

GÜNTHER SANDNER

POLITICAL POLYPHONY
OTTO NEURATH AND POLITICS RECONSIDERED¹

1. INTRODUCTION

Otto Neurath is known as the most political intellectual among the Viennese philosophers of Logical Empiricism (LE). This theme has, however, not received as much attention as other Neurath-related topics and projects such as Unity of Science or ISOTYPE. Nevertheless it is a matter of fact that none of these scientific or educational projects can be strictly separated from politics. Instead, in Neurath's case, science and politics are interlinked in various ways. But what does this mean exactly?

What I will try to do in this essay is the following: First, I will recapitulate some of the arguments that were put forth in recent decades on the relation between political involvement and scientific program in Neurath's work and life. After that I will re-evaluate two particular questions that were (to various degrees) addressed in those contributions: What kind of political approach did Neurath follow (not necessarily *qua* scientist) – how did he, in political terms, become what he was? And how was his political attitude – or, better: set of attitudes – related to his scientific and pedagogical projects?

The case of Neurath, however, is most remarkable not only because he repeatedly brought politics into philosophy of science, social sciences and visual education. Beyond that, he actually intervened in politics – and did so not only on a theoretical level. This may sound a little trivial but, anyway, it constitutes a substantial difference from many other philosophers and philosophers of science – not only from those of a 'scientific-technocratic' and seemingly apolitical neo-positivism or LE but also some of those who were usually considered as to be extremely political.

2. SOME INTERPRETATIONS

In the following I will try to summarize the arguments of those approaches that discussed the relation between Neurath's political engagement (and confession) on the one hand and his scientific program on the other in the last decades explicitly.

1 FWF – Austrian Science Fund (P 20595-G14): Otto Neurath (1882–1945) – An intellectual and political biography (director: Günther Sandner).

Although they may not be the only ones² there are – until now – not many others and these examples are quite appropriate for illustrating the status quo of debate.

The first systematic analysis was Rainer Hegselmann's introductory essay to a 1979 edition of selected writings of Neurath in which he discussed the relation between Neurath's socialism and the 'scientific world conception' (SWC).³ He states that because of the fact that normative statements are meaningless according to LE, the "inner link" between the SWC and certain political movements and developments maintained by the manifesto is a doubtful enterprise. LE, Hegselmann concludes, is neutral with respect to political systems or ideologies as long as they do not need any metaphysical foundations. It may provide arguments against fascism and totalitarianism – but it also may be consistent not only with socialism but, for instance, also with an enlightened form of bourgeois liberalism and (therefore) capitalism.

About ten years later, Gideon Freudenthal submitted a different interpretation.⁴ He claimed that Neurath's empiricist philosophy and epistemology were *dependent* on his political views. For Freudenthal, there is a sort of primacy of politics because, as he put it, "socio-political views involve interests which may affect reasoning while no such interests are directly involved in epistemology".⁵ In Neurath's case, however, these socio-political views were anything but Marxist. In contrast, he was an "authoritarian liberal" who followed the conception of a neutral state which installs the rules of distribution according to political objectives formulated by technocratic experts. Central features of Marxism such as the close correlation between human practice and socio-political changes or the labour theory of value in economic theory were simply absent or rejected in Neurath's writings.

In a quite recent essay, Joshua Stuchlik followed in a way Freudenthal's approach whereby an ethico-political program may be the key element in a 'holistic' interpretation of Neurath's work.⁶ He assesses this program, however, completely differently than Freudenthal, whose essay, by the way, isn't mentioned in Stuchlik

2 Cf. e.g. Thomas E. Uebel (2005), *Political Philosophy of Science in Logical Empiricism: The Left Vienna Circle*, in: *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 36 (2005), pp. 754-773; Nancy Cartwright/Jordi Cat/Lola Fleck/Thomas E. Uebel, *Otto Neurath. Philosophy between Science and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996.

3 Rainer Hegselmann, „Otto Neurath – Empiristischer Aufklärer und Sozialreformer“, in: Rainer Hegselmann (Ed.), *Otto Neurath, Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung, Sozialismus und Logischer Empirismus*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1979, pp. 7-78.

4 Gideon Freudenthal, "Otto Neurath: From Authoritarian Liberalism to Empiricism", in: Marcelo Dasca/Ora Gruengard (Eds., 1989), *Knowledge and Politics*. Boulder, San Francisco, London: Westview Press 1989, pp. 207-240.

