



## The Vienna Circle and its Critical Reception of Oswald Spengler

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*The Vienna Circle was an influential group of philosophers in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its members were dedicated to do philosophy and to conduct research in accordance with the guidelines of the scientific world-conception. For some of them, Oswald Spengler was a dangerous antagonist due to the success and influence of his metaphysical philosophy of history in *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* and other works. In this paper, I will explore systematically the Circle's critical reception of Spengler regarding his methodological approaches, ontological positions, and political philosophy. I will, thereby, also evaluate the criticism brought forth against Spengler.*

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## **I. Introduction**

The Vienna Circle (in short “Circle”) was a group of philosophers and scientists who frequently met in Vienna between 1924 and 1936. Its members worked in various academic fields including mathematics, logic, physics, economics, history, sociology, and psychology. What unites them is their agreement on certain guidelines for proper scientific research and philosophical work subsumed under the term “the scientific world-conception” (henceforth “SWC”). According to the SWC, scientific knowledge is the only kind of knowledge to understand the world. Furthermore, every theory or theoretical statement must only be based on empirical evidence (expressed in empirical statements) and logically sound reasoning. As part of that, the members of the Circle demanded conceptual and linguistic clarity for philosophical work and scientific research. Lastly and most importantly, the Circle explicitly rejected metaphysical theories and statements because they violate the aforementioned guidelines in some way or another.<sup>1</sup> The SWC was explicitly formulated in the brochure

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed summary of the SWC, see Donata Romizi, “The Vienna Circle’s ‘Scientific World-Conception’: Philosophy of Science in the Political Arena,” *HOPOS: The Journal of the International Society for the History of Philosophy of Science*, 2 (2) (2012), 213-216.

All English quotes in this article are translations by the author. Bibliographic citations refer to the original text.

*Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung. Der Wiener Kreis* (henceforth “*Manifesto*”), a largely independent declaration of the Circle’s left wing, written by Neurath, Carnap, and Hans Hahn in 1929.

However, as Uebel claims, the Circle was not a monolithic movement but a forum of controversial discussion concerning the question how exactly the SWC has to be interpreted.<sup>2</sup> Whilst Moritz Schlick and Rudolf Carnap, for instance, agreed that philosophy should exist as a method for the logical analysis of scientific statements,<sup>3</sup> Otto Neurath wanted to ban philosophy once and for all in order to ensure the flourishing of the sciences.<sup>4</sup> These three protagonists of the Circle also disagreed about the question which form, content, and status the empirical statements representing the bare empirical evidence should have and how theory-laden scientific statements can be based on empirical statements in order to be verified.<sup>5</sup> And whilst Schlick, belonging to the moderate wing of the Circle, regarded the fight against metaphysics as a fight with the weapon of philosophical analysis and scientific research only, Neurath and Carnap, belonging to the Circle’s left wing, claimed that this fight must be accompanied by a systematic change of the social and economic situation of the people.<sup>6</sup>

The conflict regarding this latter issue is shown in the controversies around the publication of the *Manifesto*. Other than the aforementioned scientific principles, the authors of the *Manifesto* also sought to promote the unification of all sciences (*Einheitswissenschaften*) and claimed that the theoretic work of scientists must be accompanied by a reorganization of economic and social circumstances with the final goal of a unified mankind.<sup>7</sup> Karl Menger and Kurt Gödel complained about the collectivist tone of the *Manifesto* and the announcement

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Uebel, “Anti-Foundationalism and the Vienna Circle’s Revolution in Philosophy,” *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 47 (3) (1996), 415.

<sup>3</sup> Moritz Schlick, “Die Wende der Philosophie,” in *Moritz Schlick Gesamtausgabe, Abschnitt I Band 6. Die Wiener Zeit. Aufsätze, Beiträge, Rezensionen 1926–1936*, ed. Johannes Friedl and Heiner Rutte, (Wien-New York: Springer, [1926] 2008), 218-219, and Rudolf Carnap, “Überwindung der Metaphysik durch logische Analyse der Sprache,” *Erkenntnis* 2 (1931): 237. It is worth mentioning that Carnap’s attitude towards philosophy changed after the triumph of fascism over the fragile democracies in Europe. In the lecture *Philosophie – Opium für die Gebildeten?* from 1934, Carnap warned that not just metaphysical philosophy, but philosophy as such can distract people from rational thinking and political activity. After his emigration to the US in 1936, his criticism against the philosophy changed again to a criticism against illogical thinking. See Christian Damböck, “Die Entwicklung von Carnaps Antimetaphysik, vor und nach der Emigration. Oder: Gibt es eine politische Philosophie des Logischen Empirismus?” in *Historische Erfahrung und begriffliche Transformation. Deutschsprachige Philosophie im amerikanischen Exil 1933–1945*, ed. Max Beck and Nicholas Coomann (Wien: LIT, 2018), 48-49.

<sup>4</sup> Otto Neurath, “Einheitswissenschaft und Empirismus der Gegenwart,” *Erkenntnis* 2 (1932), 310.

<sup>5</sup> See Thomas Uebel, “Anti-Foundationalism and the Vienna Circle’s Revolution in Philosophy,” on the protocol sentence debate and anti-foundationalism in the works of Schlick, Neurath, and Carnap.

<sup>6</sup> See Anne Siegetsleitner, *Ethik und Moral im Wiener Kreis. Zur Geschichte eines engagierten Humanismus* (Wien: Böhlau, 2014), 223-226 for a summary of the disagreements between the moderate and the left wing.

<sup>7</sup> Otto Neurath, “Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung. Der Wiener Kreis,” in *Wiener Kreis. Texte zur wissenschaftlichen Weltauffassung von Rudolf Carnap, Otto Neurath, Moritz Schlick, Philipp Frank, Hans Hahn, Karl Menger, Edgar Zilsel und Gustav Bergmann*, ed. Michael Stöltzner and Thomas Uebel (Hamburg: Meiner, [1929] 2006), 10.

that it was written in the name of all the members of the Circle. Schlick, to whom the Manifesto was dedicated,<sup>8</sup> similarly criticized its dogmatic and advertising formulations. Considering his general conflict with Neurath in terms of their political positions, it is likely that Schlick rejected the socialist and politicizing tendencies that Neurath expressed in these passages.<sup>9</sup> However, the moderate wing also held political positions, not dissimilar from those in the *Manifesto*. Schlick, for instance, defended clearly normative ethical positions and even a political philosophy about the form and the purpose of states in some of his works.

Against the background of the scientific and political positions of the Circle, it does not come as a surprise that many of them criticized Oswald Spengler's project of a metaphysical philosophy of history that he realized in his 1918 (1922) opus magnum *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (henceforth "*Der Untergang*") and his 1931 book *Der Mensch und die Technik*. Victor Kraft criticized aspects of Spengler's non-scientific intuitionist reasoning in the context of the philosophy of history. Philipp Frank uttered some disagreement concerning Spengler's metaphysical concept of cultural destiny. Richard von Mises, in turn, was impressed by the impact of the book and agreed with some of Spengler's prophecies. Schlick and Neurath were, by far, the two most vigorous Spengler critics in the Vienna Circle. As a part of his writings in the philosophy of culture, Schlick also attacked the methodological approaches and fatalist assumptions in *Der Untergang*. On top of that, the posthumously published book *Natur und Kultur*<sup>10</sup> contains Schlick's critical analysis of Spengler's anthropological assumptions in *Der Mensch und die Technik*. Neurath's 1921 *Anti-Spengler* is a long and detailed critique of *Der Untergang* addressing almost all of the aforementioned points. Neurath was aware of the self-immunizing methodology and the seductive potential of Spengler's book. Therefore, *Anti-Spengler* must not only be read as a philosophical argumentation but also as a pamphlet that attacks Spengler's anti-scientific program as a dangerous ideology.

The purpose of this paper is to systemically review and evaluate the Circle's critical reception of Oswald Spengler with a primary focus on Neurath and Schlick. The paper itself comes in three main sections. In section two, I will begin by analyzing the critical reception of the methodology that Spengler pursues in *Der Untergang*. This includes a discussion of Spengler's method of intuitionist reasoning as well as his attempt to provide a coherent world-view [*geschlossene Weltanschauung*]. In section three, I will pay attention to the metaphysical principles that were central for Spengler's philosophy. Primarily, I will focus on Spengler's notion of essence and destiny as the principles determining the development of cultures. In section four, I will, finally, discuss the criticism of Spengler's political and anthropological positions. I will address Spengler's assumption about the predator nature of humans, his claims about the function of national states, and his opinions about a potentially unified mankind.

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>9</sup> See Thomas Uebel, "Writing a Revolution: On the Production and Early Reception of the Vienna Circle's Manifesto," *Perspectives on Science* 16/1 (2008), 88-89.

<sup>10</sup> In 1933, Schlick began working on his opus magnum in the philosophy of culture which he never finished due to his assassination in 1936. Josef Rauscher, the publisher of the 1952 book *Natur und Kultur*, noted in the preface that the book is a collection of those manuscripts and lecture postscripts that Schlick planned to include in his opus magnum. See Josef Rauscher, "Vorwort," in *Natur und Kultur*, ed. Josef Rauscher, (Wien-Stuttgart: Humboldt Verlag, 1952), 5.

## II. Methodology

In this section, I will discuss central aspects of Spengler's methodological approach towards history that have been important for the reception of his work by the Vienna Circle. I will begin with a short overview over the philosophical program of *Der Untergang*.

