Positivism in Action: The Case of Louis Rougier

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# Abstract

In this paper, we investigate how the life and work of Louis Rougier relate to the broader political dimension of logical empiricist philosophy. We focus on three practical projects of Rougier in the 1930s and 1940s. First, his attempts to integrate French-speaking philosophers into an international network of scientific philosophers by organizing two Unity of Science conferences in Paris. Second, his role in the renewal of liberalism through the organization of the Walter Lippmann Colloquium. Third, Rougier’s attempts at political negotiations between Great Britain and the Vichy regime during the Second World War. These activities of Rougier in the 1930s and 1940s have so far never been discussed as part of a unified project on Rougier’s part. Based on our investigations of these practical projects of Rougier, we argue that Rougier’s relation to logical empiricist philosophers should primarily be understood on the level of action. Rougier’s projects aimed to proliferate the concrete improvement of society and the lives of its citizens by expunging all metaphysical questions and speculations from the sphere of social discourse. Rougier conceived logical empiricist philosophers as allies to achieve such practical effects in society.

# Victories of the Mind[[1]](#endnote-1)

Between 15 and 23 September 1935 about 160 scholars, scientists and philosophers came together at the Sorbonne University, Paris, on the occasion of the first International Conference for Scientific Philosophy. Its main organizers, Otto Neurath and Louis Rougier, although both had many philosophical differences of opinion, shared one overarching practical ideal. They believed that the social and economic progress of society relied on the integration of scientifically oriented scholars with the political and social sphere. At the closing of the conference, Rougier likened the debates among the scholars to the exchanges of “imaginary artillery batteries” (Rougier 1936a, 91).[[2]](#endnote-2) Unlike the effects of actual artillery, these scholarly exchanges did not thin out the ranks of the combatants, but “rendered the collective ever more dense and compact”. Rougier wished that Europe would from that time onward know only battles of this kind – battles that gave birth to “victories which are not followed by contestation and defeat”. Europe’s victories had to be “victories of the mind” (*victoires des esprits*). Similarly, Neurath concluded in his overview of the conference activities that the “practical attitude” (*praktische Haltung*) of the conference was of the utmost importance, and paraphrasing Rougier’s poetic simile, he claimed that the victory achieved at the conference was the only kind of victory which cannot be followed by defeat, namely a victory of the mind (*Siege des Geistes*) (Neurath 1935a, 406).

Both Neurath and Rougier were eager to emphasize that scientific philosophy, logical empiricism or the Unity of Science – they constantly debated which name to use – should not be conceived as an alternative to regular school-philosophy. Scientific philosophy could not be delineated by a specific set of beliefs. Rougier called it an intellectual climate (Rougier 1936b, 4). Neurath warned that the Paris gathering implied the danger of ‘a new scholasticism’ which dogmatically neglects certain ideas (Neurath 1935b, 381). But the actual practice of the conference was evidence of the contrary: it allowed a fruitful dialogue between representatives of different points of view (Neurath 1935b, 385). The conference was meant to go beyond a mere gathering (*Versammlung*) of people by providing a base for cooperation. It entailed the creation of a community (*Gemeinschaft*) and a common labour (*Arbeit*) (Neurath 1935a, 402). Differences of opinion could exist, but all members shared a ‘cooperative attitude’ (*Kooperative Haltung*). Such an attitude was the hallmark of science, and, to the benefit of society, it would now be expanded to philosophy.

Rougier also conceived the conference as the creation of a like-minded community: “(The conference) made an appeal to representatives of all movements who are unified by a shared concern: to solve those problems which were previously reserved to philosophy conceived as a separate discipline, now with strictly scientific methods” (Rougier 1936b, 4). For Rougier, the creation of such a community had to combine all linguistic communities in Europe and America, including the “Latin*”* movements from Belgium, France, Italy and Switzerland. Similarly to Neurath, Rougier made clear in his opening statement that the conference was not intended to install logical empiricism dogmatically or to formulate a “catechism” (Rougier 1936a, 9). “The best way to collaborate internationally is to discuss openly”. Rougier especially rebutted the notion that the conference would be a gathering of specialists, technicians, or even an “esoteric” meeting. This was exactly the model of traditional international conferences of philosophy. These conferences operated on the idea that philosophy was a discipline “doomed to eternal dispute” separate from the broader scientific community (Rougier 1936a, 7). The new community of scientific philosophy would make an end to the eternal debates over old, meaningless philosophical disputes, and this would benefit society at large.

Both organizers situated the creation of this international community within a broader intellectual tradition which had a social dimension (Rougier 1936a, 6; Neurath 1935a, 406). Bertrand Russell, who gave an opening speech at the conference, believed that the novel attitude of scientific philosophy “alone can provide the intellectual temper in which it is possible to find a cure for the diseases of the modern world” (Russell 1936, 11). In a similar vein, Neurath stressed that the reflections at the conference “moved in the proximity of life” (Neurath 1935a, 405), suggesting that the conference’s aim was to have a broader impact on its surrounding culture by showing how people could fruitfully discuss their ideas independently from ideological conflict. Scientific philosophy, in opposition to traditional philosophy, was understood as continuous with scientific, community-based reasoning and as an important exemplar of reasoning for the broader culture.

In recent decades several studies have been dedicated to the political dimension of logical empiricism in general (Tuboly 2020; Reisch 2005; Romizi 2012) and of Neurath’s and Carnap’s philosophy in particular (Uebel 2012; 2020; Cartwright et al. 1996; Mormann 2007). An investigation of the political dimension of Louis Rougier’s life and work will be beneficial to understand why, of all possible French contacts, precisely Rougier sought an alliance with logical empiricist philosophers and sought to organize a conference in Paris. The authors of the Vienna Circle manifesto conceived both technical and non-technical scientific philosophy as an active force within the broader social transformation. They believed that philosophers who purely work “on the icy slopes of logic” also had a place in the historical developments which were sought by their scientific world-conception (Hahn et al. 1929). As we argue in this paper, Rougier equally conceived his own philosophical activity in continuity with, and even potentially driving towards social transformation, eradicating metaphysical and theological disputes from public discourse. Rougier and German-speaking scientific philosophers shared this broad political aim: their philosophical activity was meant “to serve life”. Unfortunately, life would not easily embrace it.

In this paper, we will investigate how Rougier’s practical aim “to serve life” expressed itself in three aspects of Rougier’s work and life. First, Rougier actively attempted to form an international community of like-minded anti-metaphysical philosophers by co-organizing the first international conference in Paris (Soulez 1993; 2006). Second, Rougier attempted to remove metaphysical thinking from economic discourse, liberating liberalism from its metaphysical constraints, by renewing liberalism through several conferences and institutions (Denord 2001; Audier 2016). Third, Rougier was active within political negotiations during the Second World War, executing multiple political missions, including a secret negotiation between Marshal Pétain and Winston Churchill (Mehlman, 2000). Until now, these disparate elements of Rougier’s practical activities have been discussed separately. In this paper, we propose a framework that highlights how they are part of one coherent scheme.

