUL)
Carnap and Conceptual Re-engineering

VC100 Abstracts

Başak Aray (Boğaziçi Üniversitesi)

Vienna Circle in the International Auxiliary Language Movement

The rediscovery of the Vienna Circle in the last few decades visibilised some of the previously neglected socio-political contributions of its members, especially from its left wing. Neurath is possibly the most prolific and significant figure of the Circle in this respect, his activities ranging from the defence of a socialist planned economy to mass education, for which he was instrumental in the development of a visual communication method accessible to people from all nations and all backgrounds (Isotype). Yet, alongside Neurath, Carnap actively advocated for another major way of universal communication: international auxiliary language. The literature detailing their involvement in this movement is relatively recent and includes works such as McElvenny 2018, Aray 2019 and 2024, Lins 2022 and Matsui 2024. Based on these updates, I make a logical empiricist case for the benefits of a constructed international language.

References:

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Ulrich Arnswald (University of Innsbruck / University of Kaiserslautern-Landau / Oles Honchar Dnipro National University)

»The Whole Modern Conception of the World is Founded on the Illusion That the So-called Laws of Nature are the Explanations of Natural Phenomena.« (TLP 6.371) – The Core of the Debate Between Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle

Although there are now many publications on both Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle, Friedrich Stadler notes as recently as 2023 that “all is not as well as it could be

regarding the scholarship on the relationship between Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle.” At first glance, this may suggest that there is a lack of academic research on the specific aspect of “Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle,” but there are more than sufficient publications on this subject. Rather, Stadler complains on the fact that the core of the conflict between Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle has still not been adequately identified and elaborated upon today: „It is surprising then that despite these flourishing scholarly activities the crucial interaction of Wittgenstein with members of the Vienna Circle (mainly with the Schlick and Waismann) in the decade between the two World Wars has still not been investigated in sufficient depth.”

Basically, the misunderstanding between Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle began right from the start: The manifesto “Scientific Worldview. The Vienna Circle [1929]” was printed with Wittgenstein's agreement, only to be criticized by him and Schlick for its programmatic style. At the same time, it must be assumed that the signatories of the manifesto, Hans Hahn, Otto Neurath, and Rudolf Carnap, understood Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* primarily as what is now referred to as Wittgenstein's “picture theory of language.” The inclusion of ethics, religion, mysticism and aesthetics in the *Tractatus* certainly did not escape the attention of the Vienna Circle members, but whether they understood the consequences that Wittgenstein meant for the program of the Vienna Circle is rather unlikely, as Waismann's volume *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle* shows.

According to this volume published after Wittgenstein's death, the core of the conflict must already be laid out in the *Tractatus*. While most studies focus on the influence of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* on the Vienna Circle and only a few on the views of the members of the Vienna Circle on Wittgenstein's significance, to date no one has consulted the *Tractatus* itself, although this would seem to be the obvious thing to do. The lecture argues that the thesis of Wittgenstein's gradual distancing from his *Tractatus* philosophy is false and that the points raised by Wittgenstein in his discussions with the Vienna Circle can already be found in his groundbreaking *Tractatus*.

Ulrich Arnswald received his doctorate in philosophy from the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology in Germany and habilitated at the University of Innsbruck in Austria. Arnswald has written more than 170 articles. He is the author of fourteen books, including, in English: *In Search of Meaning: Ludwig Wittgenstein on Ethics, Mysticism and Religion* (2009) and *Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (2000). A further book is forthcoming in English, co-edited with Joaquín Jareño-Alarcon, titled *The Nature of Religious Belief in Wittgenstein's Philosophy* (2026). He has been teaching at the University of Kaiserslautern-Landau since 2023. Since 2024, he has also been teaching at the Oles Honchar Dnipro National University, Dnipro, Ukraine.

Anna Brożek (University of Warsaw)

Interpersonal and Intertextual Connections between the Vienna Circle and the Lvov-Warsaw School: The Current Stage of Research

Between 1929 and 1937, there were intense contacts between representatives of the Lvov-Warsaw School and members of the Vienna Circle, which came to an end due to political turbulence. The investigation into the connections between these two centers of scientific philosophy began several decades ago, with the first monograph—edited by Klemens Szaniawski—being published in 1989. Thanks to intensive research conducted in recent years on the history of logical empiricism and the tradition of the Lvov-Warsaw School, we now know significantly more about these relations.

This lecture aims to summarize research on both the interpersonal contacts and the substantive philosophical influences between the two groups. On the interpersonal level, I will present recent findings that shed new light on the early history of analytic philosophy. On the intertextual level, I will propose an interpretation of the similarities and differences between the metaphilosophical programs developed in Lvov, Warsaw, and Vienna.

Anna Brożek is a philosopher, pianist, and theorist of music; titular professor at the Institute of Philosophy, University of Warsaw as well as the head of the Lvov-Warsaw School Research Center". She is the author or coauthor of 13 books (e.g., *Theory of Questions: Erotetics Through the Prism of Its Philosophical Background and Practical Applications*, Rodopi 2010; *Kazimierz Twardowski: Die Wiener Jahre*, Springer 2011); *Anti-irrationalism. Philosophical Methods in the Lvov-Warsaw School*, Semper 2021; *The Wisest of Poles. Kazimierz Twardowski's Life, Work, and Heritage*, forthcoming) and several dozens of articles concerning various domains of philosophy.