The purpose of Spengler's philosophy of history was to develop a "morphology of world history, of the world as history," as he called it.<sup>11</sup> Based on his insights, Spengler purported to predetermine the development of certain dominant cultures, such as the Classical Antiquity, and the Medieval and Modern Central European. However, cultures do not develop in accordance with universal causal laws, according to Spengler. They rather grow and die like organisms. How a culture exactly develops depends on its soul. Spengler wrote: "History is the actualization of a soul ...".<sup>12</sup> In order to describe a soul, he introduced another term, namely "prime symbol" [*Ursymbol*].<sup>13</sup> The prime symbol is, so to speak, the semantic content of the soul. As soon as the philosopher of history knows the prime symbol of a soul, she can find it expressed in every historically relevant phenomena of the culture, such as art, musical styles, and even scientific theories. Spengler wrote: "All that is, is also a symbol."<sup>14</sup> The prime symbol of the strong-willed western soul, for instance, is that of the infinite space, and the prime symbol of the will-less Russian soul is the infinite plane. That is why western churches have pointy roofs symbolizing the West's will for upthrusting [*In-den-Himmel-dringen-Wollen*], and Russian churches plane roofs.<sup>15</sup>

The task of the philosopher of history is two-fold. She determines the prime symbol of a culture's soul; then she 'finds' it expressed in all of the culture's historically important phenomena. However, neither the prime symbol nor its expressions can be discovered by scientific research or nature knowledge [*Naturerkenntnis*]. According to Spengler, there is no science of history.<sup>16</sup> Instead: "Feeling [*Nachfühlen*], observing, comparing, immediate and internal certainty, exact and sensual fantasy ... [*T]hese are the means of historical research ...*".<sup>17</sup> Spengler later subsumed all these modes of non-scientific understanding under the notion of intuition or "lived-experience" [*Erleben*] as opposed to "scientific cognition" [*Erkennen*]. Other than that, Spengler used the words "knowledge of man" [*Menschenkenntnis*], "morphology of the organic" [*Morphologie des Organischen*] or "physiognomy."<sup>18</sup>

Spengler's method of intuiting, experiencing, and feeling history can be best compared with the method of dream interpretation. By interpreting a dream, the interpreter treats the dream's elements as symbols that convey certain subconscious messages. Treating these elements as symbols, in turn, means that the interpreter looks for analogies between the dream elements' form and the putative messages' contents. Teeth that are falling out in a dream could, for instance, convey the message that the dreamer is afraid of losing an important person because teeth are also an important part of the human's body, and falling out is the physical counterpart of the more abstract loss of a person in life. If the interpreter finds more elements in the dream having a similar form, the interpreter can be sure that these elements convey the message that the dreamer is afraid of losing an important person. Intuiting that a

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<sup>11</sup> Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes. Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*, (München: dtv, [1919, 1922] 1972), 140.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 394-395.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 75, 134-135.

particular phenomenon belongs to a particular culture because it is an expression of the culture's soul works in a similar way. The philosopher of history analyzes a certain phenomenon and looks for analogies between the phenomenon's form on the one hand, and the prime symbol of the culture that the phenomenon belongs to, on the other hand. What makes the roofs of western churches an expression of the western soul of infinite space is that they are pointy, because such a shape 'points' upwards to the infinity of the sky. Even though Spengler would reject this logical terminology, we can describe Spengler's method as alternately deductive and inductive. On the one hand, the philosopher of history interprets the phenomena of a certain culture as expressions of the culture's putative prime symbol. On the other hand, she becomes more confident that the putative prime symbol is, in fact, the culture's prime symbol when she finds more phenomena whose form is in accordance with that prime symbol.<sup>19</sup> Based on the continuous flow of phenomena with the same underlying prime symbol, the philosopher of history can, therefore, also predict the culture's future.

Let me now summarize the Circle's general attitude towards intuition and metaphysics. In his *Überwindung der Metaphysik durch logische Analyse der Sprache*, Carnap develops a definition of metaphysics that helps to evaluate Spengler's method against the background of the Circle's SWC. For Carnap, statements are metaphysical if they posit the existence of entities that lie beyond experience and/or draw conclusions that are not warranted by logical reasoning.<sup>20</sup> Spengler did exactly that. He posited the existence of non-perceivable entities (souls and prime symbols) and also assigned these prime symbols to cultural phenomena in a way not warranted by logical reasoning. For Carnap and the whole Circle, metaphysics in general was no proper form of knowledge acquisition [*Erkenntnisgewinn*]. The only proper ways to acquire knowledge were to form empirical statements based on perceptual act and then to infer further statements from these primary empirical statements through logically sound reasoning. This maxim is part of the SWC and expressed in the *Manifesto*: "The scientific conception of the world knows only empirical statements about things of all kinds and analytic statements of logic and mathematics."<sup>21</sup>

For many members of the Circle, intuition, in turn, could indeed be a part of life, namely as an expression of vital feelings [*Lebensgeföhle*] and as a source for artistic activities. In his article "Erleben, Erkennen, Metaphysik," Schlick, for instance, claimed that, while knowledge is objective and can be accurately communicated and proven, lived-experiences [*Erlebnisse*], vital feelings, and intuitions are subjective impressions of an object that cannot be accurately communicated and proven.<sup>22</sup> But they can be the raw material for poets and other artists, and as long as people only express their intuitions in the form of poetry or an art work, there is nothing wrong about it. The metaphysician, however, erroneously assumes that intuitions are themselves modes of knowledge acquisition [*Erkenntnisarten*] that can uncover transcendental truths.<sup>23</sup> Carnap provided a similar line of criticism. Like music and art, metaphysical

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<sup>19</sup> Consider this passage as an example of Spengler's search for analogies: "Who knows that there is a deep similarity of form between the differential calculus and the dynastic principle of politics during the reign of Louis XIV, between the Classical city-state and the Euclidian geometry and the conquest of space by the railroad system, between telephones and guns, and between the contrapuntal instrumental music and credit economics?" *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>20</sup> Rudolf Carnap, "Überwindung der Metaphysik durch logische Analyse der Sprache," 232.

<sup>21</sup> Otto Neurath et al., "Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung," 14.

<sup>22</sup> Moritz Schlick, "Erleben, Erkennen, Metaphysik," in *Moritz Schlick Gesamtausgabe, Abschnitt I Band 6. Die Wiener Zeit. Aufsätze, Beiträge, Rezensionen 1926–1936*, ed. Johannes Friedl and Heiner Rutte, (Wien-New York: Springer, [1926] 2008), 39-40, 49-50.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

statements rest on intuitions and vital feelings. However, unlike music and art, metaphysical statements share the form of empirical statements and thereby pretend to be something that they are not, namely theories about the world, and this makes them dangerous.<sup>24</sup> The same problem is mentioned in the *Manifesto*. While the SWC allows the expression of vital feelings in literature, art, and music, it warns of its misuse by the metaphysician. The metaphysician utters these meaningless statements in disguise of a theory.<sup>25</sup>

Some members of the Circle even claimed that intuitions can play a role within scientific research, namely as a, what I would call, “intuition pump.” Viktor Kraft’s position serves as a good example for this option. Kraft valued the inspiring power of intuitive insights [*intuitive Einsichten*] for historical research in his essays *Die Grundformen der wissenschaftlichen Methoden* and *Geschichtsforschung als strenge Wissenschaft*.<sup>26</sup> In agreement with Dilthey, Kraft argued that historical research requires the understanding of the motives and intentions of the actions of historical agents, and of the impressions of important artworks. This understanding is free from discursive thinking and, therefore, intuitive. In addition to that, the historian also needs to discover significant characteristics in his historical material to capture the common trait of a historical period through an act of intuitive synthesis:

The idea that unites some historical material into a coherent whole comes intuitively. It is something that joins the historical material; it cannot be logically deduced from it. — Due to the understanding and this synthesis, intuition is indispensable for historical research.<sup>27</sup>

However, for Kraft, understanding and synthesis do not by themselves qualify as the acquisition of knowledge. Assuming that confuses the psychological process of finding similarities between historical events with the (normative) scientific method of proving that these historical events are causally connected or have similar causes.<sup>28</sup> Kraft hereby argued against Dilthey and the modern tendencies of intuitionist historical research [*“Intuitionismus in der Geschichtswissenschaft”*] — a movement that, according to him, systematically treats intuitions as knowledge without further empirical proof or testing of logical coherence. He denied that historical research requires a method for knowledge acquisition that differs from the methods of the sciences.<sup>29</sup> The methods of historical research are the same as the methods of the sciences. Kraft’s approach is in accordance with the SWC, and the *Manifesto*. The authors of the *Manifesto* also claimed that intuition can be a useful source for knowledge

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<sup>24</sup> Rudolf Carnap, “Überwindung der Metaphysik durch logische Analyse der Sprache,” 239-240. Also see Christian Damböck, “Die Entwicklung von Carnaps Antimetaphysik, vor und nach der Emigration,” 41-42, and Eric Nelson, “Dilthey and Carnap: The Feeling of Life, the Scientific Worldview, and the Elimination of Metaphysics,” in *The Worlds of Positivism. A Global Intellectual History, 1770-1930*, ed. Johannes Feichtinger, Franz L. Fillafer, and Jan Surnam, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 334-335.

<sup>25</sup> Otto Neurath et al., “Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung,” 13.

<sup>26</sup> Viktor Kraft, “Die Grundformen Wissenschaftlicher Methoden,” in *Sitzungsberichte der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien. Philosophisch-historische Klasse* 203. Band, 3. Abhandlung, (Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky A.-G. Wien und Leipzig, 1925), 287, and idem., “Geschichtsforschung als strenge Wissenschaft,” in *Logik der Sozialwissenschaften*, ed. Ernst Topisch, (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, [1955] 1976), 73.

<sup>27</sup> Viktor Kraft, “Geschichtsforschung als strenge Wissenschaft,” 75.

<sup>28</sup> Idem., “Die Grundformen Wissenschaftlicher Methoden,” 279-280.

<sup>29</sup> Idem., “Geschichtsforschung als strenge Wissenschaft,” 72-73, 76.