Instead of focusing on Rougier’s ideas[[3]](#endnote-3), we investigate how Rougier strove to achieve his aim of social and political transformation in the context of his philosophical endeavors. From the beginning of his career, Rougier’s practice aimed to proliferate the concrete improvement of society and the lives of its citizens by expunging all metaphysical questions and speculations from the sphere of social and political discourse. In section 2 and 3, we argue that it was this practical aim, more than Rougier’s specific philosophical ideas, which brought him in contact with logical empiricist philosophers and which formed the shared background for their initial collaboration. We illustrate their practical alliance by an analysis of the organization of the 1935 conference. In Section 4 and 5 we show how their shared practical project eventually failed to integrate German and French philosophical networks, most likely because most French philosophers did not share Rougier’s and logical empiricists’ political aim for the creation of a new kind of community.

In sections 6 and 7, we investigate Rougier’s subsequent attempts at social transformation. First, he attempts to renew liberalism and free it from all metaphysics and abstract principles. Second, he embarks on a political mission during the Second World War to improve the lives of French citizens during the occupation. In contrast to many of his logical empiricist colleagues, Rougier refused to confine his philosophical activity to the icy slopes of logic during the Second World War. This final episode would cost Rougier his reputation and academic career. In that sense, Rougier’s biography fits with the general historical narrative of logical empiricism: its broader political dimension did not survive the social and political context that resulted from the Second World War (Reisch 2005). However, in the case of Rougier, the reason for it lay exactly in the failure of his active attempts to achieve political effects during the war.

# A Compatibility of Thought?

Traditionally, the alliance between logical empiricist philosophers and Louis Rougier (1889 –1982) is conceived as the result of a compatibility of thought: Rougier was the perfect figure in Paris because he had similar philosophical ideas as members of the Vienna Circle (Soulez 1993; 2006; Marion 2005; Berndt and Marion 2006). This compatibility of thought is already present in Rougier’s early publications, such as a 1913 article that refutes the existence of necessary truths like the synthetic a priori (Rougier 1913). He also published on non-Euclidean geometry, the theory of relativity (Rougier 1914) and how the new developments in physics show old philosophical questions, such as the distinction between energy and matter, to be “pseudo-problems” (Rougier 1921, 1).

His doctoral thesis would make a great impression on members of the Vienna Circle, such as Philipp Frank, who would later describe it as “the best all-round criticism of the school philosophy that I know of” (Frank 1950, 48). Rougier defended his thesis *Les paralogismes du rationalisme* in 1920 at the Sorbonne, under supervision of André Lalande (his initial supervisor, Gaston Milhaud, died in 1918) with Léon Brunschvicg in the jury. His minor thesis, *La philosophie géométrique de Poincaré,* is also well received and both works soon appear in print with Alcan (Rougier 1920a,b). These works already spell out the central ideas of Rougier, which will hardly change throughout his life. “Rougier had *idées fixes*.” (Berndt and Marion 2006, 18)

Conventionalism, in the line of Poincaré, was Rougier’s philosophical starting point.[[4]](#endnote-4) In his doctoral thesis, he presented conventionalism as a solution to the eternal dilemma of rationalism and empiricism (Rougier 1920a, 199). The main target of his thesis was (French) rationalism. According to Rougier, rationalism is based on a number of paralogisms, mainly the confused transportation of the formal necessity of logical and mathematical deductions to the premises on which these deductions are founded. This creates the false impression that they are necessary, a priori and analytic truths, whereas in fact, they are conventional and thus subject to choice.

At the same time, Rougier gave his conventionalism an explicit political twist, in the form of what he calls a critique of ‘mystiques’ (Rougier 1929; 1935; 1938). According to Rougier mystiques play a crucial role in political practice: every form of power, democracy included, is based on such a mystique: “A doctrine becomes a mystique when it is subtracted from the control by experience and the trial by discussion, and is treated as an intangible dogma, or when it is founded on a basis that has no empirical or rational meaning and which only expresses a passionate conviction” (Rougier 1929, 12-13).

Such mystiques are nonsensical principles that are endorsed with quasi-religious and fanatic support. In fact, there is never an *a priori, rational* justification of first principles, only conventional *choices*. In Rougier’s view, democracy is also a convention that cannot be grounded on first principles. But in contrast to alternative mystiques such as communism or fascism, democratic conventions are to be preferred on pragmatic grounds: they create the conditions for a liberal society and a market economy. According to Rougier, liberal democracy is the only system for which there is empirical proof that it leads to an improvement in our standards of living. Consequently, the justification of liberal democracy purely lies in its practical capacity to improve the lives of its citizens (which is Rougier’s preferred aim of social organization).

Thus, Rougier shared with many logical empiricist philosophers a struggle against metaphysical principles which are invoked as justifications in both scientific theories and political reasoning (Romizi 2012).According to him the use of such principles as justifications lies beyond the boundaries of reason. From the very beginning of his academic career, and independently from the ideas of logical empiricist philosophers, Rougier’s concern lay with the detrimental political effects of metaphysical styles of reasoning and the mystiques they engendered. Philosophy was conceived as a cure to an ill use of reason, as an intellectual culture that aims to protect society from this use. However, such culture can only have its effect, if it stands in close relation to society, which entails a practical project for the philosopher.

# Rougier as an Ally in Practice: the Paris Conference

It was Rougier’s practical engagement to change society that brought him into contact with Hans Reichenbach. In his first letter to Reichenbach of 1 November 1931, Rougier opened by proposing an ambitious plan to create a new organization for the defense of intellectuals: “I am the initiator of a vast project for the protection of intellectuals, elaborated by the The Hague Academy of International Law, which will be submitted to the League of Nations when it becomes juridically complete. It would be a question of treating certain categories of Intellectuals as a minority protected by the League of Nations and to guarantee them an international Statute capable of safeguarding free scientific research” (quoted in Padovani 2006, 224). Reichenbach, in an enthusiastic response, linked it immediately to goals of his own institutional efforts with the *Gesellschaft für empirische Philosophie*: “I was very interested in your plan for an organization of intellectuals close to us. We are really a minority that would be of great value to the League of Nations Protectorate. Your efforts to organize an international association are fully supported by me, since I myself strive to carry our movement beyond the borders of the countries” (quoted in Padovani 2006, 224).

Reichenbach subsequently invited Rougier to give a lecture in Berlin on the philosophical developments in France and to discuss a possible alliance with the groups in Germany and Austria. In later letters, Rougier revealed his plans to create a group in Paris similar to Reichenbach’s group, in order to “let a philosophy prevail based on science, whereas in France nowadays people’s minds have been taken over by the Bergsonian and Neothomist offensive.” Initially, Rougier’s plan was to create a *Société de philosophie scientifique* with Louis de Broglie as chair. A later idea was to create a *Société Henri Poincaré.* (Padovani 2006, 230-231).

Rougier eventually visited Reichenbach in Berlin, on 17 July 1932, to give his lecture.[[5]](#endnote-5) During this meeting, Reichenbach and Rougier discussed the possibility to organize a gathering of scientific philosophers in Paris in order to create an international community of like-minded scholars. Already in the summer of 1932 Rougier’s contacts at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ensured him that they welcomed an international conference in Paris.[[6]](#endnote-6) In October 1932, Rougier visited Reichenbach again underway to Moscow, on a political mission for the Ministry of Public Education. The French minister of education, Anatole de Monzie, had sent Rougier to investigate what the actual developments were in the Soviet Union, in contrast to what the rumors and propaganda told them (Rougier 1937, 7; Dard 2007, 53). To Reichenbach, he expressed the hope that some Russian scholars would be interested to join their aspired international community for scientific philosophy – a hope that would soon diminish.