Matteo Collodel (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia)

Feyerabend and the Alleged Conservatism of Logical Empiricism

Feyerabend became familiar with the Vienna Circle tradition and Logical Empiricism in his formative years in post-war Vienna. However, since the mid-1950s, he made LE one of his favourite critical targets, articulating his criticism in personal dialogue with some of its most distinguished representatives, in an attempt to expose some conservative and even authoritarian tendencies of contemporary empiricism. This paper accounts for the different stages of Feyerabend's sustained assault against LE, examining both Feyerabend's reception of LE and the logical empiricists' responses to Feyerabend's challenge.

In the second half of the 1950s, Feyerabend found fault with Carnap's two-language model for rationally reconstructing the structure of scientific theories and its assumption of an autonomous and theory-neutral thing-language, while in a series of papers

published in the first half of the 1960s, he relentlessly questioned the descriptive adequacy and the normative desirability of the 'orthodox', logical empiricist, accounts of reduction and explanation advanced by Hempel and Nagel. Feyerabend's persistent criticism shook North American philosophy of science and prompted Hempel's reaction: first in their correspondence and later in print.

Initially, Hempel retorted that Feyerabend's methodological analysis was 'completely mistaken' and Feyerabend could offer 'no support' for his allegations. This raises interesting historiographical questions about the later reception of LE, as it seems that Feyerabend, driven by his anti-authoritarian stance and his vantage point notwithstanding, substantially misinterpreted the logical empiricist research programme. On the other hand, Hempel also recognised that the descriptive issues on which Feyerabend insisted, despite having been long acknowledged by LE, could have farther-reaching consequences than previously envisaged. In fact, by the end of the 1960s, Hempel came to make quite radical concessions, admitting that the standard logical empiricist model for rationally reconstructing scientific theories was essentially 'misleading', that the logical empiricist account of reduction was 'an untenable oversimplification', and that the logical empiricist approach as to the meaning of scientific terms was actually 'misconceived'. In this respect, there are good reasons to consider the decline of the logical empiricist research programme in the 1970s at least partly as the result of Feyerabend's stimulating, however misrepresenting, insights.

Matteo Collodel earned his Ph.D. in Philosophy from the Ca' Foscari University of Venice, and pursued his research at the Humboldt University of Berlin and at the Institute Vienna Circle, University of Vienna. His work focuses on the historical and psycho-sociological dimensions of philosophical research with a special attention to the development of the philosophical movements of logical empiricism and critical rationalism and to the life and work of Paul K. Feyerabend. His most significant publications include "Was Feyerabend a Popperian? Methodological Issues in the Historiography of the Philosophy of Science," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* (2016) and "Ehrenhaft's Experiments on Magnetic Monopoles: Reconsidering the Feyerabend-Ehrenhaft Connection," *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science* (2022); he recently co-edited the collections of correspondence and unpublished papers *Feyerabend's Formative Years. Volume 1. Feyerabend and Popper* (2020) and *Volume 2. Feyerabend on Logical Empiricism, Bohm & Kuhn* (2024).

Christian Damböck (University of Vienna)

The Development of Otto Neurath's Views on Democracy

Otto Neurath's views on democracy, part of the largely forgotten political legacy of logical empiricism, grew out of his theoretical views on human decision making by means of "auxiliary motives" that he developed early in his career. After refinements during his time in the Vienna Circle, where, together with Rudolf Carnap, he developed a view of rationality based on science and instrumental rationality, it was not until his last years that Neurath developed an explicitly

democratic view that combined auxiliary motives with the concept of “orchestrating” politics in a setting of “scientific humanism.” This view is strikingly relevant today, because it allows us to understand politics as both grounded in science and expert knowledge, and attentive to the individual attitudes and desires of ordinary citizens.

Christian Damböck is a privatdozent at the Philosophy Department (University of Vienna) and director of the research project "Carnap in Context III: 'practical' philosophy in the US" (FWF proposal P 34887, 2021-2025). The project is located at the Institute Vienna Circle.

Paweł Kawalec (KUL)