5 Freudenthal, Otto Neurath, loc.cit., p. 234.

6 Joshua Stuchlik, "Felicology: Neurath's Naturalization of Ethics", in: *HOPOS: The Journal of the International Society for the History of Philosophy of Science*, 1 (2010) 2, pp. 183-208.

at all. His thesis: Neurath's oeuvre (which includes philosophy of science, economy, social science, empirical sociology, visual education and a number of other fields) is best understood on the basis of his social and political program of felicitology, the aim of which is nothing less than to improve the happiness of mankind.

I am completely aware that I may have simplified the essays in summarizing their differentiated arguments in just a few phrases. But I will come back to some of their points in the next sections, in which I will first discuss Neurath's political views and then, secondly, raise the question of how far these views determine or are dependent on, or are just in a contingent relation to his epistemological and educational projects.

If Freudenthal is right in claiming that socio-political views involve interests that affect reasoning, then the *early*, juvenile or adolescent formation of such views that have proceeded or accompanied the formation of his epistemology is of particular importance. What do we know about Neurath's politicization?

3. POLITICIZATION

Some of the early political influences such as those of his father Wilhelm Neurath, who had made him sensitive to the failures and negative social consequences of capitalism and market economy, or Ferdinand Tönnies, whose book 'Community and Society' he had read several times, are obvious and – at least in part – profoundly analyzed.⁷ There is, however, one set of documents that has not been introduced into the research on young Neurath: His letters to Swedish popular writer, social reformer and pedagogue Ellen Key (1849–1926). I will briefly summarize why these documents are highly relevant not only as biographical evidence but also to the question of Neurath's politicization.

Ellen Key was a very popular figure in European turn-of-the-century debates on social reform, women's rights and, above all, education.⁸ Her books were bestsellers that provoked enthusiasm as well as harsh critique and rejection. Already as an 18-year-old Viennese schoolboy, Otto Neurath probably attended one of her lectures in an overcrowded auditorium in Vienna⁹ – and immediately afterwards began writing letters to her. What do we learn from this collection of early letters that already had started at the turn of the century?

7 This is at least the case for Wilhelm Neurath's influence on his son. Cf. Thomas E. Uebel, "Otto Neurath's Idealist Inheritance: The Social and Economic Thought of Wilhelm Neurath", in: *Synthèse*, 1995, 103, 87-121.

8 Probably the best intellectual portrait of Ellen Key is Reinhard Däbring, *Der Traum vom ‚Jahrhundert des Kindes‘. Geistige Grundlagen, soziale Implikationen und reformpädagogische Relevanz der Erziehungslehre Ellen Keys*. Frankfurt am Main, Bern, New York, Paris: Peter Lang 1990. The Ellen Key estate (including the letters from Otto Neurath) is held by the National Library of Sweden in Stockholm.

9 Cf. *Neue Freie Presse*, June 27, 1901, p. 5.

First of all, young Neurath was highly attracted by the *issues and themes* Key addressed: Matters of education, the changing role of women in contemporary society, sexual relationships and marriage, ethics, and the relation between individuals and the state. The young Neurath was not only an admirer of Key who praised her in poetry as a “northern seer”.¹⁰ Moreover, he used her writings for developing his own approach. He even made some attempts at a logical systematization of her (in his view: unsystematic) thought and surprisingly the bestselling author did not reject the suggestions for improvement formulated by a young man who had not even started his university studies.¹¹

Before Neurath went to Berlin in 1903, he introduced a young female poet to Key and asked her how to promote this extraordinary talent with reviews in Nordic journals. This female poet was none other than his future wife Anna Schapire. When Neurath met Schapire (probably at the very beginning of his university studies) she was an intellectual and highly politicized woman who had already in 1898 written a Marxist critique of Ellen Key in Karl Kautsky’s social democratic newspaper “Die Neue Zeit”.¹² From then on, both Neurath and Schapire wrote reviews of Key’s books in several journals and newspapers (these texts are hardly known)¹³ and it becomes very obvious that they used this intellectual exchange to clarify their own social and political positions.