[*Erkenntnisquelle*]. However, its results must be rationally justified subsequently: “The seeker is allowed any means; but what has been found must stand up to testing.”<sup>30</sup>

In light of his nuanced position towards intuition, Kraft criticized Spengler’s philosophy of history cautiously. In *Die Grundformen der Wissenschaftlichen Methoden*, Kraft accepted that Spengler tried to provide his own kind of non-scientific historical knowledge — a knowledge that is directly drawn from intuitive insights, without any scientific method of proof. However, with such a merely subjective foundation, one can never know whether the results of Spengler’s works are true.<sup>31</sup> In *Geschichtsforschung als strenge Wissenschaft*, Kraft called Spengler a typical proponent of the modern intuitionist historical research that he argued against.<sup>32</sup> In the context of his philosophy of the social sciences, Felix Kaufmann made a similar point of criticism. In his book *Methodenlehre der Sozialwissenschaften*, Kaufmann also appreciated the occasional irrationality that accompanies the acts of feeling [*nachfühlen*] other people’s minds and of understanding their actions intuitively in the social sciences. However, this irrationality does not guaranty the rightfulness of the understanding and it does not provide knowledge *sui generis*. According to Kaufmann, Spengler is one of these thinkers because he erroneously assumed that his “physiognomic acts” of understanding are already “autonomous sources for truth [autonome Wahrheitsquellen].”<sup>33</sup>

Schlick’s reception of Spengler’s methodology should, in my opinion, be analyzed in the context of his general and deep mistrust of the modern humanities [*Geisteswissenschaften*], philosophies or culture [*Kulturphilosophie*], and philosophies of history [*Geschichtsphilosophen*]. In *Erleben, Erkennen, Metaphysik*, Schlick already indicated that scholars of these disciplines often confuse lived-experiences or intuition with knowledge acquisition and are, therefore, likely to become metaphysicians. In his 1934 paper “Philosophie und Naturwissenschaft” and in *Natur und Kultur*, Schlick accused explicitly the recently thriving [*emporblihenden*] humanities, philosophies of history, and now also philosophies of culture of committing the aforementioned confusion, and, thereby, of practicing metaphysics.<sup>34</sup>

The manuscripts collected in *Natur und Kultur* are particularly interesting. Schlick discussed in which sense nature and technologically advanced cultures are opposed to each other and how they can be in harmony: The cultures have to adopt a peaceful lifestyle. However, due to the warmongering practices of the national states that the people live in, they depart from this goal. In this book and also in his lecture series *Ethik und Kulturphilosophie* that was held at the time when he was working on the manuscripts for *Natur und Kultur*, namely in 1935/36, Schlick explicitly aimed to develop a philosophy of culture. But this philosophy must, like any other kind of philosophy, be analytic and based on scientific results.<sup>35</sup> In *Natur und Kultur*, he argued that some cultural philosophers apply insufficient “metaphysical constructions [*metaphysische Konstruktionen*]” and, thereby, misconceive the opposition between nature and

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<sup>30</sup> Otto Neurath et al., “Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung,” 14.

<sup>31</sup> Viktor Kraft, “Die Grundformen Wissenschaftlicher Methoden,” 287-288.

<sup>32</sup> Idem., “Geschichtsforschung als strenge Wissenschaft,” 73.

<sup>33</sup> Felix Kaufmann, *Methodenlehre der Sozialwissenschaften* (Wien-New York: Springer, [1936] 1999), 171-172.

<sup>34</sup> Moritz Schlick, „Philosophie und Naturwissenschaft,“ in *Moritz Schlick Gesamtausgabe, Abschnitt I Band 6. Die Wiener Zeit. Aufsätze, Beiträge, Rezensionen 1926–1936*, ed. Johannes Friedl and Heiner Rutte, (Wien-New York: Springer, [1934] 2008), 535, 541, and idem., *Natur und Kultur*, 9, 22, 122.

<sup>35</sup> Schlick, *Natur und Kultur*, 9, and “Ethik und Kulturphilosophie,” in *Moritz Schlick Gesamtausgabe, Abteilung II Band 3.2. Vorlesungen, Vorträge und Fragmente zur Ethik*, ed. Friederike Tömm, (Wiesbaden: Springer, [1935/1936] forthcoming), 201.

culture.<sup>36</sup> Schlick did not give any example in this paragraph. However, a few pages later he accused Spengler of exactly that, namely of misconceiving the opposition between nature and culture because he ignored the scientifically proven similarities between humans and monkeys in his book *Der Mensch und die Technik*.<sup>37</sup> Later, he returned to Spengler and criticized him again, presumably addressing his methodology in *Der Untergang*. Like Kraft, Schlick argued that similarities in the course of a culture's development cannot be explained by referring to a "metaphysical essence [*metaphysisches Wesen*]" of that culture but only by referring to similar causes.<sup>38</sup> In *Ethik und Kulturphilosophie*, he resumed this line of criticism. For him, Spengler was a proponent of the modern philosophy of culture (and philosophy of history) that is prone to metaphysical thinking. More precisely, he claimed that Spengler aimed to discover the essences of cultures and their destiny by intuiting. But this metaphysical intuiting cannot provide knowledge.<sup>39</sup> For Schlick, Spengler was a prophet (rather than a researcher) who provided "spurious explanations [*Scheinerklärungen*]" based on metaphysical terms.

Neurath wrote *Anti-Spengler* right after the publication of *Der Untergang*, when he was imprisoned in 1919, after Prussian soldiers took Munich, for his engagement for the Munich Soviet Republic. These conditions might explain the special tone and the political significance of Neurath's work, as Vrahimis assumed.<sup>40</sup> Neurath presented his criticism not in a purely argumentative style but with dedication and furor. *Anti-Spengler* is a detailed discussion of Spengler's "mystical intuition [*mystisches Schauen*]" and his intuitive deductions in *Der Untergang*; but it also comes as a political pamphlet, as a warning, and a plea.

*Anti-Spengler* is divided in three main parts, in which Neurath criticized Spengler's individuation of cultures and cultural periods, his assignments of historical phenomena to prime symbols, and his pessimistic descriptions of the world and society [*Weltbeschreibung*]. According to Neurath, the most dangerous aspect of *Der Untergang* is not the accumulation of the questionable results of his intuitive method and the false evidence for that, but its argumentative method as such and the way he provided evidence. Instead of writing poetry, and, therefore, a work without any claim to knowledge, Spengler aimed to analyze and predict history with method and evidence. However, he never introduced this method in any part of his book, nor did he explain why he related historical phenomenon to a certain prime symbol in the way he did.<sup>41</sup> For Neurath, Spengler interpreted historical phenomena, no matter how different they are from other phenomena of the same culture, in a way that they seemed to match the culture's putative prime symbol, even though, properly interpreted, they often did not match.<sup>42</sup> According to Neurath, this method resembled the method of theologians who

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<sup>36</sup> Idem., *Natur und Kultur*, 22.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 30-32. Also see Andreas Vrahimis, "The Vienna Circle's Responses to *Lebensphilosophie*," in *Logique et Analyse* 253 (2021), 54-56.

<sup>38</sup> Moritz Schlick, *Natur und Kultur*, 42.

<sup>39</sup> Schlick, "Ethik und Kulturphilosophie," 204, 274, 279.

<sup>40</sup> Andreas Vrahimis, "The Vienna Circle's Responses to *Lebensphilosophie*," 56.

<sup>41</sup> Otto Neurath, "Anti-Spengler," in *Gesammelte philosophische und methodologische Schriften, Band 1*, ed. Rudolf Haller and Heiner Rutte (Wien: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, [1921] 1981), 141-142.

<sup>42</sup> Among other things, Neurath referred to Spengler's interpretation of the development and the spread of Euclidean mathematics and geometry. According to Spengler, the prime symbol of the Antiquity's soul is the physical, non-infinite, and non-spatial in contrast to the West's infinite space. But Euclidian mathematics and geometry seems to be spatial and infinite. Against this assumption, Spengler argued that the Euclidian mathematics and geometry was a discipline of non-spatial relations and physical units. The West later changed or even

explain gruesome events in history in a way that they can be deduced from the will of god. In spite of that, Spengler presented his associations with absolute certainty.<sup>43</sup>

Neurath's *Anti-Spengler* was criticized, in turn, by Manfred Schröter, who summarized the critical reception of *Der Untergang* in the years after its publication (commonly known as "Spengler-Streit" in his book *Der Streit um Spengler* from 1922). Schröter, an admirer of *Der Untergang*, described the book as an experience of incomparable intensity. He granted that many of Spengler critics, for instance Neurath and the seven scholars of the first volume on Spengler in *Logos*,<sup>44</sup> detected contradictory positions and historically inaccurate assumptions in *Der Untergang*. However, they lacked any metaphysical understanding, according to Schröter. *Der Untergang* was not supposed to be a correct historiography or philosophical argumentation with logically correct deductions.<sup>45</sup> The purpose of *Der Untergang* was, instead, to make past times feel alive and to provide a "vital [*lebendig*]" understanding of the essences of cultures and of the cultural development as a whole.<sup>46</sup> Schröter emphasized the inciting potential of *Der Untergang*. According to him, the book was a "creative work [*schöpferisches Werk*]" expressing a strong "will of change [*Gestaltungswille*]" whose true impact on the society has yet to be determined.<sup>47</sup> Real criticism should rather attack the bigger picture of Spengler's interpretations and provide an alternative physiognomy of cultures.<sup>48</sup>

In accordance with his defense of Spengler, Schröter described Neurath's *Anti-Spengler* as a pamphlet that, despite its richness in detail, did not provide an argumentative synthesis. It is nothing but a random mix of various "single aspects [*Einzelgesichtspunkte*]." It is an

... excessively exaggerated satire that contains elements of a scientific, valuable, and logical critique, but it lacks any feeling for the real depths behind Spengler's views that open up progressively.<sup>49</sup>

In this context, it might be interesting to hear another critic of Spengler's critics who, despite writing against Spengler, shared Schröter's assessment of the Spengler dispute: Theodor W. Adorno. Adorno did not address the members of the Circle explicitly, but he remarked that most of Spengler's critics failed to address Spengler properly, including the scientists and positivists, who were Spengler's most irritable enemies. The petty endeavors of the seven

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destroyed the Euclidian mathematics in order to rebuild it in a more "Western way". Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, 85-87, 86-88. However, Neurath remarked that this is not true. According to him, Western scholars just applied the Euclidian geometry and mathematics. Otto Neurath, "Anti-Spengler," 173.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 171-172, 191.

<sup>44</sup> The seven scholars were Karl Joël, Eduard Schwartz, Wilhelm Spiegelberg, Ludwig Curtius, Erich Frank, Edmund Mezger, and Gustav Becking. The preface of the issue gives an explicit warning of the negative influence of *Der Untergang* on the devastated soul of the German people. See Georg Mehlis and Richard Kroner (ed.), "Zum Geleit," in *Logos. Internationale Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Kultur* 9 (1920/21), 133. Schröter reacted to these two introductory pages and called them unintentionally amusing thanks to their "auntie-like tone [*tantenhaften Art*]." Manfred Schröter, *Der Streit um Spengler. Kritik seiner Kritiker*, (München: C. H. Beck, 1922), 29.

<sup>45</sup> Manfred Schröter, *Der Streit um Spengler*, 38, 24-25.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, 38, 46.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 20, 24-25.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 36. For a more detailed discussion on Schröter's Spengler reception, see Domenico Conte, *Oswald Spengler, Eine Einführung*, ed. Gerald Diesener, (Leipzig: Universitätsverlag, [1997] 2004), 38-39.