Based on his experience with the Russian intellectual culture, Rougier became a fierce critic of the Soviet Union. In *Revue de Paris* Rougier lamented the effects of Marxist ideas on all aspects of Russian society. This had engendered a new scholasticism, dogmatically taking over all aspects of life (Rougier 1934). Similarly, he wrote to Reichenbach in November 1932:

In the communist universities, in the Institutes of the Red Professors, a new scholasticism, as fanatical as that of the thirteenth century, was born, with its theologians, its exegetes, its heresiarchs: dialectical materialism applied to all domains: to the mathematical, physical and natural sciences, to technologies, even to prices. There are pamphlets on 'Dialectical Materialism and Engines', “DM and the game of chess” [. . . ] This is probably not the scientific philosophy we dreamed of. In Russia, such a thing is doctrinally impossible and it is one of the reasons, among many others, that averts me from seeing in the dictatorship of the Bolshevik Party a solution for the future.[[7]](#endnote-7)

In his reply, Reichenbach wrote equally pessimistic about the future for Germany: “Unfortunately, I can only report unpleasant things about Germany. The current political direction poses a great danger, especially in the intellectual and cultural domain, since all liberal efforts are being suppressed.”[[8]](#endnote-8) For Reichenbach and Rougier the importance of scientific philosophy was not purely academic or theoretical. It was conceived as an alternative to ideological and emotional forms of reasoning which threatened to take hold of society as a dogma and damage the improvement of life in society.

Rougier’s plan to have a conference in Paris did not crystalize in 1933, supposedly due to sudden monetary constraints at the Ministry of Public Education.[[9]](#endnote-9) However, when the logical empiricist philosophers from Berlin and Vienna decided to meet each other in 1934 before the 8th International Conference of Philosophy in Prague, Rougier decided to team up with them and make a case for a large international gathering in Paris. In the meantime, Rougier had already talked to Philipp Frank and Otto Neurath about this possibility.[[10]](#endnote-10) During the Prague Pre-conference, Rougier’s proposal was formally accepted and an organizing committee, consisting of Carnap, Frank, Reichenbach, Neurath and Rougier was elected to make an ambitious international gathering a reality in 1935 (Bourdeau 2018).‬‬‬‬

In general, contacts between logical empiricist philosophers and the French intellectual world up until 1934 had been scarce. Most logical empiricist philosophers were unaware of what was going on in Paris at that time, with only Philipp Frank, who seemed to have some contacts in Paris, as a possible exception (Nemeth 2007). In the fall of 1934 Rougier alerted three French epistemologists of his plans: Gaston Bachelard, Léon Brunschvicg and André Lalande. There were good reasons to see Bachelard, with whom the members of the Vienna Circle were somewhat familiar, as a suitable candidate. Bachelard himself was aware of their work, shown for instance by his reviews ofReichenbach’s *Warscheinlichkeitslehre* and Hahn’s *Logik, Mathematik und Naturerkennen* and by citing Schlick, Reichenbach and von Mises in his own work (Bachelard, 1934). Philipp Frank had also suggested Bachelard on multiple occasions to Neurath as a potential ally of the logical empiricist movement in France (Nemeth 2007, 211). “As for Bachelard, he has a very good reputation in France, and he is probably the only French professor who, to a certain extent, is close to us.”[[11]](#endnote-11) However, in a letter to Neurath Bachelard rejected Rougier’s invitation to the pre-conference for logistic reasons, even though he expressed sympathy for the idea of a Paris conference:

Mr. Rougier, the French representative of the Wiener Kreis, kindly sent me an invitation for the meetings you planned before the Prague Congress. Unfortunately, it will be very difficult for me to arrive in Prague before Sunday the 2nd of September. I would like to say how much I admire the work of the Wiener Kreis and to give you my membership for the Congress of Scientific Philosophy that you want to organize. In any case, I am going to see you soon as well as your colleagues.[[12]](#endnote-12)

Similarly, Brunschvicg and Lalande replied that they were unable to join the pre-conference meeting. Based on the available evidence, it is hard to assess whether this is an unfortunate coincidence or more a general apathy of French epistemologists towards their German counterparts. Fortunately for Rougier, two non-academic, French scholars were highly intrigued by the new German epistemology: Marcel Boll and Ernest Vouillemin.

Marcel Boll (1886-1971) was born into a family that followed Comte in his positivist religion, literally a born positivist (Schöttler 2015). Boll was a regular contributor to the *Revue positiviste internationale* and one of the founders of the *Union rationaliste*, also contributing to their journal *Cahiers rationalists.* This organization had the goal to promote a scientific worldview, scientific freedom and *laicité.* Similar to the ambitions of Rougier, Boll saw this organization as the French counterpart of the *Verein Ernst Mach* and *Erkenntnis.*[[13]](#endnote-13)Boll was himself acquainted with the work of the Vienna Circle and was already in contact with Moritz Schlick from 1930 onward.

About the life of Charles-Ernest Vouillemin (1865-1954), or Général Vouillemin as he is often referred to, little is known. He fought in the First World War where he became general of the 75th brigade, officer in the *Légion d’honneur* and was decorated with the *Croix de Guerre*. Upon his retirement, Vouillemin started to publish articles and books on contemporary science, such as early studies on Einstein’s theory of relativity and general introductions to philosophy of science (Vouillemin 1922; 1924; 1927).

Rougier, Boll and Vouillemin joined forces in the early 1930s to translate texts from logical empiricist philosophers into French. They convinced the publisher Hermann to start a series on the Vienna Circle, with Abel Rey as the official editor. Most of the time, Boll wrote the prefaces, selected the works and contacted the authors and translators (Bourdeau 2018, 26). Vouillemin provided most of these translations, including work by Reichenbach, Carnap, Frank, Neurath, Schlick and Hahn. In addition to these translations, Vouillemin published a number of books and articles on the Vienna Circle (Vouillemin 1935a; 1945).

Since Boll and Vouillemin could not join the pre-conference in 1934, Rougier ended up as the only French representative, and the only local organizer of the Paris conference in 1935. As Rougier was a lecturer at the University of Cairo and could not be in France during most of the academic year 1934-1935, this posed many problems. The practical details of the 1935 conference were mainly dealt with by Rougier and Neurath. Initially everything was open for debate.

First, there was the decision of the name for the gathering. On the suggestion of Rougier, Neurath accepted *philosophie scientifique* in order to avoid any particular ‘special group name’ (*Spezial Gruppenname*) so as to maintain the peace between all the representatives of the various groups.[[14]](#endnote-14) Especially, the term “unity of science” had to be avoided, because it was interpreted by many French philosophers as a specific thesis on the nature of science which they associated with a specific German logical empiricist “school”. However, in all German communication about the conference, Neurath would use the terminology of *Einheit der Wissenschaft*, because he believed that the German *wisschenschaftliche Philosophie* implied a relation to traditional school philosophy and its associated metaphysics.[[15]](#endnote-15) The result was a complicated scheme of names and translations in order to bring together as many international groups as possible. Both Neurath and Rougier were constantly worried that certain groups would be offended, and would eventually refuse to join the gathering. They also agreed on a late date, September 16-21, 1935, in order to attract as many French scholars who professed to be unavailable during the summer months.[[16]](#endnote-16)

Once the date and name were fixed, Rougier started to send out invitations to prominent French scholars, ranging from Jean Cavaillès to Ferdinand Gonseth (Bourdeau 2018, 23). He was, however, soon frustrated due to a lack of replies and enthusiasm: “I have written more than 100 letters: for some, it is the sacred time of the holidays, others invoke their incompetence. […] Only young people seem to be willing.”[[17]](#endnote-17) Throughout 1934 and 1935 Rougier was increasingly worried by the lack of French enthusiasm, and he regularly brought up the possibility of postponing the conference to 1937, when the international *Congrès Descartes*, organized by Brunschvicg, would take place.