Neurath was strongly influenced by Schapire who was five years older than he and had already written a number of articles on social policy, women’s rights and other social and political issues in journals and periodicals. She was a woman of letters, a translator, a political commentator and a radical feminist whose proposals sound modern even today. Her doctoral thesis that she had submitted at the University of Bern was on “the protection of workers and the political parties in Germany”.¹⁴ It is obvious that Neurath was politicized not exclusively but considerably by the woman who would later be his first wife. It was after he met Schapire that his views on women and their role in society changed considerably. Henceforward he defined the question of women’s rights as one of the most important issues (in addition to social reform and peace).¹⁵ He already started to attend many

10 Otto Neurath to Ellen Key, December 1901.

11 Cf. Otto Neurath to Ellen Key, August 4, 1901 and October 1, 1901.

12 Anna Schapire, „Mißbrauchte Frauenkraft!“, in: *Die Neue Zeit. Revue des geistigen und öffentlichen Lebens*, 16 (1898), pp. 535-537.

13 Otto Neurath, „Ellen Key“, in: *Neue Bahnen. Halbmonatsschrift für Kunst und öffentliches Leben*, 3 (1903) 1, pp. 341-342; Anna Schapire, „Ein neues Buch von Ellen Key“, in: *Die Wage. Eine Wiener Wochenschrift*. 7. Jg. (1904), pp. 1035-1036; O.(tto) N.(eurath), Rezension zu „Ellen Key: Über Liebe und Ehe“. Berlin: S. Fischer 1904, in: *Neues Frauenleben* (1904) 7, pp.19-20; O.(tto) N.(eurath), „Ellen Key“, in: *Neues Frauenleben* (1905) 4, pp. 16-19.

14 Anna Schapire, *Arbeiterschutz und die politischen Parteien in Deutschland*. Bern 1906.

15 „Drei Fragen treten im alten Griechenland sowohl als heute in den Vordergrund: die soziale Frage, die Frauenfrage und die Friedensfrage“. Otto Neurath, “Sozialwissen-

of the lectures and congresses of early feminism in Vienna and continued to do so particularly in Berlin. Some of his later proposals in the socialization debate of the early 1920s such as those on payment for bringing up children and household work or on the representation of housewives in the soviet system may be seen as a later consequence of this early influence.¹⁶

The letters in the Key estate in the National Library in Stockholm demonstrate, however, not only the relevance of Schapire. Although he became more and more a critic of Key and accused the famous author of practicing a sort of “pseudo-science”¹⁷, there are at least two points that functioned as stimuli for his later intellectual life. The first is the assessment that educational measures should not only address cultural elites or intellectual circles but large segments of the society. That was something which Key did with her lectures and books, and Neurath admired it enormously. And there was a second topic that he shared with Key from this point on: A secular understanding of human happiness as the principal aim of politics and social reform. And this, by the way, supports Stuchlik’s argument for the centrality of this issue in Otto Neurath’s work.

A provisional summary is the following: Neurath was already a political character at the very beginning of his intellectual career. Politics was not something that joined in later (around 1918 as is often maintained) – it was there even in the early stages.

4. MARXISM

In 2009 Sarah Richardson published a controversial two-part essay in which she aimed to challenge (if not disprove) the Left Vienna Circle (LVC) thesis (as she called it).¹⁸ In his refutation¹⁹ and also in some previous essays, Thomas Uebel demonstrated why there definitely has been a LVC, why its philosophy did not prescribe but allowed for political engagement, and in what respect its philosophy of science was political (for instance in recognising the influence of extra-theoretical values). I will not continue this debate in which many important arguments were

schaftliches von den Ferial-Hochschulkursen” in Salzburg (1903), in: Rudolf Haller/Ulf Höfer (Eds.), *Otto Neurath. Gesammelte ökonomische, soziologische und sozialpolitische Schriften (Band 1)*. Wien: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky 1998, pp. 1-7, p. 5.

16 Cf. Otto Neurath, *Betriebsräte, Fachräte, Kontrollrat und die Vorbereitung der Vollsozialisierung*, Berlin: Buchverlag Rätebund 1920, p.28.

17 O.(tto) N.(eurath), „Ellen Key“, in: *Neues Frauenleben* (1905) 4, pp. 16-19, p. 19.

18 Sarah S. Richardson, “The Left Vienna Circle, Part 1. Carnap, Neurath and the Left Vienna Circle Thesis”, in: *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 40 (2009), 14-24. Part 2. “The Left Vienna Circle, disciplinary history, and feminist philosophy of science”, in: *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 40 (2009), pp. 167-174.