<sup>49</sup> Schröter, *Der Streit um Spengler*, 17.

scholars' articles published in *Logos* in response to *Der Untergang*, for instance, exemplified the "intellectual powerlessness [*intellektuelle Ohnmacht*]" in the face of Spengler's work comparable with the political powerlessness in the face of Hitler's rise.<sup>50</sup> Adorno criticized Spengler's unbearable and totalitarian endeavor to force every individual vital phenomenon into a lifeless category. However, like Schröter, Adorno acknowledged the productive power of *Der Untergang*. Thanks to his dogmatic and fatalist tone, and his success, Spengler was not actually the prophet of *Der Untergang* but its agent. In accordance with that, Adorno argued that it does not help to refer to the scientific inaccuracy and the unverifiability of Spengler's morphology or simply to attack the morphology's "savagery [*Barbarei*]." Instead, real criticism must expose the savagery of the cultures themselves, so that, at the end, the "hotchpotch" of different cultures will be replaced by a united utopia.<sup>51</sup>

In my opinion, Schröter's and Adorno's analyses indeed apply to the critiques brought forth by Kraft, Kaufmann, and Schlick. Kraft and Kaufmann developed and defended methods for research in the historical and in the social sciences, respectively, that were in accordance with the SWC. Their sparse and superficial criticism of Spengler consisted in the observation that elements of Spengler's methodology were not in accordance with these methods, due to the non-verifiability of Spengler's intuitionist methods and Spengler's disregard of underlying causal relations. However, Spengler never claimed that his physiognomy might stand empirical testing. In fact, he explicitly criticized the positivist attempt to explain the whole world in scientific terms, as a computable system of causal relations.<sup>52</sup> Even though Schlick's criticism was more comprehensive (and more aggressive), it also consisted in a simple rejection of Spengler's method in favor of a more science-based philosophy of culture.

Neurath's *Anti-Spengler*, in turn, is not only more detailed than the works of these other authors. Unlike Schröter claimed, *Anti-Spengler* was much more than a random mix of various single aspects and points of criticism. It also exposed the self-immunizing strategy of Spengler and its dangerous ideological potential. Due to these aspects, the meta-critical analyses of Schröter and Adorno do not apply to *Anti-Spengler*. Neurath noticed that simply attacking the anti-scientific character of *Der Untergang*, and simply pointing out implausible deductions and interpretations, would not help to convince the readers of his book. According to him, the way how Spengler described the world (his physiognomy of history) "destroyed [*zerstört*]" every means of criticism upfront.<sup>53</sup> In fact, Spengler defended a skeptic and relativistic conception of knowledge and intuition that is reflected in his self-immunizing method. According to Spengler, truth is not objective but only relative to a certain culture, and people from different cultures cannot fully intuit the soul of another culture. As a result, "[w]orld-views stand opposite to world-views."<sup>54</sup> In response to that skeptic argument, Neurath did not only provide a scientific counter-position emphasizing that truth is indeed objective because people from different cultures can both disagree and agree with each other on the basis of a joint confrontation with the facts;<sup>55</sup> he also pointed out the obvious contradiction

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<sup>50</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Spengler nach dem Untergang," *Der Monat* 20 (1950), 116.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-124, 128.

<sup>52</sup> Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, 940.

<sup>53</sup> Neurath, "Anti-Spengler," 182, 191.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>55</sup> For an in-depth discussion on Neurath's arguments against Spengler's relativist challenge, see Nancy Cartwright, Jordi Cat, Laura Fleck, Thomas E. Uebel, *Otto Neurath: Philosophy between Science and Politics*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1996), 137-142.

in Spengler's rejection of reciprocal understanding and intuition on the one hand, and his attempt to intuit the "soul-life [*Seelentum*]" of other cultures on the other hand.

Moreover, Neurath was aware of *Der Untergang's* seductive and inciting potential that Schröter and Adorno emphasized. The book was an influential attempt to develop a coherent, simple, and overarching world-view that can hardly be rebutted. In Vrahimis's opinion, Neurath's criticism of *Der Untergang* should be understood against the background of his anti-foundationalist and holistic epistemology that he exemplified in his famous analogies of the boat and the miner. Neurath emphasized that it is tempting but unscientific to build up a description of the world in its totality from scratch.<sup>56</sup> Spengler's morphology of history was exactly that. Similar to the time of religious conflicts and changes, the period after World War I was a time of different competing political ideologies on the one hand, and a paradigm change in physics on the other hand. Even scientists were more inclined to adhere to world-views that promised to explain everything based on a simple principle. From this perspective, it is understandable why Spengler's book satisfied a longing for such a coherent world-view, as Neurath wrote at the beginning of his essay.<sup>57</sup> In his short article "Mankind [*Menschheit*]," that was published in the same year as *Anti-Spengler*, he repeated this diagnosis.<sup>58</sup>

Neurath saw that Spengler's prophecy might indeed come true; because it might, thanks to its "influence on the reality [*Beeinflussung der Wirklichkeit*]," be the cause of its own realization — a self-fulfilling prophecy.<sup>59</sup> That explains why *Anti-Spengler* has the character of a warning and a plea.<sup>60</sup> It comes as a warning to save the readers of *Der Untergang* (especially the youth) from delusion;<sup>61</sup> and it appeals to scientists to provide their own counter-conception:

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<sup>56</sup> Vrahimis, "The Vienna Circle's Responses to *Lebensphilosophie*," 59-60.

<sup>57</sup> Neurath, "Anti-Spengler," 143.

<sup>58</sup> Otto Neurath, "Menschheit," in *Gesammelte philosophische und methodologische Schriften, Band 1*, ed. Rudolf Haller and Heiner Rutte (Wien: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, [1921] 1981), 199. In this article, Neurath admitted that, even though *Der Untergang* is absolutely inadequate, it filled a gap that "... our period felt deeply ..." This gap was caused by our greed for comprehensive knowledge and our thirst for explanations of our action based on the analysis of world history.

<sup>59</sup> Richard von Mises was one of the few members of the Circle who actually shared some of Spengler's positions. In the appendix to his inaugural speech for the Technische Hochschule Dresden in 1920, he also emphasized the self-fulfilling nature of Spengler work. He said: "One might think about his [Spengler's] competence in particular questions of the sciences and of technology whatever one wants; nobody who is eager to anticipate the course of the world can avoid his prophecies which, thanks to the great resonance, made themselves come true." I will further discuss von Mises's positions towards Spengler in the next section. Richard von Mises, "Naturwissenschaft und Technik der Gegenwart. Eine akademische Rede mit Zusätzen," in *Abhandlungen und Vorträge aus dem Gebiete der Mathematik, Naturwissenschaft und Technik* Hft. 8, (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien GmbH, 1922), 32.

<sup>60</sup> Neurath, "Anti-Spengler," 141.

<sup>61</sup> *Anti-Spengler* ends with the following words: "This book is dedicated to the youth that is struggling with and wasting their energy on him [Spengler]. It was written *not to do justice to Spengler, but to do justice to the importance of the youth that it wants to help.*" Ibid., 196. Neurath's concern about the bad influence of Spengler's thoughts on the youth is expressed in many of his works. After his escape to England and shortly before his death in 1945, Neurath called Spengler again one of the authors whose work weakened the resistance of the youth against the ideology of national socialism. Neurath and Lauwerys, "Plato's 'Republic' and German education (III)," *Journal of Education* 77/913 (1945): 394.

The sciences need a conception of the world [*Weltbild*]. Otherwise, they are at the mercy of the *skepticism* and the *arrogance* that Spengler's book combines to form a bizarre union. Many feel liberated by Spengler. We want to liberate from Spengler.<sup>62</sup>

So, unlike Schröter claimed, Neurath indeed realized that the best way to preempt Spengler's attempt of satisfying the people's longing for a coherent world-view is to provide an alternative; not another coherent world-view but a scientific world-conception.<sup>63</sup> I am inclined to say that this call for a conception of the world (against Spengler's world-view) is already an early expression of the SWC and its scientific and anti-metaphysical spirit.

### III. Ontology

Other than Spengler's methodology, the members of the Circle criticized his notions of essence and destiny. Again, I will begin the chapter by summarizing Spengler's position regarding these notions. Then, I will describe the Circle's general account on essence, causality, and acausal principles, such as destiny and entelechy. As part of that, I will also say a few words about the theory of constitution [*Konstitutionstheorie*], largely accepted by the members of the Circle, according to which the knowledge of all sciences (from physics to sociology) must be interconnected and grounded in observations. Against the background of these positions, I will, finally, discuss the points of criticism brought forth against Spengler.

The notion of essence [*Wesen*] plays a central role in *Der Untergang*. It is difficult to provide a proper definition of it or to clearly determine the scope of its application. Concepts such as extendedness, space, or culture have essences according to Spengler.<sup>64</sup> People also have essences, and the phenomena of cultures, in virtue of which they are an expression of their

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<sup>62</sup> Neurath, "Anti-Spengler," 143.

<sup>63</sup> The authors of the *Manifesto* distinguished between the negative concept of a world-view [*Weltanschauung*] and the positive concept of a world-conception [*Weltauffassung*]. Carnap urged to avoid the term "Weltanschauung" because it blurs the line between vital feelings and theory. Rudolf Carnap, "Überwindung der Metaphysik durch logische Analyse der Sprache," 239. Neurath emphasized that the problematic world-views aim to depict the world in its totality. A world-conception, in turn, understands the world as the continuously growing sphere of the plurality of sciences. These definitions of "Weltanschauung" and "Weltauffassung" are in line with their usages in *Anti-Spengler* and in the *Manifesto*. Otto Neurath, "Wege der Wissenschaftlichen Weltauffassung," in *Erkenntnis* 1 (1930/31), 107. Also see Donata Romizi, "The Vienna Circle's 'Scientific World-Conception,'" 215.