When Rougier’s wife died unexpectedly due to surgical complications in March 1935, Rougier’s resolve plummeted. Neurath, however, was steadfast and wrote in capital letters that “despite the varied interests and tensions that are at play in our midst, we must do everything in order to meet internationally, even if it is only a modest gathering.”[[18]](#endnote-18) Rougier countered that “the ministry does not want the congress to be a meeting of foreigners without French collaborators.”[[19]](#endnote-19) Even though Rougier was determined to quit at several points in both April, May and June, due to the lack of French interest, he never abandoned the project on which he had embarked after his first contact with Hans Reichenbach: the creation of a new and international community of scientifically oriented philosophers.

When the conference finally took place in September 1935, there were 160 persons present.[[20]](#endnote-20) The opening speeches were delivered in the buildings of the *Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle* (IICI), by representatives of various groups that were united in the gathering: Rougier himself, Bertrand Russell, Federigo Enriques, Philipp Frank, Hans Reichenbach, Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz and Charles Morris. This opening ceremony was suggested by Neurath as an alternative to representatives of nations or governments – their gathering was to be a victory of the mind, not of nations.[[21]](#endnote-21) There were few representatives from French philosophy at the conference: André Lalande, Rougier’s supervisor and Albert Lautman who wrote a report on the conference (Lautman, 1936). Nonetheless, about 13 French scholars, from the natural and human sciences, did present talks.[[22]](#endnote-22) However, none of them became active in the network of logical empiricism later on.

# Philosophie Scietifique: a Failed Attempt

Despite all efforts, Rougier’s ambitious project to integrate French-speaking philosophers and scientists within a larger international movement failed. Very few French philosophers responded to his call. Bachelard and Brunschvicg remained absent and would never accept invitations for future conferences of the Unity of Science movement. To make matters worse, the internal alliance of Rougier-Boll-Vouillemin quickly started to fall apart after 1935.

The relationship between Rougier and Boll, for instance, had many ups and downs. Most significantly, a big break occurred in the summer before the 1935 conference. Neurath received messages from both Rougier and Boll that they could not work together anymore.[[23]](#endnote-23) Rougier lamented Boll’s eristic character and claimed that Boll had been expelled before from several institutions due to “verbal abuses”. In the meantime, it was becoming clear that General Vouillemin was not a neutral translator. In his own publications on the Vienna Circle, often published in religiously inspired journals, Vouillemin argued that the claims of the Vienna Circle were “in accordance with catholic dogma” (Vouillemin 1935b, 253; see also Vouillemin 1924; 1927). Vouillemin understood logical empiricist philosophy as a means to save religious themes from philosophical and metaphysical criticism, arguing that logical empiricism internally “calls for the notions of Soul and God” (Vouillemin 1935b, 229). As a result, logical empiricist philosophy was associated with a number of theological debates, which provoked responses from French catholic philosophers, such as Yves Simon (Simon 1935). In the prefaces of a number of these Hermann translations, Boll already added passages where he tried to distance the Vienna Circle from such theological debates: “Granted, Philip Frank, like Laplace, alluded to an 'infinite intelligence', but both in an ironic manner; moreover Frank goes beyond Laplace, since it is no longer just an ‘unnecessary hypothesis’, but a supposition to which the logical analysis of language denies any meaning” (Boll, 1934a: 8; see also 1934b).

As to be expected, Boll rejected Vouillemin as the translator of further treaties by the Vienna Circle (Schöttler 2015, 227). Vouillemin, on his turn, started to contradict and criticize Boll: “The comments given by M. Marcel Boll to the translations I have made of some doctrinal statements (in the editions for Hermann) contrast gravely with the spirit of the School” (Vouillemin 1935b, 230n2). Within the French context, these developments did not benefit the image of logical empiricism as a broad collective of intellectuals determined to unify science and society. Hardly any reviews of these translations are found in the major French journals at that time (with a few exceptions such as Metzger 1935a; Stern 1935). The choice of translators proved detrimental to the scientific, non-eristic aspiration of logical empiricist philosophers. Neurath himself was shocked when he learned about Vouillemin’s attempt to recruit logical positivism for Catholicism.[[24]](#endnote-24) Finally, the loyalty and usefulness of Rougier became increasingly doubtful. During the organization of the 1935 conference, Neurath and Rougier were already openly in conflict. In later years, Neurath became frustrated with Rougier’s methods: “Rougier has, I find, incredibly dictatorial manners, when he thinks he can afford it, and I am glad that our next congress will not take place in Paris.”[[25]](#endnote-25)

Due to the fact that the French representatives had their problems, and their internal collaboration had largely broken down, Frank and Neurath started to look for alternative allies. Frank suggested to sidetrack Rougier and involve the *Centre de synthèse*, created by Henri Berr in 1925, which he found more befitting than Rougier: “I would very much advise you to instigate interest from the ''Centre de synthèse'' for our Encyclopedia Congress. Do not count on Rougier, who always seeks to isolate us in Paris and to monopolize it for himself. [...] This ‘Centre’ has in some ways similar encyclopedic tendencies. [...].”[[26]](#endnote-26) Their journal *Revue de synthèse* at that time had similar intentions to *Erkenntnis* (Schöttler 2006) and its secretary, Robert Bouvier, published the first French book on Mach (Bouvier 1923). From 1935 onwards Neurath would correspond with Bouvier about a possible interaction between the Synthèse group and the Unity of Science movement. He was interested to understand how French philosophers from various groups understood the Unity of Science movement. After the Paris conference Bouvier reported to Neurath that the opinion of French philosophers towards German epistemologists cannot be formulated in “a general way” (*d’une forme générale*).[[27]](#endnote-27) Later, he specified that the French are “very individualistic in their philosophies” and, as a consequence, Neurath’s search for clear-cut cooperative alliances in France would be difficult.[[28]](#endnote-28) Neurath wrote that he was particularly interested to find out “how Abel Rey, Langevin and Boll stand toward the Vienna Circle, and to hear about the resistance of those who are relatively close to us.”[[29]](#endnote-29) At the time, Neurath was already organizing a second international conference to be held in Copenhagen, and he hoped that “some French would come, so that the initial contact could be expanded.”[[30]](#endnote-30) No further contact emerged. Unlike Rougier, Bouvier did not share the broader political intentions to transform society which had unified Rougier and logical empiricists despite their disagreements.