19 Thomas E. Uebel, “What’s right about Carnap, Neurath and the Left Vienna Circle thesis: a refutation”, in: *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 41 (2010), pp. 214-221.

brought forward by Thomas Uebel. With respect to Neurath, however, there is one argument in which Richardson is in accordance with other studies, and that is when she points out that the precise character of Neurath's Marxism has remained rather unclear (or controversial) until today.²⁰ I will take up this open question in sketching first the development of Neurath's reception of Marxism and then try to give a characterization.

I have explained that the politicization of Otto Neurath began quite early. But also his examination of Marxism started not much later – at the time of his university studies in Berlin. In one of his letters to Ferdinand Tönnies²¹ he discussed Franz Oppenheimer's book on Marx in which he rejected the theorem of capitalist accumulation and the emergence of an industrial reserve army which was, as he put it, not in accordance with empirical evidence.²² But if the theory of accumulation is wrong, Oppenheimer concluded, there will be no collapse of capitalism and no future socialist society either. The young Neurath, however, expressed his sympathy with the book and its author. In 1903 he studied the protocols of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) convention in Dresden very carefully and sided with the circle around Eduard Bernstein whose revisionism was condemned in an official resolution.²³ Neurath was obviously fascinated by social democracy but he was neither a factionist nor a Marxist. Politically he favored at that time a coalition between social democracy and the liberals around Friedrich Naumann, and he and Tönnies most probably even had a meeting with the legendary and highly contested German politician and political thinker in which they exchanged their thoughts.²⁴ Neurath claimed that it was Tönnies (who was politically also a non-Marxist socialist) who had introduced him to politics, and as a student he supported his socio-political activities. So it seems to me that Freudenthal is right in stressing Neurath's early sympathy for revisionism. But was he an "authoritarian liberal" or did he ever become one?

Let's turn to the socialization debates shortly after World War I in which – according to Freudenthal – the authoritarian-liberal character becomes most evident. It means that in his radical concept of total socialization in 1919, he followed his own assumptions of 'war economy' and the concepts of economists and social philosophers such as Carl Ballod and Popper-Lynkeus – but not that of Marx. He explicitly rejected the labor theory of value, which is without a doubt an essential part of Marxist economic theory, and many Marxists such as Austro-Marxist theoretician Helene Bauer accused him of not being in accordance with Marxist

20 Sarah S. Richardson (2009), *The Left Vienna Circle*, loc.cit., p. 21.

21 Otto Neurath to Ferdinand Tönnies, December 9, 1903. (Estate Ferdinand Tönnies, Schleswig-Holsteinische Landesbibliothek, Kiel).

22 Franz Oppenheimer, *Das Grundgesetz der Marx'schen Gesellschaftslehre. Darstellung und Kritik*. Berlin: Reimer 1903.

23 Cf. Carl Schorske, *Die große Spaltung. Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie 1905–1917*. Berlin: Olle und Wolter 1981 [1955], p. 45.

24 Otto Neurath to Ferdinand Tönnies, April 7, 1913.

theory.²⁵ Nonetheless the socialized economy in Neurath's view was an in-kind economy without money and market, and this has in no way been a liberal concept – even despite the fact that Freudenthal defines liberalism as a theory that understands the state as a “socially neutral institution” and “authoritarian liberalism” as a “liberal social theory which (...) holds that the state can and should install rules of distribution to achieve particular social aims in the interest of society as a whole”.²⁶ And neither was it authoritarian, in my opinion. Neurath did not say that social engineers should make plans that the state would put into practice (even against the people's will). Rather, in his conception, it is the electorate who has to choose democratically between different projects elaborated and proposed by social engineers.²⁷ There may be a lot of qualified criticism of his socialization plans – but accusing it of being authoritarian is misleading.