Unfortunately, in *Anti-Spengler*, Neurath used the word "Weltbild" ambiguously, in my opinion. In one passage, he used it clearly as a synonym for "Weltanschauung." Neurath, "Anti-Spengler," 190. The translation of "Weltbild" as "Weltanschauung" is also in line with its usage in *Wege der Wissenschaftlichen Weltauffassung*. Neurath, "Wege der Wissenschaftlichen Weltauffassung," 107. In the passage quoted above, in turn, he presumably used it to describe the scientific world-conception that scientists and philosophers are supposed to develop against world-views and that will later become the Circle's leading scientific doctrine. For this reason, I chose the phrase "conception of the world" as a translation.

<sup>64</sup> A part of the essence of extendedness is "overcoming directedness [*Überwindung des Gerichtetseins*]." Furthermore, space, by its essence, is transcendent and speaks to imagination. And the essence of culture is religion, whereas the essence of civilization is irreligion. In fact, "religion" is just another word for "culture" and "civilization" for "irreligion." Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, 157, 313, 458.

respective culture, have essences, too.<sup>65</sup> Other than that, Spengler claimed that the cultures themselves have essences.<sup>66</sup> Sometimes, he even wrote that the souls of cultures have their own essences.<sup>67</sup> In accordance with Spengler's general explanations of his physiognomic method, I am inclined to say that "essence" is either synonymous to "prime symbol," or prime symbols are the essences of cultures or of their souls. In any way, essences cannot be scientifically analyzed. The philosopher of history must rather "descend into the depth" of the concept, the cultural practice, or the culture in order to determine its essence. Therefore, essences of concepts or cultures are distinguished from the concept's more superficial and accidental properties and from the culture's more obvious but irrelevant expressions.

As I said in the previous section, the essence of a culture (its prime symbol) determines its development, according to Spengler. Spengler compared cultures with organisms both regarding their growth and decay. Destiny is the idea [*Idee*] that determines how a culture develops organically based on its essence. It is a historical idea that only concerns the unique development of particular cultures. In contrast to it, causality is an ahistorical principle only concerning the always-reoccurring processes of natural objects (including stones, planets, plants, and animals). Causal relations can be scientifically proven; destiny can only be felt.<sup>68</sup> This distinction does not imply that the world is divided into two spatially distinct hemispheres — cultures that are determined by the destiny of their essence and natural objects whose processes are determined by causality. Spengler is not a dualist. He acknowledged that cultures are part of nature, and that all data of history are also data of nature. The "factual material [*Tatsachenmaterial*]" is the same. But, as part of history, all the data of the past times are not just repeating events with physical and chemical properties; they form a "rigid web [*starres Gewebe*]" with symbolical potential.<sup>69</sup> As soon as individuals gather and a culture "is born," the culture's development as a whole is determined by destiny:

Mathematics and the principle of causality lead to a naturalistic order of all appearances; the idea of chronology and destiny to a historical order. Each of both principles of order encompasses, by itself, the *whole* world. The difference is only in the eye by which and through which this world is realized.<sup>70</sup>

It is tempting to compare Spengler's notion of destiny with the ancient notion of entelechy and organic teleology, as it was developed by Aristotle, or the modern notion of entelechy and teleology as it was developed and defended by vitalists, such as the biologist Hans Driesch.<sup>71</sup> In fact, Spengler talked about entelechy and teleology in *Der Untergang*. However,

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<sup>65</sup> According to Spengler, a part of Michelangelo's essence moved him towards ancient history and, therefore, to plastic arts. The myth of Pygmalion who fell in love with the ivory statue of Galatea that he had crafted with his own hands is, in turn, the essence of the ancient art of sculpture, because it shows how much the Greek soul admired building material. *Ibid.*, 353.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 42, 194.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 79, 213.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 156-158.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 200-201.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>71</sup> Driesch believed that entelechy is a non-mechanistic power in the plant that determines the development of the cells. Unlike Spengler, Driesch rejected the idea of metaphysics and treated entelechy rather as some kind of vital causality. He wrote: "The vital causality that rests on the notion of entelechy as an immaterial agent operating 'into space' is called 'wholeness causality' because the organism is a whole and becomes a whole after disruptions."

he did not think that they could help to explain the development of cultures. He rejected entelechy as a principle, because it is ahistorical, and teleology because it is just another mechanistic principle; the simple counterpart to causation and a caricature of destiny.<sup>72</sup>

The members of the Circle did not reject the notion of essence as such. As O'Neill and Uebel remarked, in order to understand the Circle's position, one must distinguish between essence in the sense of the actual nature of something that is opposed to its appearance and that is scientifically accessible, and essence as something that is beyond empirical access.<sup>73</sup> In his paper "Soziologie im Physikalismus," Neurath argued that it is meaningless to assume the existence of essences of things "behind" the events and "beyond" their correlations.<sup>74</sup> In another paper, in turn, he claimed that the essence-appearance-distinction can be useful as part of scientific endeavor, as long as it is "liberated from the metaphors of traditional metaphysics" and open to empirical control.<sup>75</sup> Other members of the Circle including Schlick and the authors of the *Manifesto* tried to differentiate between the metaphysical notion of essence and a less problematic notion by using inverted commas for the metaphysical notion.<sup>76</sup>

Furthermore, instead of trying to unearth metaphysical essences, a proper scientific description [*Wissenschaftliche Beschreibung*] of the world must focus on the structures and forms of order [*Ordnungsform*] of objects. The description must be drawn, first, from the content of the experiences that scientists gained by encountering simple natural objects. The jointly made experiences are then expressed in empirical statements and placed in a system of all other scientific statements. From this web of statements, concepts [*Begriffe*] about those simple objects are then gained through abstraction. From those concepts, in turn, further concepts about more complex and abstract objects, such as objects of the social sciences, can be constituted. The authors of the *Manifesto* called such a pyramid-like system of concepts "constitution system [*Konstitutionsystem*]," and the theory that described the construction of such a constitution system "constitutions theory [*Konstitutionstheorie*]." With such a

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Hans Driesch, "Systematische Darstellung," in *Deutsche systematische Philosophie nach ihren Gestalten*, ed. Hermann Schwarz (Berlin: Junker und Dünhaupt, 1931), 156.

<sup>72</sup> Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, 20, 157.

<sup>73</sup> John O'Neill and Thomas Uebel, "Horkheimer and Neurath: Restarting a Disrupted Debate," *European Journal of Philosophy* 12/1 (2004), 82.

<sup>74</sup> Otto Neurath, "Soziologie im Physikalismus," in *Gesammelte philosophische und methodologische Schriften, Band 2*, ed. Rudolf Haller and Heiner Rutte, (Wien: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, [1931] 1981), 543.

<sup>75</sup> Otto Neurath, "Einheitswissenschaft und logischer Empirismus. Eine Erwiderung," in *Otto Neurath Nachlass, Wiener Kreis Archiv*, (Haarlem: Noord-Hollands Archief, 1937), 14, 16 as cited in John O'Neill and Thomas Uebel, "Horkheimer and Neurath," 82.

<sup>76</sup> See Otto Neurath et al., "Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung," 16, 24. Also see Moritz Schlick, "Philosophie und Naturwissenschaft," 529; *Natur und Kultur*, 42-43; and "Grundfragen der Ethik," in *Moritz Schlick Gesamtausgabe, Abteilung II Band 3.2. Vorlesungen, Vorträge und Fragmente zur Ethik*, ed. Friederike Tomm, (Wiesbaden: Springer, [1912/1913] forthcoming), 23, 88, 103. In this latter lecture and in *Natur und Kultur*, however, Schlick used the word frequently and, as I am inclined to say, carelessly. He talked about the "essence of human nature [*Wesen der menschlichen Natur*]," the "essence of ethical practice [*Wesen der Sittlichkeit*]," the "essence of moral [*Wesen der Moral*]," the "essence of culture [*Wesen der Kultur*]," and the essences of many other things in an almost Spenglerian tone without providing any empirical evidence or logical deduction method to show how he accessed these essences.

constitution system, all the knowledge of all the sciences can be integrated to form the body of a universal science.<sup>77</sup> How such a constitution system must be built up was best described by Carnap in his book *Der Logische Aufbau der Welt* that was published one year before the *Manifesto*. As Uebel summarized, the book "... sought to develop a genealogy of empirical concepts that rooted them in the phenomenal given."<sup>78</sup> In accordance with the SWC and the *Manifesto*, Carnap argued that, in order to understand what a certain object really is, we must not look for mystical and metaphysical essences. Instead, we must find out how it, or more precisely, how its concept is located in the constitutional context of the system, especially how it is constituted of the concepts of more basic objects. Similar to Neurath, Carnap excluded the metaphysical notion of essence from his philosophy and replaced it with the notion of a constitutional essence that is compatible with the constitution theory.<sup>79</sup>

Let me now determine the special status of social entities, such as states and peoples, within a constitution system, according to the members of the Circle. As part of that, I will also discuss which principles governed the developments of these entities according to them.

Many members of the Circle followed an at least partially reductionist strategy concerning the integration of the social sciences. This strategy is expressed in the *Manifesto*. The authors of the *Manifesto* argued that metaphysical entities, such as "people's spirit [*Volksgeist*]," should not be part of sociological research because they cannot be related to concepts of the other sciences, especially psychology and physics. Instead, sociologists should focus on physical objects, such as people and groups of people, to conduct their research.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, the authors of the *Manifesto* also rejected Driesch's vitalist idea that the laws of the organic nature are unique and cannot be reduced to the laws of physics. If this was true, they claimed, certain parts of reality would not be subject to a uniform and determined "lawfulness [*Gesetzmäßigkeit*]." As a member of the Circle, however, it is hard to accept this conclusion.<sup>81</sup>

Carnap's individual view on this matter was ambivalent. In *Der Logische Aufbau der Welt*, he similarly argued that social entities, such as states, tribes, and families essentially consist of a "system of relations [*Relationsgefüge*]" of people including their psychological properties.<sup>82</sup> In another part of the book, however, he remarked that these "entities of the humanities [*geistige Gegenstände*]" cannot simply be composed of a particular group of people because they continue to exist after the death of these people. Consequently, statements about the concepts of the humanities cannot be translated into statements about psychological entities.<sup>83</sup>

In his 1935 booklet *Das Ende der mechanistischen Physik*, Philipp Frank also defended a nuanced position. He argued that the paradigm of atomism, according to which all processes of macroscopic objects including organisms and states can be deduced from the interactions

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<sup>77</sup> Neurath et al., "Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung," 16.

<sup>78</sup> Uebel, "Anti-Foundationalism and the Vienna Circle's Revolution in Philosophy," 424.