Carnap and Conceptual Re-engineering

The recent revival of conceptual engineering in experimental philosophy is often linked to Rudolf Carnap. To highlight some key discrepancies between this contemporary approach and Carnap’s original vision, I focus on the case of reflective equilibrium, as discussed by Brun (2017). From Carnap’s perspective, the integration of explication with reflective equilibrium, as proposed in that paper, may appear to be a promising and theoretically fruitful step toward a more comprehensive method of conceptual re-engineering. The emphasis on theoretical virtues and the recognition of historical and systematic links between the two approaches would likely be welcomed, as would the acknowledgment of concept systems and the move beyond linear processes, which better reflect actual theory development. Nevertheless, several critical concerns would arise. Chief among them is the lack of formal precision in the iterative adjustments of reflective equilibrium. The process of ‘mutual adjustment’ remains too vague and intuitive; clearer rules would be needed to guide and evaluate the process systematically. The method also underplays the transformative power of explication, favoring continuity and similarity over radical conceptual innovation, which could limit progress in theoretical frameworks. The treatment of conceptual systems presents another issue. The combined approach lacks a clear methodology for managing interdependent concepts or coordinating multiple explications. Its non-linear structure, though flexible, introduces uncertainty about the direction and endpoint of the adjustment process. Criteria for achieving equilibrium and resolving competing outcomes remain underdeveloped. Another shortcoming lies in the insufficient attention to background theories. Any method of conceptual revision, from this perspective, must be grounded in an explicit and coherent theoretical framework. Finally, the response to the subject-change challenge appears too cautious, leaning toward preservation rather than embracing explication as a tool for systematic replacement and theoretical advancement. In sum, while the combined method is a valuable contribution, it remains incomplete. Further refinement is needed to enhance formal rigor, emphasize conceptual transformation, and provide clearer strategies for handling complex systems and background commitments – essential steps for a scientifically

oriented philosophy. I conclude by examining the extent to which Carnap's likely objections – viewing the method as incomplete and in need of greater formal rigor, a stronger emphasis on theoretical transformation, and clearer strategies for handling systems of concepts and background theories – might apply more broadly to conceptual re-engineering.

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Thomas Uebel (University of Manchester)

Pragmatism and the Vienna Circle, 1928-1932: A Cautionary Tale

This paper considers the contention that pragmatist thought entered the Vienna Circle via Wittgenstein's dissemination of Ramsey's conception of variable hypotheticals in the guise of his view of "hypotheses" as linguistic rules. It is argued that support for this view on the Circle's left wing was spotty and lasted at best until 1931 and that, given it was accompanied by the demand for strict verificationism, it was not understood by them in a pragmatist spirit at all but as deeply foundationalist and therefore rejected. The sources of the left wing's pragmatism lie elsewhere.

Thomas Uebel is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University of Manchester, UK. His books include *Empiricism at the Crossroads: The Vienna Circle's Protocol-Sentence Debate* (2007) and an edition of Neurath's *Economic Writings* (2004).

Georg Schiemer (University of Vienna)

From Hilbert's Program to Carnap's Wissenschaftslogik

The talk will focus on several points of contact between David Hilbert's logical work and Rudolf Carnap's early contributions to the logical reconstruction of mathematical and scientific theories until the publication of Carnap's monograph *Foundations of Logic and Mathematics* in 1939. The comparison between Hilbert and Carnap will focus on two interpretative points: first, the extent to which Carnap's own project on "general axiomatics" from the 1920s with its focus on metatheoretical properties of axiomatic theories

was motivated by Hilbert's foundational work. Second, the talk will analyze to what extent Carnap's later views on theoretical languages, in particular, on the status of theoretical terms in science, were directly influenced by Hilbert's instrumental formalism about logic and mathematics.

Georg Schiemer is professor at the Department of Philosophy and head of department of the Institute Vienna Circle at the University of Vienna. I am also an external fellow at the Munich Center for Mathematical Philosophy at LMU Munich. His research focuses on the history and philosophy of mathematics and early analytic philosophy. He is also interested in logic, the history and philosophy of logic and formal philosophy of science.

Friedrich Stadler (University of Vienna)

New Light on Schlick

It is astonishing that on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Vienna Circle in 2024 just its founder and head did not get the attention he deserved for several reasons to be discussed.

After his dissertation with Max Planck, the physicist-philosopher Schlick increasingly devoted himself to practical philosophy as counterpart of his turn towards natural philosophy, including the interpretation of the theory of relativity and quantum physics. This was already evident during his time in Rostock and Kiel and intensified after his appointment to the Vienna Chair of "Philosophy of Inductive Sciences" in 1922, as can be seen from his lectures, talks and publications. This arc stretches from his book *Lebensweisheit* (1908) to his *Fragen der Ethik* (1930) with his involvement in the Vienna Ethical Society, confirmed by the posthumously published selection of his aphorisms (1962). This continuity will be confirmed by two forthcoming books on Schlick's philosophical continuity from Rostock to Vienna and on Schlick's unfinished book project *Natur, Kultur, Kunst* (nature, culture, arts) from the archives.

In addition to a fundamental philosophical penetration of all scientific disciplines, the reason for Schlick's orientation also lies in the increasing rise of fascism and National Socialism, against which he took a stand to the end. His individual epicureanism and political liberalism represented an alternative to the dominant totalitarian *zeitgeist*, which was ultimately also the background for his assassination in 1936. In this respect, Schlick was both a sensitive seismograph of his times and an object of the anti-Semitic history of violence of the interwar period. His murder was thus also a sign of an inhumane society before the final destruction of the First Republic and the expulsion of scientific reason.

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Friedrich Stadler is retired Professor of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Vienna. Founder of the Institute Vienna Circle, where he is a Permanent Senior Fellow.

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