What was his political self-definition? Prima facie it seems to be paradoxical. Precisely at the same historical moment (1918–19) in which Neurath declared that he had left behind his life as a scholar and entered the stage of a political ‘vita activa’, the self-image of the social engineer who writes apolitical expert reports appeared. But what did he want to demonstrate by describing himself as apolitical? Conceptual historians – the successors of Reinhart Koselleck such as the German historian Christian Geulen – have emphasized only recently that there were a number of key terms whose meaning has been transformed considerably in the 20th century²⁸ – and I think politics is among them. Democratization and participation have influenced our understanding of politics, which is not the same as it was immediately after the Great War. When he spoke of being apolitical, Neurath meant something different than we do today. First of all, Neurath's distance from politics had to do with its negative meanings such as ideological conflicts whose proponents simply lacked the know-how for rational problem solving. There are indications that Neurath followed this understanding even prior to the socialization debates, for instance when he pleaded for civic education – not only for common people but even for politicians!²⁹ Second – and in accordance with this – Neurath wanted to make it clear that it is not he but the people who will make the decision

25 Cf. the controversy between Otto Neurath and Helene Bauer: Otto Neurath, „Geld und Sozialismus“, in: *Der Kampf* 1923, pp. 145-157; Helene Bauer, „Geld, Sozialismus und Otto Neurath“, in: *Der Kampf* 1923, pp. 195-202; Otto Neurath, „Geld, Sozialismus, Marxismus“, in: *Der Kampf* 1923, pp. 283-288.

26 Freudenthal, Otto Neurath, loc. cit., p. 210.

27 Cf. e.g. Otto Neurath, Betriebsräte, loc. cit., p. 16.

28 Although „politics” is not among the examples mentioned by Christian Geulen, Plädoyer für eine Geschichte der Grundbegriffe des 20. Jahrhunderts, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, Online-Ausgabe, 7 (2010), H.1, URL: <http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/16126041-Geulen-1-2010>.

29 Cf. Otto Neurath, „Die allgemeine Einführung des volkswirtschaftlichen und staatsbürgerlichen Unterrichts“ (1908), in: Rudolf Haller/Ulf Höfer (Eds.), *Otto Neurath. Gesammelte ökonomische, soziologische und sozialpolitische Schriften* (Teil 1), Wien: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky 1998, pp. 119-132, p. 120.

on proposed plans. The social engineer was not the counter-image of the politically engaged intellectual, but, instead, the appropriate figure to participate as an expert in political proceedings. Apolitical simply meant not being a politician, a representative of a political party.

Neurath's closest examination of Marxism took place in Vienna (1920–1933). In this time he tried to harmonize the different parts of his social, economic and political thinking with LE and the SCW. For him, Marxism was first of all an empirical and scientific sociology based upon materialism – and not a political ideology. In this context, the rejection of Max Weber's thesis on capitalism and Protestantism³⁰ and his own interpretation of the base-superstructure problem, the critique of Karl Mannheim's 'Ideology and Utopia',³¹ and of Bertrand Russell as a petit bourgeois revolter³² were formulated. Within the Vienna Circle only a few shared Neurath's interest in Marxism—most likely those who joined the regular sessions on Marxism that took place in the Boltzmannngasse in Vienna as those of the Vienna Circle did. It was a group that consisted of only a few individuals such as Rudolf Carnap and Hans Zeisel but not, for instance, Moritz Schlick.³³

How could someone who rejected fundamentals of Marxist economic theory, opposed Hegelian dialectics and blamed Marxism for having discredited the useful concept of utopia³⁴ have been welcomed in the Austro-Marxist scene of Red Vienna? First, Austro-Marxism was not an orthodox and dogmatic movement, and left enough room for controversial positions.³⁵ There were 'Machians' such as Neurath and Friedrich Adler as well as Neo-Kantians such as Max Adler. How strongly leading Austro-Marxist politicians and diplomats supported Neurath – despite political antagonisms – becomes most evident in the political quarrels about his deportation from Bavaria to Austria after he was sent to prison for high treason following his role in the Munich soviet republic. In fact, there was a diplomatic tug-of-war on Neurath's release and deportation between the Bavarian and the Austrian government (Federal Chancellor Karl Renner and Foreign Minister

30 Otto Neurath, "Marxismus eines Jesuiten" (1931), in: Rudolf Haller/Heiner Rutte (Eds.), *Otto Neurath. Gesammelte philosophische und methodologische Schriften* (Band 1), Wien: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky: 1981, pp. 401-405.

31 Otto Neurath, "Bürgerlicher Marxismus" (1930), in: Haller/Rutte, Otto Neurath, pp. 349-356.

32 Otto Neurath, "Bertrand Russell, der Sozialist" (1929), in: Haller/Rutte, Otto Neurath, pp. 337-343.

33 These protocols were analyzed only recently by the author as part of a collection of Neurath papers and documents held by the special archive Moscow, now Austrian State Archive (AdR 1433-1-5).