<sup>79</sup> Rudolf Carnap, *Der logische Aufbau der Welt*, (Hamburg: Meiner, [1928] 2017), 221, 271.

<sup>80</sup> Neurath et al., "Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung," 24

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23. In 1934, at The Prague International Congress for Philosophy, Driesch's defense of his vital causality enraged Schlick, Carnap, Neurath, and Hans Reichenbach who attended the conference. Reichenbach, for instance, accused Driesch of mysticism, and for Neurath, Driesch's concept of the organic lacked any law-like character needed to qualify it as scientific. See Anne Harrington, *Reenchanted Science. Holism in German Culture. Form Wilhelm II to Hitler*, (Princeton: University Press 1996), 192-193.

<sup>82</sup> Carnap, *Der logische Aufbau der Welt*, 202.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 30. As Nelson noted, Carnap's categorical distinction between the humanities and the sciences was influenced by Dilthey. At least in these passages, he treated concepts of the humanities as autonomous and unique. Eric Nelson, "Dilthey and Carnap," 331.

of the atoms that they are constituted of, has been replaced by a modern, “holistic [*ganzheitlich*]” paradigm. Larger objects were now treated as objects in their own rights. However, as he went on to argue, the basic causal laws of the sciences have just been applied to these larger objects. The schema of how physical theories are developed (through mathematical calculations and observations) is still the same.<sup>84</sup> In accordance with this position, Frank rejected, in his 1932 book *Das Kausalgesetz und seine Grenzen*, the idea of a world of “real things” (essences) behind our experiences, as well as the idea of specific acausal principles working in organisms, such as entelechy, teleology, or “*élan vital*” as misleading and unscientific. Even though the principle of causality cannot be proven scientifically, all of our sciences and our daily experiences presuppose it, and there is no reason to doubt its existence and its universality, even in a holistic scientific paradigm.<sup>85</sup> Against this background, it becomes clear why Frank rejected Spengler’s notion of destiny as a principle that is supposed to determine the course of history in opposition to the causal laws of the sciences. If destiny exists, physics and chemistry should have already discovered it under the “superficial” causal interpretation of historical processes. They should have discovered a system that is rather determined by the “meaningfulness of the whole [*Sinn des Ganzen*]” than by causality, the “blind play of powers and atoms [*blinden Spiel der Kräfte und Atome*].”<sup>86</sup> But, apparently, they have not.

Frank’s criticism against Spengler is problematic because he presented Spengler’s notion of destiny (similar to entelechy) as a quasi-scientific principle. He presupposed that destiny is a principle that, just like a scientific law, can be discovered or observed through the methods of physics or chemistry by analyzing historical processes. In some way, Frank, in arguing so, contradicted his own holistic interpretation of modern physics in his later *Das Ende der mechanistischen Physik*. Understood as a principle of large social objects (cultures), destiny only concerns the development of cultures as a whole and not the physical and chemical processes that the cultural development consists of. Other than that, Spengler emphasized that destiny cannot be discovered through the means of science in general. Instead of criticizing Spengler’s destiny as a quasi-scientific law in the framework of scientific research, Frank should have rejected it right away because it cannot even be located within this framework at all.

In contrast to Frank’s short attack, the criticisms of Neurath and Schlick show a deeper examination of Spengler’s position. Like Carnap, Neurath confirmed the constitution theory in his monograph *Empirische Soziologie*, and argued that all scientific statements of all sciences, including those statements about social entities, are interconnected. Sociology should not be a discipline of the so-called “humanities.” It is an empirical science. He argued that sociological descriptions can only be about objects that can also, in principle, be described in molecular language.<sup>87</sup> The sociologist should only be concerned with various objects in space and time, primarily groups of human beings (but also lifeless objects) surrounded by other objects that can also be analyzed and described by physicists.<sup>88</sup> As Cartwright et al. remarked,

<sup>84</sup> Philipp Frank, “Das Ende der mechanistischen Physik,” in *Einheitswissenschaft* Hft. 5, (Wien: Gerold & Co., 1935), 19-24.

<sup>85</sup> Philipp Frank, *Das Kausalgesetz und seine Grenzen*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, [1932] 1988), 83, 285-287.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>87</sup> Otto Neurath, “Empirische Soziologie,” in *Gesammelte philosophische und methodologische Schriften, Band 1*, ed. Rudolf Haller and Heiner Rutte, (Wien: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, [1931] 1981), 424, 515.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 469-470, 479.

Neurath was still a Carnapian at the time of *Empirical Sociology*;<sup>89</sup> maybe a more radical Carnapian than Carnap himself. In his later *Soziologie im Physikalismus*, however, Neurath made aware of the limits of physicalist reductionism. Similar to Frank, he argued that the laws about processes in the microstructures can and should not be simply transferred to the level of living beings and groups. Accordingly, sociologists should look for laws that uniquely apply to living beings and groups.<sup>90</sup> One reason for the rejection of this reductionism is that Neurath did not consider laws to be (metaphysical) entities that can be revealed through observation. They are rather means to utter predictions based on observations. However, sociologists do not observe physics experiments. They analyze data reports about human behavior.<sup>91</sup> That does not mean that social laws are categorically different from the laws of physics, according to Neurath. They are still causal, and there is no “different causality.”<sup>92</sup> In accordance with what he said in *Empirische Soziologie*, Neurath also emphasized that, despite their different form, the laws for social entities must be compatible with other scientific laws to enable predictions:

All laws of the unified science must be connectable with each other to meet the requirements for *predicting* processes or certain groups of processes as often as possible.<sup>93</sup>

Neurath’s criticism of Spengler’s notion of destiny in *Anti-Spengler* reflects his general positions regarding the status of groups of human beings and the connectedness of social laws with other causal laws. Similar to Frank, Neurath argued that it is against every experience that some “internal momentum [*inneres Moment*]” determines the decay of a culture. Furthermore, he claimed that Spengler’s principle of destiny can only be applied to ideal cultures that are isolated from other cultures. Real, empirical cultures are surrounded by other cultures, and they are part of the empirical world full of other objects. Their development is dependent on the activities of these other cultures and the social, physical, and chemical processes of all the individuals inside of the culture and of all the dead objects outside of it. It can be accelerated and interrupted. A real sociologist has to take these multiple processes into account when she attempts to uncover new social laws or to make her own predictions.<sup>94</sup>

Schlick held more radical positions than Neurath, at least in some respects. In *Philosophie und Naturwissenschaft*, Schlick also defended the theory of constitution and argued that all the concepts that we use to describe the destiny of human beings and mankind can be reduced to physical and psychological concepts. Historical processes are natural processes — a “muddle [*Gewirr*]” of causes and effects —, and the destiny of peoples is determined by the physical influence of climate and landscape and the psychological impact of their leaders.<sup>95</sup> The assumption that psychology is the key to understand social and historical processes is defended in many of Schlick’s works. In *Ethik und Kulturphilosophie*, Schlick argued much more radically than Frank, Carnap, and Neurath, that the course of a culture’s history must fully depend on the laws that govern the psychological operations of its people (for instance their willpower) because cultures are nothing but agglomerations of people:

Culture emerged from human actions; hence the *laws of culture* cannot differ from the *laws of human action* ... The regularities within history are no unique

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<sup>89</sup> Cartwright et al., *Otto Neurath*, 184.

<sup>90</sup> Neurath, “Soziologie im Physikalismus,” 549.

<sup>91</sup> Cartwright et al., *Otto Neurath*, 185-186.

<sup>92</sup> Neurath, “Soziologie im Physikalismus,” 543.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Neurath, “Anti-Spengler,” 150, 160. Also see Nancy Cartwright et al., *Otto Neurath*, 227.

<sup>95</sup> Schlick, “Philosophie und Naturwissenschaft,” 537-540.

historical laws, but psychological laws which result from people living together (just like meteorological laws resulting from physical laws.)<sup>96</sup>

In accordance with this position, Schlick, in *Natur und Kultur*, criticized Spengler's idea of metaphysical essences that stand behind the phenomena of a culture and determine their "flourishing" and "withering" like an invisible force. Spengler's notion of destiny, thanks to which the development of a culture is determined by its essence, is based on a confused notion of necessity and "coercion [*Zwang*]."<sup>97</sup> In *Ethik und Kulturphilosophie*, he provided some background information for this criticism. According to Schlick, many fatalist philosophers misinterpreted the laws of nature normatively as something like a coercive state law opposed to the free will of the people dictating the course of history. But laws of nature are not like that, and the course of history, despite being determined, is not dictated by a law against the people's will. Similar to Neurath, Schlick treated laws of nature rather as general description for the unfolding of natural processes, including biological processes and free agency, that allow predictions.<sup>98</sup> They do not force anybody. In accordance with that, Schlick identified Spengler as one of these fatalist philosophers treating the historical law of destiny as a coercive power,<sup>99</sup> and, thereby, rejecting any contribution of human volition to the progression of the history of their cultures.<sup>100</sup> But since cultures are nothing but agglomerations of people, the history of cultures develops (not against but) through the will of the people.

Schlick's distinction between state law and law of nature are very insightful; and, as I may say, in these passages he proves to be one of the first compatibilists in the free will debate. However, his criticism against Spengler is problematic. In fact, Spengler did not say that free will does not exist and that free actions do not have any influence on the course of history. They do have. However, despite having an influence and despite being accompanied by individual intentions, these free actions cannot change the course of the culture because their consequences cannot, on the large scale, be predicted and will, at the end, still become integrated into the flow of the culture's destiny.<sup>101</sup> One might question whether it is true that actions, even if they are performed to alter the course of the culture's history and to bring about a change for the better, will, at the end, still support the decay of the culture. But this is another question. In fact, as part of his political philosophy and anthropology and against Spengler, Schlick also defended both a positive image of mankind and an optimistic vision of the future. I will return to these normative positions in the next section.

Neurath's argument, in contrast, is more powerful. In fact, Spengler claimed that both the individual actions of people and other "coincidences [*Zufälle*]" can shape the development of a culture without being able to change it (completely). Again, Spengler referred to the picture of the plant, which, as we might interpret, grows and decays in accordance with its nature relatively independently from external influences.<sup>102</sup> However, as Neurath remarked, a plant can indeed die, unnaturally, before its flowering period due to an external force,<sup>103</sup> and so could also a culture be wiped out before its heyday, for instance by another culture. In fact, Spengler neglected the interaction and interdependence between different cultures in *Der Untergang*, as Neurath remarked. In the posthumously published work *Frühzeit der Weltgeschichte*:

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<sup>96</sup> Schlick, "Ethik und Kulturphilosophie," 275.