Another attempt to procure new allies can be found in Neurath’s correspondence with Hélène Metzger, who wrote negative articles on the Vienna school for *Archeion* (Metzger 1935a,b). Metzger complained that the logical empiricists lacked an eye for the history of philosophy and science: they discarded Descartes, Malebranche and Aristotle in the abyss of metaphysics. According to Metzger, logical empiricists attempted to reinvent the wheel. Reichenbach is “less revolutionary or novel than he imagines himself to be” and Carnap should study the history of philosophy before publishing novel works (Metzger 1935a, 333). In her correspondence with Neurath, which stretches from 1936 until May 1939, Metzger often repeated that the outright rejection of metaphysics could not be accepted by many French philosophers.[[31]](#endnote-31) The Vienna school had systematically neglected perspectives on science that show the fruitfulness of metaphysical reasoning on scientific progress, like the work Meyerson or Brunschvicg.[[32]](#endnote-32) She also scorned Neurath’s incessant desire to find out how the French epistemologists as a group responded to the work of the logical empiricists. “In France, there are no philosophical parties. A philosophical party would necessarily be authoritarian and fascist.”[[33]](#endnote-33) Similar to Bouvier’s resistance, Metzger did not welcome Neurath’s broader social intentions to form a collaborative community.

Metzger shared Neurath’s broader political concerns that certain forms of reasoning were detrimental to the political sphere, but she explicitly rejected a united, “scientific” attitude of philosophers as the solution for these social developments. Whereas Neurath and Rougier interpreted their international gathering as a new form of philosophy, aimed at an improvement of society, Metzger understood it as an illegitimate restriction of philosophy. She wrote: “I would be happy if philosophers and intellectuals collaborated with each other instead of hating each other. I desire that no domain be closed off from philosophy and that there be no barrier between anyone who thinks seriously. But, do not enclose thinkers in a narrow definition. Investigate their work.”[[34]](#endnote-34)

Throughout the correspondence, Neurath attempted to turn Metzger into an ally. He hinted that “despite the absence in France of a tendency to form groups (…) one can still delineate a direction of development which is close to logical empiricism”.[[35]](#endnote-35) In his last letter of 1939, he still saw the potential for a reconciliation: “It is necessary to stress the Scientific Attitude and to highlight the significance of an integral scientific attitude. I think we agree on this.”[[36]](#endnote-36)

Such agreement was all but clear. Many French philosophers opposed the creation of a unified, international collaboration, whereas this was exactly what had brought Neurath and Rougier together. Bouvier, Berr, Rey, Langevin, the central figures of the *Revue*, would never show up to conferences outside France, neither do Metzger, Bachelard, Brunschvicg or Lalande.

# **The French Counter-Alliance**

In preparation for the 9th World Congress of Philosophy of 1937 in Paris, the *Congrès Descartes*, Rougier and Neurath vehemently debated how the project of the *Philosophie Scientifique/Unity of Science* community had to be represented at the conference. Rougier warned Neurath: “[French philosophers] are determined to represent the Descartes conference as a counter-offensive to the Vienna group”.[[37]](#endnote-37) He advised Neurath to avoid any hint that their movement would separate itself from the other philosophical debates. This could only confirm the prejudices of other French philosophers concerning logical empiricism. Instead, Rougier advised to “prepare themselves for the attack and for a response.”[[38]](#endnote-38) As a consequence, Rougier arranged that the speakers of their movement were spread out in the program.[[39]](#endnote-39) When Neurath aimed to have their contributions more focused within the program, Rougier became upset and said that the French philosophers would look down on the organization of a conference within a conference.[[40]](#endnote-40) Neurath, in turn, protested that there should be a *third* conference for the unity of science, and not simply the presence of the Unity of Science community within the Descartes conference.[[41]](#endnote-41)

Eventually, they settled on a middle ground, the organization of a third conference beforehand which would solely be concerned with the development of Neurath’s Encyclopedia of Unified Science project. However, Rougier was extremely displeased with this solution, concluding that “all discussion must end; it is useless to write anymore to you, because you do not listen”.[[42]](#endnote-42) Nonetheless, Rougier and Neurath maintained their correspondence afterward. Neurath was not disheartened by personal and professional differences as long as there was a common will to collaborate and exchange ideas. Just before the 1937 gathering he wrote to Rougier: “I hope that the Unity of Science movement has created some kind of Commonwealth of Unified Science where many groups and persons, who all maintain their own freedom of decision, are prepared to collaborate.”[[43]](#endnote-43) In the spirit of collaboration Neurath and Rougier, although no longer having any concrete organizational commitments, remained in close contact with one another after the 1937 conference. In May 1938 Rougier reported that, to his surprise, French epistemologists had finally started organizing themselves, all be it in reaction against the scientific philosophy of the logical empiricists. In a letter to Reichenbach he reported the new developments in detail:

Here the news relating to scientific philosophy is as follows: a French group ([Jean-Louis] Destouches, [Jean?] Mariani, [Maurice] Frechet, [Léon] Brillouin, me etc.) and Swiss (Gonseth, [Rolin] Wavre, etc.) decided to meet in Brittany at the beginning of September to discuss the theses of the Vienna School and write a manifesto that would be clarified by those of what might be called the French school. Philipp Frank asks me to go. I'm letting you know in case you're in these parts of France in September.[[44]](#endnote-44)

To both Neurath and Reichenbach, Rougier wrote in positive terms about this French initiative, and described it as an opportunity for more sustained interaction with the French philosophers.[[45]](#endnote-45) “At last, the dynamic that I wanted to launch with the 1935 conference begins to create its effect.”[[46]](#endnote-46) The conference in Brittany never took place. But in September 1938 a number of French scholars would come together at Amersfoort in the Netherlands (Bayer 1939). Ferdinand Gonseth, the central organizer, wrote about this conference: "We were quite a large group, from which I still recall Bachelard and his daughter Suzanne, [Marcel] Barzin, [Raymond] Bayer, [Eugène] Dupréel, [Jean-Louis] Destouches, Paulette Février, [Julius] Ebbinghaus, [Alfred] Tarski, [Władysław] Tatarkiewicz, and especially Jean Cavaillès." (quoted in Emery 2000, 177-178) Organized by the newly created *Institut International de Collaboration Philosophique*,[[47]](#endnote-47) the theme of the conference was “modern conceptions of reason.” Gonseth concluded the conference with a call to start a French philosophy of science from a dynamic understanding of science, informed by the practices and results of the sciences themselves (Bayer 1939, 65). After the gathering Rougier asked Neurath to contact Gonseth with a proposition to publish in *Erkenntnis* in order to promote contact between Gonseth’s efforts and the Unity of Science movement.[[48]](#endnote-48) These efforts, however, remained mute due to the initiation of the Second World War.

# Rougier and the Renewal of Liberalism

The 1935 and 1937 conferences had not produced the broader intellectual culture that Rougier had aspired to create by collaborating with logical empiricists from Germany and Austria. After 1935 Rougier initiated an alternative project embodying once more the ambition for social transformation: the renewal of liberalism. Rougier later claimed that this interest in economical questions dated back to his diplomatic mission in the Soviet Union (Audier 2012, 98-99). His intention was to revive liberalism as a viable alternative to the mystiques of both socialism and fascism. Rougier was in close contact with the European network of liberal thinkers, such as Lionel Robbins, Wilhelm Röpke, Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich von Hayek, Jacques Rueff and Maurice Allais, whom he believed had similar ambitions. This revival of liberalism was supported by institutes such as the Rockefeller Foundation and the International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC). The latter was created in 1926 at the *Palais Royal* in Paris (where the opening speeches of the 1935 conference were also held). Together with Louis Marlio and others, Rougier also created the *Centre international d’études pour la renovation du libéralisme* in 1938 (Audier 2016), a center that only existed for two years since it was immediately closed once the Germans invaded Paris. More important than the center itself was Rougier’s role in the organization of the Walter Lippmann Colloquium in Paris in August 1938, of which Rougier edited the proceedings in 1939 (Denord 2001).