34 Otto Neurath, „Ein System der Sozialisierung“, in: *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 48 (1920) 1, pp. 44-73, p. 44.

35 Cf. Günther Sandner, „Austro-Marxism“, in: William A. Darity, Jr. (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 2nd edition, Farmington Hills, MI: Macmillan Reference USA 2007, pp. 212-13.

Otto Bauer) that lasted more than half a year.³⁶ Second, in Austro-Marxism it was education that played a pivotal political role (in this respect, Austro-Marxism was, in a way, exceptional within the socialist movement) and this was an ideal framework for the project in visual education which he had already started to develop.

In sum, there were obviously different periods of Neurath's dealing with Marxism. The revisionist period during his university studies, the explicitly socialist but still non-Marxist period of 1918/19, the longer Austro-Marxist one until 1933/34, and the period of emigration to which we turn finally.

5. DEMOCRATISATION AND UNIFICATION

Was there a Neurathian political project in the time of exile – and if so, how did it relate to his scientific and educational programs and activities? In any case, Marxism did not play a role anymore. It almost disappeared from 1934 onwards. There are, however, three interconnected intellectual strands of which the political approach of the émigré Neurath consisted.

The first one is 'democratization of knowledge'³⁷ which is formulated most clearly but also differentiated in an essay on Visual Education of the 1940s (published posthumously only in 1996)³⁸ in which he not only continued the empowerment project of Red Vienna – giving the people knowledge, tools and instruments for democratic participation – but also reflected theoretically on democratic ways of decision making for instance in making proposals for non-hierarchical cooperation among experts and citizens. Many of his activities in exile – writings, exhibitions, and not least of all the documentaries for the British Ministry of Information³⁹ – are part of this endeavor.

The second one includes the debates on 'unity of science', particularly the dispute with Horace Kallen after the end of World War II and the beginnings of the Cold War. In this context, however, Neurath made it clear that for him LE had a political meaning. Around 1940 Kallen claimed repeatedly that there would be a general contemporary tendency towards unification (economically, politically)

36 There are numerous documents in the Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv that support this view. Cf. Telegramm Otto Bauer to the Austrian embassies in Berlin and in Munich, May 10, 1919 and letter Otto Bauer to Otto Neurath, July 3, 1919 (both: BayHstA, MJu 18589).

37 Günther Sandner, „Demokratisierung des Wissens. Otto Neuraths politisches Projekt“, in: *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft* 38 (2009) 2, pp. 231-248.

38 Otto Neurath, “Visual Education. Humanisation versus Popularisation”, in: Elisabeth Nemeth/Friedrich Stadler (Eds.), *Encyclopedia and Utopia. The Life and Work of Otto Neurath (1882–1945)*. Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers 1996, pp. 245-335.

39 Cf. Michael Burke/Toby Haggith, “Words divide: pictures unite. Otto Neurath and British propaganda films of the Second World War”, in: *Imperial Museum Review* 12 (1996), pp. 59-70.

of which the unity of science is a part. As part of that broader unification movement, however, it ran into danger of becoming a totalitarian enterprise that nullifies any alternatives. To be successful, as he put it, “the proponents of the program 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.”⁴⁰ Not surprisingly, Neurath interpreted LE and unity of science in exactly the opposite way. He insisted that its proponents are followers of an even sceptical pluralism, absolutely anti-totalitarian, and oriented on the cooperation of different approaches in both science and politics. On various occasions he linked the epistemic and the political meanings, when he set pluralism against absolutism, democracy against totalitarianism, the encyclopedia against the system, multiple possibilities against the one and only solution. “The encyclopedism of logical empiricism”, he put it, “with the unified science encyclopedia are the children of the tolerant approach of democratic cooperation.”⁴¹

In a letter to educationalist Joseph Lauwerys,⁴² he wrote about his (Neurath’s) book “Foundations of the Social Sciences” (which Lauwerys planned to review and Neurath obviously wanted him to share his self-interpretation) that LE is particularly pluralistic. The book was meant to be his “SONG OF SONGS OF TOLERANCE, as far as a theoretical attitude may support persecution or tolerance.” This is a remarkable formulation because it is one of the few in which he addresses directly the question of the influence between a theoretical approach or program and political engagement. It may influence ... A later paragraph of the same letter, however, is more concrete:

Through the whole essay goes the argument, that a scientist is not better equipped for making decisions, than other people, because the better a scientist, the more he must be prepared to see MORE THAN ONE PREDICTION, MORE THAN ONE POSSIBILITY. (...) That is important for any scientific analysis of parliamentary government against any kind of “technocratic” government executed by scientific experts who say they KNOW THE OPTIMUM SOLUTION.