<sup>97</sup> Schlick, *Natur und Kultur*, 41-42.

<sup>98</sup> Schlick, "Ethik und Kulturphilosophie," 267.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 272-273.

<sup>100</sup> See Vrahimis, „The Vienna Circle's Responses to *Lebensphilosophie*," 54.

<sup>101</sup> Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, 183-184.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 189-190.

<sup>103</sup> Neurath, "Anti-Spengler," 150.

*Fragmente aus dem Nachlass*, however, Spengler did not only change his judgements about the superiority of certain culture and the inferiority of other cultures, but he also took the deeply rooted interconnectedness between cultures into account.<sup>104</sup> But even if Spengler managed to include the existence of other cultures into his prophetic philosophy of history, a culture can also be wiped out by a comet; and the trajectory of a comet can hardly be intuited by a philosopher of history. So, Neurath's criticism has a point. One might insist and argue that Spengler's philosophy of history can predict the development of empirical cultures under the condition of a development uninterrupted by natural catastrophes. However, a defendant of Neurath might discover more unintuitable threats for the culture.

Finally, let me say a few more words about von Mises's Spengler reception, which stands in a sharp contrast to the reception of the Circle's other members. In the appendix to his 1920 inaugural speech at the Technische Hochschule Dresden, the mathematician von Mises expressed his agreement with Spengler's basic concept of cultures that grow and decay, and his assumption of a non-linear and organic flow of history. Almost in an Spenglerian tone, he argued that the Western culture that has accumulated so much knowledge and achievements in 500 years, will, most likely, collapse within the next centuries.<sup>105</sup>

This assertion might come as a surprise since von Mises accepted the SWC and was a positivist through and through. Forman pointed out that von Mises must have lost his mind and the confidence in himself and his discipline while writing these words. In fact, many German scientists of this time became unnerved by the paradigm changes that accompanied the upcoming quantum physics. Suddenly, the classical mechanical framework of physics and the existence of causality itself was questioned. According to Forman, this crisis within physics explains why von Mises and other scientists surrendered and then adapted to Spenglerism and Spengler's anti-scientific and acausal idea of destiny.<sup>106</sup> This is the scenario that Neurath has warned of in *Anti-Spengler*, as I have shown in the last section. However, it seems that von Mises has changed later. In his *Kleines Lehrbuch des Positivismus* from 1939, he already uttered some mild criticism, calling Spengler's *Der Untergang* a work of "Hegelian metaphysics [*Hegelsche Metaphysik*]" rich in ideas, but very negativistic and full of tautological elements.<sup>107</sup>

#### IV. Anthropology and Political Philosophy

In this final section, I will pay attention to the political philosophy of Spengler and the Vienna Circle. I will discuss how Spengler and the Vienna Circle described the state of nature of human beings and the relation between the national state and its citizens. I will also review their thoughts about a potential, unified human culture, or mankind. After this broad overview, I will discuss the Spengler reception of the Circle regarding these points.

Spengler's interest in political and anthropological questions grew after the success of *Der Untergang*. He became friends with members of the national right, including Georg Escherich and Franz Seldte, leaders of powerful para-military organizations, as well as Gustav von Kahr, the former prime minister of Bavaria, with whom Spengler shared a common aversion against

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<sup>104</sup> Conte, *Oswald Spengler*, 79-80.

<sup>105</sup> von Mises, "Naturwissenschaft und Technik der Gegenwart," 32.

<sup>106</sup> Paul Forman, "Weimar Culture, Causality, and Quantum Theory, 1918-1927: Adaptation by German Physicists and Mathematicians to a Hostile Intellectual Environment," *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences* 3 (1971), 51, 55, 80-82.

<sup>107</sup> Richard von Mises, *Kleines Lehrbuch des Positivismus. Einführung in die empiristische Wissenschaftsauffassung*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp [1939] 1990), 325, 525.

the social-democratic government in Berlin.<sup>108</sup> In 1919, Spengler published the book *Preußentum und Sozialismus*, in which he developed the idea of a purely culturally and ethically defined socialism, against its economic interpretation by Marx. In *Der Untergang*, Spengler already considered the idea of a non-Marxist socialism as a Nietzschean will to power [Wille zur Macht] against global capitalism.<sup>109</sup> In *Preußentum und Sozialismus*, however, he deepened his thoughts with a focus on concrete socialist movements and leaders in Germany, for instance August Bebel whom he characterized as a “red Bismarck [Roter Bismarck]” because he was through and through militaristic and authoritarian.<sup>110</sup> Spengler claimed that, despite their reciprocal hatred, “old-Prussian spirit [altpreußischer Geist]” and “socialist ethos [sozialistische Gesinnung],” were essentially the same. For him, socialism consisted in the unification of all national workers as a serving and fighting collective, and in the integration of the worker collective into a strong, hierarchical national state, based on the model of Prussia.<sup>111</sup> It is not surprising that some National Socialists, after their rise to power, praised Spengler’s new book as a “signpost to new shores,” as the Nazi journalist Johann von Leers described it.<sup>112</sup>

At the beginning of the 1930s, after the Great Crash, Spengler published another book, *Der Mensch und die Technik*, in which he developed his ideas on philosophical anthropology and his theory of the state. *Der Mensch und die Technik* was, again, a continuation of his philosophical project in *Der Untergang*.<sup>113</sup> In *Der Untergang*, Spengler described the Western soul as a soul that fights for its existence and that strives to rule over everything.<sup>114</sup> In *Der Mensch und die Technik*, Spengler ascribed these character traits to mankind as such. Quoting Nietzsche, Spengler claimed that humans are destined to fight gruesomely and without mercy because they have a natural will to power. Social and technological developments did not change that. The utilization of tools, for instance, was just a means to live a life of fighting. Humans, in general, are predators, lone wolves, and the world is their prey. A group of humans can work together; however, even as a pack, humans still act violently and mistrust each other. Later packs became peoples, and, at some point in history, peoples founded the first states.<sup>115</sup>

But living in a state did not change their predator nature. On the contrary, the predator nature just became institutionalized. A national spirit could develop and a hierarchy of leaders and followers within a state could emerge. As a geographic structure, a state has a territorial delamination against other states. However, for its citizens it will always be too small. Driven by the thirst for expansion, the hostility against members of other states will grow. The main purpose of the state is, therefore, to prepare for and to wage war, as a form of tribal conflict on a national scale. Politics, in turn, is just a means to negotiate with other states and to maintain the military power of a state within the rare peaceful periods:

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<sup>108</sup> Conte, *Oswald Spengler*, 55.

<sup>109</sup> Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, 463.

<sup>110</sup> Spengler, *Preußentum und Sozialismus*, (München: C. H. Beck [1919] 1922), 14.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 23.

<sup>112</sup> Johann von Leers, *Spenglers Weltpolitisches System und der Nationalsozialismus*, (Berlin: Junker & Dünnhaupt, 1934), 5 as cited in Conte, *Oswald Spengler*, 56.

<sup>113</sup> Oswald Spengler, *Der Mensch und die Technik, Beitrag zu einer Philosophie des Lebens*, (München: C. H. Beck 1931), 1.

<sup>114</sup> Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, 436-437.

<sup>115</sup> Spengler, *Der Mensch und die Technik*, 13, 21.

... [T]he State is the internal order of a people for its external purpose ... Politics is only a temporary substitute for war that uses more intellectual weapons.<sup>116</sup>

The polemic assumption that territorial distinction and war are the determining principles of politics is, again, not a new aspect of Spengler's work. It was already present in the second part of *Der Untergang*. Here, Spengler claimed that every people or state is only defined in opposition to other peoples or states, and the primary and natural relation between two different states or peoples is war.<sup>117</sup> This polemic assumption is also in line with an influential philosophical doctrine that was promoted and defended by Carl Schmitt and other thinkers of the "Conservative Revolution," to which Spengler was ascribed.<sup>118</sup> It is the doctrine that the political [*das Politische*] itself is defined in terms of the distinction between friend (what we are and what belongs to us) and enemy (what they are).<sup>119</sup>

That the Vienna Circle had a political philosophy might come as a surprise. The general reception of the Vienna Circle after World War II almost only focused on its members' works in logic and neglected the cultural, pedagogical, and political aspects that defined their earlier projects. This had many reasons. For one thing, after the exile in the UK and the US, many of them were compelled to de-emphasize these apparently non-scientific aspects, as Nelsen argued.<sup>120</sup> To some extent, however, the Vienna Circle itself was responsible for the historian's "neutral" or even "amputated" reception, as Mormann called it.<sup>121</sup> In his autobiography, Carnap praised the lack of any political motivation as an ideal for the Vienna Circle.<sup>122</sup> Menger also committed himself to renouncing any moral evaluations based on personal opinions in his logical analysis of moral acting.<sup>123</sup> And Schlick praised the purely theoretical character of ethics as a philosophical discipline in his book *Fragen der Ethik*.<sup>124</sup>

But the Vienna Circle was political in many ways. First of all, many members, mainly members of the left wing, actively promoted a "non-capitalist socialization of the sciences [*nicht-kapitalistische Vergesellschaftung der Wissenschaft*]," as Dvořák called it.<sup>125</sup> Scientific research

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>117</sup> Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, 1109.

<sup>118</sup> Armin Mohler used the term "Conservative Revolution" to subsume a group of anti-modernist intellectuals of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to him, its most influential thinkers were Thomas Mann, Hans Böhler, Carl Schmitt, Ernst and Friedrich Georg Jünger, and also Oswald Spengler. Armin Mohler, *Die konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918–1932. Ein Handbuch*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, [1950] 1989), 324–332.

<sup>119</sup> Schmitt explained his doctrine in his book *Der Begriff des Politischen* from 1932. According to Schmitt, the existence of a political unit, such as a state, requires the existence of real or potential enemies. Unlike Spengler claimed, these enemies do not always have to be fought in a war. However, politics, as the way of organizing, structuring, and leading a state, essentially rests on the distinction between friend and enemy. Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, (München-Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1932), 14, 20.

<sup>120</sup> Nelson, "Dilthey and Carnap," 324.