Rougier encountered the book, *The Good Society,* by the American journalist Walter Lippmann and was thrilled. It affirmed his own view that the market economy was not a spontaneous result from a natural order, but a product of a legal order in which state intervention plays a crucial role. Rougier made a very similar claim in *Les mystiques économiques*, a book that itself was soon considered to be one of the central publications in this revival of liberalism (Piatier 1938). Rougier aimed to develop a new form of liberalism, which he initially called *libéralisme constructif,* but would soon be known under the banner of neoliberalism (Denord 2001, 12).[[49]](#endnote-49) This liberalism was an application of Rougier’s conventionalism. The problem with traditional liberalism was its assumption of a natural, and thus metaphysical ground for the free market. Rougier’s alternative started from the central assumption that the free market is a convention, not a given, and that state intervention is needed, but in a particular way:

Scientific truth is acquired forever; but the success of a policy is fleeting and successful institutions today will be out of date. […] The liberal doctrine of ‘*laisser faire, laisser passer’* has favored economic progress by stimulating competition: it is now outdated, because free competition is always accompanied by poor workmanship, waste, crises of overproduction, economic wars, which control by the state and an international organization, entrusted to competent agents, could all make disappear. In practice, everything is revisable, nothing is definitive, because the acts, and the ideas which are the motives of our acts, have unexpected and incalculable repercussions, which unfold as the conditions of the social life evolve. (Rougier 1920a, 46)

His own constructive liberalism assumed no natural order, but rather a *code de la route* that directs capitalism on the right track. Just like traffic rules, one has to install a number of rules governing the free market. These rules should evolve together with society and technology. Intervention is thus allowed: “Being liberal is, thus, by no means being conservative in the sense of maintaining the *de facto* privileges resulting from past legislation. It is, to the contrary, being essentially progressive, in the sense of a perpetual adaptation of the legal order to the scientific discoveries, to the progress of organization and economic technique, to the changes in the structure of society, to the demands of contemporary conscience” (Rougier 1939, 99). Rougier’s activities between 1937 and 1939 focused on bringing his conventionalist understanding of liberalism to effect in society. This implied the creation of institutions and communities who could embody the constant need to adapt the economic order to social needs. Just as his efforts to organize an international movement to renew philosophy and its relation to society, the renewal of liberalism was meant to translate Rougier’s philosophical conventionalism and positivism into concrete social effects

As part of this new agenda, Rougier invited Walter Lippmann to Paris in 1938 and Lippman’s book was translated as *La Cité Libre* in 1938, with the publisher *Librairie de Médicis,* which was newly created in 1937 by Marie-Thèrèse Génin. This publisher was a strong ally in the neoliberal cause and favored a similar tactic to the one used for the propagation of logical empiricism in France. The *Librairie de Médicis* published numerous neoliberal and anti-communist books. Rougier played a crucial role in the selection of translations and the writing of prefaces (Denord 2001, 18; Berndt and Marion 2006, 49).For Rougier this neoliberal project was both an academic reflection and a political front. The aim was to influence public opinion through the translation of books, the writing of articles, and engaging in polemics in newspapers. On 23 June 1938, Rougier wrote to Neurath that he would promote the Unity of Science movement during the Lippman conference and search a capable author to write a volume on economy for the Encyclopedia of Unified Science – news which Neurath warmly welcomed.[[50]](#endnote-50) Due to the war, a potential cross-over between the institutional efforts of logical empiricism and the renewal of liberalism never happened.

# Rougier and the Second World War

When the war broke out in France in May 1939, Rougier’s various attempts to form a community of philosophers engaged towards a reform of society had not engendered great success: his alliance with the logical empiricists from Germany and Austria had not resulted in a closer collaboration between the German- and French-speaking intellectual world, and his renewal of liberalism was still in its infancy. However, unlike his logical empiricist colleagues who had mostly fled to the United States and became increasingly concerned with purely logical problems, Rougier saw the unique situation of the war as an opportunity to engage himself even more in the socio-political problems that presented themselves.

When France surrendered in 1940, Rougier did not join the resistance like Cavaillès or Lautman, but attempted to weigh on the Vichy regime through political interventions. This would eventually lead Rougier to publish the book that ruined his career: *Mission secrète à Londres. Les accords Pétain-Churchill* (1946). In this book Rougier claimed to have executed a secret mission in name of the Vichy regime to London to negotiate between Great Britain and Vichy France.

As described in detail by Mehlman (2000), the results for Rougier were disastrous: The English government formally denied that such accords were ever made and Rougier was ostracized in France due to his alleged collaboration. After his official conviction in 1947 he was relieved from his academic position. But what had persuaded Rougier to do these political interventions and to write that book? Rougier did not act because of a political ideology, such as sympathy with Nazism. His actions should be understood as an attempt to extend his positivist philosophy to the political sphere: do not let yourself get caught by a mystique, but act with the practical improvement of human lives in mind. As Mehlman summarizes, all of Rougier’s actions during the war were inspired by one issue: “the hunger induced by the Allied blockade of France was wreaking a demographic catastrophe that would ultimately be of greater consequence than any political victory the Allies might achieve.” (Mehlman 2000, 119) When France surrendered, and the Vichy state was erected, the Allies installed a blockade in the Mediterranean Sea to prevent the French fleet and colonies from falling into German hands. Only by starving France, so it was claimed, could one defeat Nazi Germany. Rougier, however, feared that this would be nothing but “peace built on a children’s graveyard.” (Rougier 1947, 53)

After exploring possibilities with the British consul in Geneva, Rougier proposed to Pétain to to negotiate with the British government. According to Rougier, Pétain agreed to this and Rougier reached London on 22 October 1940, where he was welcomed by Sir Alexander Cadogan and Lord Halifax. On 25 October he met with Churchill himself. Rougier and Churchill reached, according to the former, a ‘gentlemen’s agreement’: France would neither surrender their fleet nor their colonial outputs to the Axis powers, whereas the British would lift the blockade and stop the *ad hominem* attacks on BBC radio on Pétain. Military actions between Gaullist and Vichy troops should moreover be prevented and Rougier was not to disclose anything about this meeting to the Gaullist camp.

Rougier then returned to France, through Lisbon and Algiers, where he met Maxime Weygand, the Delegate-General in French North Africa for Vichy France and briefed him about the new agreement. On 8 November Rougier was back in Vichy, handing over the documents to Pétain. Afterward Rougier moved to Geneva, where in December he received the news of a fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation to go to New York, with a two-year contract at the New School for Social Research (Berndt and Marion 2006, 58).

In New York, and especially at the New School, Rougier encountered a radically different context. Most French émigrés were Gaullist, members of *Free France* and proponents of the blockade in their ideological struggle against Vichy France.[[51]](#endnote-51) In 1941 the *École Libre des Hautes Etudes* was created as a separate institution, but linked to the New School (Zolberg 1998; Loyer 2005). Despite claiming to be non-political, the *École Libre* was *de facto* linked with the Gaullist cause, perhaps best shown by the fact that the American authorities wanted to register the school under the Foreign Agents Registration Act. This resulted in a controversy within the school, and the neothomist Jacques Maritain resigned as secretary-general, but the school was saved in the hands of a new generation of scholars, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss.