One can paraphrase this statement as stating that it is LE that supports participation and democratic decision making against technocracy and expert leadership.

After all, however, in a third strand Neurath wanted to employ his political interpretation of LE as a democratic, tolerant and pluralistic force in particular for

40 Horace Kallen, “A Discussion of the Unity of Science – The Meanings of “Unity” among the Sciences once more”, in: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research. A Quarterly Journal*, 6 (1946) 4, pp. 493-496, p. 494.

41 Otto Neurath, “The Orchestration of the Sciences by the Encyclopedism of Logical Empiricism”, in: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research. A Quarterly Journal*, 6 (1946) 4, pp. 496-508, p. 508.

42 Otto Neurath to Joseph Lauwerys, January 9, 1945 (Isotype Collection, University of Reading).

the current political situation of ending World War II. In his theory on the German climate, he explained why a ‘human climate’ that is traditionally strongly influenced by metaphysics and idealism was more liable for totalitarianism and National Socialism than the Western cultures, especially the English ‘climate’ in which empiricism and utilitarianism were dominant and human happiness played a more important role than duties or obedience to higher – and necessarily metaphysical – ideals. I have analyzed this approach elsewhere in detail.⁴³ Now I only want to point out that at the very end of his life he drew a very clear line to connect epistemic and political elements including both their political application and necessary political consequences, for instance in civic educational and re-educational measures in which he participated considerably.

6. CONCLUSION

I have taken up Freudenthal’s assumption that socio-political views affect reasoning more than vice versa and considered this in the context of Neurath’s early politicization in which social reform, education and – probably most importantly – the orientation on human happiness started to play a crucial role. This underlines Stuchlik’s argument that ‘felicology’ as an approach that aimed to improve the happiness of humans, was a foundation of his lifework that is interlinked with the economic, the sociological, the philosophical and the pictorial pedagogical parts of it. As a socio-political program, however, it needs to be specified and complemented in terms of politics.

I would agree with the thesis in Hegselmann’s early essay that the SWC is not exclusively linked to Marxism or socialism. But if we regard – beyond the Vienna Circle’s manifesto – Neurath’s writings and activities in economics and visual education, it becomes evident that his works provide not only arguments against metaphysical concepts such as nationalism, fascism or totalitarianism. His insistence on the compatibility (if not interdependence) of planning and freedom, the orientation on the standard of living and the happiness of even the common people instead of apotheosizing the liberal economic freedom that produces inequality, an egalitarian-oriented pedagogy that empowers the less educated to participate politically instead of elitist scientific communication – all this was without doubt part of a larger left wing political project.

Considering Neurath as proponent of a political concept means, however, not only analyzing its relation to his scientific and pedagogical work but also looking closely at both its strengths and weaknesses – and as such it is open to critique. I don’t think that there can be a strong determination of a scientific lifework by

⁴³ Günther Sandner, “The German Climate and Its Opposite: Otto Neurath in England, 1940–45”, in: Anthony Grenville/Andrea Reiter (Eds.), *Politics in British Exile – Exile Politics in Britain after 1933* (Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies, vol. 12). Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi 2011, pp. 67-85.

a political program – there are always other influences and multiple possible developments. In Neurath's case, however, certain socio-political elements formed a coherent project together with his philosophy of science, his economic writings, his sociological works, unity of science and visual education – but these elements, however, were not determined to appear only in this particular combination.

Anyway, Neurath never swam in the mainstream of a political ideology and always formulated his own, peculiar way. Beside Kallen's 'orchestration' he much earlier used another word from the world of music to characterize his approach. In the early 1920s in a letter to his friend, art historian Franz Roh, he argued for a political polyphony which – for him – did not mean arbitrariness but providing a political framework in which different groups and cultures could coexist and try to maintain a political consensus and cooperation, and deliberate on common political targets with opposing attitudes – as long as it is possible.⁴⁴

Institute Vienna Circle
Spitalgasse 2-4, Hof 1
1090 Wien
Austria
guenther.sandner@univie.ac.at

44 Otto Neurath to Franz Roh, June 19, 1924 (The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, California).