As to be expected, this resulted in several conflicts between the school and Rougier. Rougier became *persona non grata* by refusing to become a member of the *Comité Français de Libération Nationale,* which was a condition to join the *École libre.* Similarly, he refused to join movements such as *Free France* or *France Forever.* In November 1941 he had to justify his decision in a letter to the president of the *École Libre,* Henri Focillon. Rougier claimed that he refused because: (a) he did not want to break all diplomatic contacts between Washington and Vichy France, thereby playing into the hands of the Germans; (b) the main focus should be sending food to the children of France, to prevent a demographic disaster from occurring; (c) the responsibility of the defeat of France is not that of the Vichy regime alone, but of the whole of the Allied forces.

Focillon was displeased by Rougier’s answer. In his reply, Rougier suggested that the *Ecole libre* proved to be not so free after all, since “it demonstrates through its recruitment criteria that, in the guise of an institution of higher learning, it is intent on being an instrument of political propaganda” (Mehlman 2000, 131). Rougier would eventually find a new job at St. John’s College.

The subsequent years were less eventful for Rougier, although he kept pleading for lifting the blockade. Soon after the war was over, Rougier returned to the spotlights. This had to do with the fate of Pierre-Étienne Flandin, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Vichy France and for a brief time Prime Minister under Pétain. Under the pressure from the Germans, he was later fired and fled to Algeria where he was arrested in 1943 and, after 26 months in prison, was tried. Flandin claimed to have only accepted the job in the Vichy regime if Pétain could show documents proving that there were negotiations with the British government, which Pétain did. At the trial, however, proof for such negotiations was lacking and the British government publicly denied their existence.

In response to this Rougier made his secret mission public, first in the form of newspaper articles and later in his infamous book. The result was a heated debate in *The New York Times* and elsewhere between Rougier and the British government, who officially denied the existence of such negotiations once again. Two questions were at stake: (a) whether such negotiations between Britain and Vichy France actually took place and (b) if so, whether Rougier did in fact play a role in them. The existence of these negotiations was soon accepted. But what remained contested was Rougier’s role in this. For instance, it was seen as more plausible that Jacques Chevalier, a philosopher and colleague of Rougier at Bensançon, but Vichy Minister of Education as well, had been the real negotiator for Vichy France. The French publisher Paul Winkler was cited in the *Times* (July 29, 1945) as saying that he "couldn't understand why a university professor should be entrusted with a diplomatic mission" (Mehlman 2000, 136). Others argued that the naïve Rougier was used by both sides, by Pétain to distract the British and by the British to try to persuade General Weygand to join the Allied cause.

What complicated this affair further is that Rougier, who published the documents he had as proof of this secret mission, forged parts of the first page of it, adding the name of Churchill. It is unclear why he did so, but, when this was revealed, it had severe repercussions for his further reputation (Berndt and Marion 2006, 71). This book would haunt Rougier for the rest of his life. Rougier lost his position in Besançon after his appearance before two commissions in 1948. The first commission acquitted Rougier from all charges, but the second commission sentenced Rougier on two grounds: (a) For his unwarranted attempt to intervene in diplomatic discussions, running the risk, by indiscreet pressure, of hampering the effort of the Allied forces; and (b) for helping the enemy cause and hampering the French war effort by criticizing the *Comité Français de Libération Nationale.* The evidence for both accusations was a letter between Churchill and Halifax, a telegram and an article published in *Pour la victoire* in 1944. These all dealt with Rougier’s single obsession: the humanitarian effort of food scarcity and the blockade. As a consequence, Rougier was labeled as an *épuré* and was ostracized from academia.

After the war, Rougier’s only remaining intellectual connections, which would allow him to publish in their journals, were far-right thinkers and other épurés. Contacts with American logical empiricism were scarce and Rougier was no longer welcome in neoliberal circles.[[52]](#endnote-52) His attendance at the first meeting of the Mont Pèlerin Society was vetoed by Lionel Robbins in 1947 (Steiner 2007: 65-66).[[53]](#endnote-53)

Moreover, from the 1960s on especially, thinkers such as Alain de Benoist, linked to the *Nouvelle Droite* and the *Groupement de Recherches et d’Études sur la Civilisation Européenne* (GRECE), adopted Rougier’s criticisms of the mystiques of Christianity and egalitarianism for their own agendas (Dard 2007). Rougier's work was often discussed in their journal *Europe-Action* (created in 1963), he was a board member of GRECE's journal *Novelle École* (created in 1968) and would publish books with their publishing house (e.g. Rougier 1979). De Benoist would also reissue a number of Rougier’s books, mainly his criticisms of Christianity, but also his *La Mystique démocratique.* As a result, Rougier’s reputation and publications became linked to these movements, including his earlier works and actions, which were often reinterpreted from this novel perspective.

# Conclusion

In his autobiography Rudolf Carnap wrote that scientific humanism was the value-position which many logical empiricist philosophers shared, despite their theoretical differences. According to this humanism, human beings are themselves responsible for the improvement of the conditions of their life. This deliberate self-improvement should rely on the acquisition of scientific knowledge of the world to improve “the internal and external situation of one’s own life” (Carnap 1963, 82-83). As Carnap already emphasized in the 1930s, logical empiricist philosophers were not indifferent to how people in society came to have their values: “We reject the narcotic (of philosophical and religious metaphysics to discuss values). However, if someone else prefers to enjoy their pleasures, then we cannot refute this theoretically. But this does not mean that we are indifferent to how people decide on this matter” (Carnap 1934/2013, 179).

As was witnessed by the various opening addresses of the 1935 Paris gathering, the activity of scientific philosophy was conceived by the actors involved within the broader, political context: it aimed to demote the use of religion and metaphysics within all forms of reasoning, including the political sphere. This aim also drove all of Rougier’s activities in the 1930s. The organization of the Unity of Science conference and the Walter Lippman conference were consistent attempts of Rougier to promote a new international, collaborative effort to ban all forms of religious, metaphysical or ideological decision-making from the political sphere and replace it with decisions based on scientific knowledge. Rougier’s political negotiations during the Second World War had a similar aim: to abandon the ideological conflict between Gaullists and supporters of Pétain and focus attention on rescuing French people from starvation. At the end of his life, Rougier made clear that his philosophy should be conceived not only as a theoretical activity, but also always as a practical one, as a way of life. “The scientific method in philosophy implies an entire way of life: the habit to justify one’s believes through observations and inferences as impersonal as possible. (…) Only this habit can produce an agreement between minds, diminish fanaticism, establish the largest capacity of sympathy and mutual comprehension” (Rougier 1963, 127-128).

It is wrong to think of Louis Rougier as the French representative of logical empiricism who failed to incorporate French epistemologists within the broader network of the Unity of Science movement – just one more exemplary case that proves the philosophical isolation of French intellectuals before and after the Second World War. As we have shown, Rougier’s activities are exemplary of the political context within which many other scientific philosophers in the 1930s equally situated their work. The positivism which Rougier practiced cannot be conceived merely on a theoretical level as the defense of particular theses, it was equally a form of action, from the organization of international collaboration, over the revival of our motivations to desire a liberal democracy, to secret negotiations during a time of war.

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1. Both authors contributed equally to this publication. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. We have translated all original texts, including correspondence, by German and French authors to English. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Rougier’s philosophy has been the object of a number of special issues of *Philosophia Scientiae*, among others “Louis Rougier : vie et œuvre d'un philosophe engage” (2006), an issue that published a manuscript of Rougier on Torricelli’s experiments (Mazauric, 2010) and more recently as part of the issue “Sur la philosophie scientifique et l’unité de la science” (2018). Articles in these issues have focused on themes such as scholasticism (Courcier, 2006; Cesalli, 2006; Libera, 2006), history of science (Nabonnand, 2006) and philosophy of science (Hyder, 2006; Lacki, 2006; Pont, 2006). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. In France, conventionalism was not limited to the work of Poincaré, but was also found in the work of authors such as Pierre Duhem, Gaston Milhaud (Rougier's original supervisor) and Édouard Le Roy. On the general context of French conventionalism, see Brenner (2003). On the specific relation of French conventionalism to the Vienna Circle, see Brenner (2001). Nevertheless, it is clear that for Rougier the main reference was Poincaré, shown by the fact that his secondary thesis (Rougier 1920b), as well as his first publications (Rougier 1913; 1914) centered on Poincaré and that at a certain moment he wanted to create a counterpart of *Verein Ernst Mach* named *Société Henri Poincaré* (see Padovani 2006, 230-231). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Rougier to Schlick, 6 November 1932, Nr. 114, Vienna Circle Archives, Noord-Hollands Archief Haarlem. Quoted by permission of the Wiener Kreis Stichting, Amsterdam. All rights reserved. (Henceforth VCA). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Rougier to Reichenbach, 6 August 1932, HR 14-59-20, Hans Reichenbach Papers, Archives of Scientific Philosophy, Hillman Library, University of Pittsburgh. (Henceforth ASP). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Rougier to Reichenbach, 6 November 1932, HR 014-59-16, ASP. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Reichenbach to Rougier, 2 December 1932, HR 14-59-15, ASP. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Rougier to Reichenbach, 5 January 1933, HR 14-59-14, ASP. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Rougier to Reichenbach, 16 July 1935, HR 3-54 / Rougier to Neurath, 14 November 1933, HR 3-54, ASP. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Frank to Neurath, July 1935, Nr. 235, VCA. To explain why Bachelard was not to become a central ally for the Vienna Circle in France, some scholars have invoked philosophical differences. Bachelard, for instance, never abandons a form of psychologism, and constantly gives psychological explanations for certain arguments, concepts and beliefs (Leroux 2002, 12). This is true, but Rougier was also interested to show the psychological origin of the illusions in metaphysical statements (Rougier 1963, 121). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Bachelard to Neurath, 20 August 1934, Nr. 214, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Schöttler is amazed that so much attention has gone to Rougier and not to Boll who is, according to Schöttler, closer in his political ideology to the Vienna Circle: “clearly opposed to the position of Louis Rougier, a professing neo‑liberal who would gradually shift towards the right, while Boll, as a socialist (or left‑liberal in American terms), stood on the same ground as most members of the Vienna Circle, who were, as notably Carnap, Frank and Neurath, partisans of democratic socialism.” (Schöttler 2015, 224) [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Neurath to Rougier, 28 November 1934, Nr. 294, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Neurath to Rougier, 18 September 1934, Nr. 294, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Rougier to Neurath, 11 February 1935, Nr. 294, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Rougier to Neurath, 7 June 1935, Nr. 295, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Neurath to Rougier, 3 April 1935, Nr. 294, VCA [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Rougier to Neurath, 3 April 1935, Nr. 294, VCA [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. This is the number that Rougier himself gives in the preface to the Conference proceedings (1936b, 3). [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Neurath to Rougier, 15 September 1934, Nr. 294, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. More specifically, these scholars were: Lecomte du Noüy, Robert Gibrat, Louis Massignon, Paul Masson-Oursel, Jules Richard, Claude Chevalley, Georges Matisse, Paul Renaud, Gérard Petiau, Jean-Louis Destouches, Jacques Métadier, Georges Bouligand and Antoinette Reymond. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Rougier to Neurath, 4 July 1935, Nr. 295; Boll to Neurath, 3 July 1935, Nr. 216, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Neurath to Frank, 25 July 1935, Nr. 235, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Neurath to Frank, 4 June 1937, Nr. 236, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Frank to Neurath, 29 May 1937, Nr. 296 VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Bouvier to Neurath, 29 February 1936, Nr. 216 VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Bouvier to Neurath, March 1936, Nr. 216, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Neurath to Bouvier, 12 March 1936, Nr. 216, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Neurath to Bouvier, 6 May 1936, Nr. 216, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Metzger to Neurath, 15 July 1937, Nr. 267, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Metzger to Neurath, 25 June 1936, Nr. 267, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Metzger to Neurath, 19 July 1936, Nr. 267, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Metzger to Neurath, 8 December 1937, Nr. 267, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Neurath to Metzger, 9 July 1936, Nr. 267, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Neurath to Metzger, 11 January 1939, Nr. 267, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Rougier to Neurath, 22 June 1936, Nr. 296, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Rougier to Neurath, 22 June 1936, Nr. 296, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Rougier to Neurath, 25 May 1937, Nr. 296, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Rougier to Neurath, 30 April 1937, Nr. 296, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Neurath to Rougier, 6 May 1937, Nr. 296, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Rougier to Neurath, 7 June 1937, Nr. 296, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Neurath to Rougier, 26 July 1937, Nr. 296, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Rougier to Reichenbach, 25 May 1938, HR 13-54-23, ASP. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Rougier to Neurath, 17 June 1938, Nr. 296, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Rougier to Reichenbach, 6 June 1938, HR 13-54-19, ASP. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. The institute was created at the *Congrès Descartes* in 1937 with Léon Robin, a retired Sorbonne professor in Ancient philosophy, as its president and Raymond Bayer as the secretary. The link with Amersfoort was Evert Willem Beth. Plans for the institute already went back to Ake Petzäll who took the initiative for this institute at the Prague conference and would even move to Paris in 1937. Other members of the institute are, among others, Emile Bréhier, Dupréel and Enriques. It would even be recognized by UNESCO as the official organ of international philosophy. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Rougier to Neurath, 22 November 1938, 30 December 1938. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. The origin of the term neoliberalism is unclear. It has been suggested that it was coined by Rougier, in analogy with logical positivism as neopositivism (Reinhoudt and Audier 2017, 6). Another hypothesis is that it was a response to the ‘neosocialism’ as developed by the French socialist party, inspired by the Belgian socialist Henri de Man, arguing that the original end goal of socializing the means of production should be abandoned in favor of an endless planning of economic activity by the state. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Rougier to Neurath, 23 June 1938; Neurath to Rougier, 4 July 1938, Nr. 296, VCA. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. However, Rougier was not the only one who cared about food scarcity in France. The most dramatic case is probably that of Simone Weil. Rougier was a friend of both her and her brother, André. Simone tragically died in a British hospital in August 1943 since she refused to eat more than a French child under the occupation (Mehlman 2000, 117). André informed Rougier about this sad news and instructed him to inform her parents, who lived in New York. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. During the war Rougier had no known contact with his logical empiricist colleagues. On 26 August 1952, Rougier wrote to Reichenbach that he could not meet Reichenbach during his European journey. This was apparently Rougier’s last interaction with American logical empiricism. (HR 38-08-66, ASP) [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Only ten years later, through the help of Friedrich Hayek was Rougier allowed to join the society. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)