<sup>121</sup> Mormann, *Rudolf Carnap*, 201.

<sup>122</sup> Rudolf Carnap, *Mein Weg in die Philosophie*, (Stuttgart: Reclam, [1963] 1993), 63.

<sup>123</sup> Karl Menger, *Moral, Wille und Weltgestaltung. Grundlegung zur Logik der Sitten*, (Wien: Julius Springer, 1934), 1.

<sup>124</sup> Moritz Schlick, "Fragen der Ethik," in *Moritz Schlick Gesamtausgabe Abschnitt I Band 3. Lebensweisheit. Versuch einer Glückseligkeitslehre. Fragen der Ethik*, ed. Mathias Iven (Wien-New York: Springer, [1930] 2006), 358.

<sup>125</sup> Johann Dvořák, "Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung, Volkshochschule und Arbeiterbildung im Wien der Zwischenkriegszeit. Am Beispiel von Otto Neurath und Edgar

should no longer only be accessible to a few privileged people, but to all people. As part of that goal, it should improve the economic and social situation of the majority and finally lead to a change of society. Some members such as Neurath and Edgar Zilsel actively supported the Vienna People's Education Movement [*Wiener Volksbildungsbewegung*] to popularize science and to promote the aspired social reform through the education of the masses.<sup>126</sup> This political agenda had also been formulated in the last paragraph of the *Manifesto*. The concluding sentence reads: “*The scientific world-conception serves life, and life receives it.*”<sup>127</sup>

Furthermore, for many members of the Vienna Circle, metaphysical thinking was not only a wrong way to develop scientific theories and philosophical thought. It was also the source for a dangerous totalitarian and reactionary mindset. Because of that, their fight against it had a concrete political dimension. In his talk *Philosophie – Opium für die Gebildeten* and in his essay *Theoretische Fragen und praktische Entscheidungen*, both from 1934, Carnap warned of metaphysics as a powerful tool to legitimize the upcoming National Socialism and Austrofacism. In the essay, he further argued that questions of the political attitude cannot be solved through theoretical reasoning. For the fight against superstition, metaphysics, and the capitalist exploitation of the workers, philosophers and scientists must take a position and influence the people through education.<sup>128</sup> Neurath, similarly, claimed that metaphysical positions often lead to political totalitarianism.<sup>129</sup> That might be a reason why, for him, “[...] the rejection of metaphysics was a fight like that against a political opponent.”<sup>130</sup> In his 1928 book *Lebensgestaltung und Klassenkampf*, Neurath expressed the combinations of both thoughts and considered the fight against the bourgeoisie metaphysics as a fight for the sciences under the leadership of the proletariat: “For the proletarian front, fighting technique and interest in propaganda coincides with admiration of science and overcoming of metaphysics.”<sup>131</sup>

Even Schlick, a rather liberal and moderate thinker, developed a psychological theory of values and moral acting in many of his works that promised to be purely theoretical and analytic, but that turned out to be clearly practice-oriented and normative, too. In his manuscript *Ethik des modernen Lebens* from 1927, for instance, Schlick emphasized the relevance of an applied ethics that is not supposed to solve eternal scientific problems but concrete and recent practical problems.<sup>132</sup> His interest in these rather non-scientific questions culminated in a political theory in *Natur und Kultur* — a theory about human nature and a

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Zilsel,” in *Philosophie, Wissenschaft, Aufklärung. Beiträge zur Geschichte und Wirkung des Wiener Kreises*, ed. Hans-Joachim Dahms (Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, 1985), 133.

<sup>126</sup> See Klaus Taschwer, *Wissenschaft für viele: Zur Wissensvermittlung in der Wiener Volksbildungsbewegung rund um 1900*, (Wien: Czernin, 2005).

<sup>127</sup> Neurath et al., “Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung,” 27.

<sup>128</sup> Rudolf Carnap, “Theoretische Fragen und praktische Entscheidungen,” *Natur und Geist* 2 (1934), 257–260. Also see Siegetsleitner, *Ethik und Moral im Wiener Kreis*, 133-136.

<sup>129</sup> See Horace M. Kallen, “Postscript: Otto Neurath, 1882-1945,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 6/4 (1946): 533.

<sup>130</sup> Heinrich Neider, “Memories of Otto Neurath,” in *Otto Neurath. Empiricism and Sociology*, ed. Marie Neurath and Robert S. Cohen (Dordrecht-Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1973), 46.

<sup>131</sup> Otto Neurath, “Lebensgestaltung und Klassenkampf,” in *Gesammelte philosophische und methodologische Schriften, Band 1*, ed. Rudolf Haller and Heiner Rutte (Wien: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, [1928] 1981), 293. Also see Cartwright et al., *Otto Neurath*, 76.

<sup>132</sup> Moritz Schlick, “Ethik des modernen Lebens. Eine Kritik der gegenwärtigen Kultur,” in *Moritz Schlick Gesamtausgabe, Abteilung II Band 3.2. Vorlesungen, Vorträge und Fragmente zur Ethik*, ed. Friederike Tömm, (Wiesbaden: Springer, [1927] forthcoming), 375-376.

critique of the modern state as a warmongering entity. The primary antagonist of his discussions was Oswald Spengler as the author of *Der Mensch und die Technik*.

In *Natur und Kultur*, Schlick primarily attacked, as he called it, Spengler's "crude hypothesis [*lieblose These*]" but "favorite thought [*Lieblingsgedanke*]" that humans are predators by nature. Spengler tried to prove this assumption by pointing out the anatomical similarities between humans and predators, especially eagles and lions. He claimed that Humans move in a straightforward way and their eyes are at the front of the head.<sup>133</sup> Schlick, in turn, argued that Spengler did not only ignore the evidence of evolutionary biology, but his examinations were also flawed. Humans originated from herbivorous monkeys, and they are, in fact, more similar to monkey than to lions and eagles, with regard to their social behavior and anatomy.<sup>134</sup> However, the main error of Spengler's argumentation, according to Schlick, was the attempt to argue both metaphysically (by saying that humans are "spiritually [*seelisch*]" predators, despite their evolutionary origin,) and biologically (by referring to some "physical characteristics [*körperliche Einrichtungen*]"). Following both strategies is difficult, especially due to Spengler's flawed observations. Schlick then concluded laconically: "Nothing follows from Spengler's predator argument, except that he prefers to be rather a lion than a monkey, and that he maybe wishes the same for all other humans."<sup>135</sup>

Schlick himself defended a positive image of the human nature, as part of his project of an empirical psychology in *Grundfragen der Ethik*. While Spengler claimed that humans have instincts for hatred, attack, and annihilation,<sup>136</sup> Schlick claimed that humans are peaceful by nature, and have "social instincts [*soziale Triebe*]," "duty instincts [*Pflichttriebe*]," and "altruistic instincts [*altruistische Triebe*]," other than their egoistic instincts for self-preservation. Thanks to these instincts, humans tend to help, because they feel pleasure when they do so, and they prevent injustices, because they feel pain when they see others suffer.<sup>137</sup> In *Natur und Kultur*, Schlick again emphasized the existence of social instincts, thanks to which people treat each other with dignity.<sup>138</sup> However, Schlick was aware that people do not always act in this way. In *Natur und Kultur*, Schlick diagnosed that the current existential hardship of mankind originated in the state. There is "... nothing that causes more existential hardship for the people than the state."<sup>139</sup> This is so because there is no morality between states and no proper judicial system that can punish them for their crimes. The state is, as Schlick summarized, "the coldest of all cold beasts."<sup>140</sup> Morality is a purely psychological property of individuals. But since citizens of different states are spatially separated from each other artificially, their innate social instincts are not stimulated. So, the state does not only lack any moral property; it also prevents people from their natural endeavor to interact and sympathize with each other. This leads to hostility, a wrong kind of national proud, and, finally, war:

... the state took possession of an intrinsically harmless feeling of togetherness with brute force and relentless institutions to use it for its aggressive purposes.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Spengler, *Der Mensch und die Technik*, 16-19, 22.

<sup>134</sup> Schlick, *Natur und Kultur*, 32-33. Also see Vrahimis, "The Vienna Circle's Responses to *Lebensphilosophie*," 56.

<sup>135</sup> Schlick, *Natur und Kultur*, 33.

<sup>136</sup> Oswald Spengler, *Der Mensch und die Technik*, 56.

<sup>137</sup> Schlick, "Grundfragen der Ethik," 120, 125.

<sup>138</sup> Schlick, *Natur und Kultur*, 70.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

In contrast to Spengler, Schlick did not think that the existence of wars is grounded in human nature. The state does not institutionalize the aggression that is already there. It is the structure of the state itself that has the potential to turn innately peaceful citizens into hateful soldiers. In accordance with his assumption, Schlick criticized theories that glorify states for their lack of moral norms; that support power, “combat readiness [*Kampfbereitschaft*],” and solidarity only among the state’s citizens, instead of “goodness [*Güte*],” love, and humanity.<sup>142</sup> Without mentioning his name, Schlick, most certainly, meant Spengler’s theories here.

However, Schlick noted that states do not have to be the source of existential hardship. Spengler and Schmitt defined the state as a political and military unit against real or potential enemies, and politics as a means to prepare for war and to keep enemies away. Schlick, in turn, claimed that the basic idea of states and politics is and was always to be a community of people who provide help and protection for each other, and, thereby, create peace in the world.<sup>143</sup> In the words of Martin Buber, we might say that Schlick emphasized the “cohesion sphere [*Zusammenhaltssphäre*]” of the state, while Schmitt and Spengler emphasized their “concussion sphere [*Erschütterungssphäre*].”<sup>144</sup> In order to create peace, Schlick claimed that all borders must be erased and the territorial states must be replaced by one world-state. This world-state is supposed to encompass all good people that are willing to live together peacefully against the remaining renegades. Within it, there would be still different state-like communities with different political positions. However, these “non-territorial states,” as Schlick called them, should no longer rule over a delimited area. Thanks to this constellation, all humans within the world-state could sympathize with each other.<sup>145</sup>

Schlick’s vision of a peaceful world without borders shows that the center of his political interest was the idea of a united mankind. This was already apparent in his philosophical debut *Lebensweisheit. Versuch einer Glückseligkeitslehre* from 1908. In this text, Schlick lamented that civilization, human culture and politics are just a “corset [*Schnürleib*]” around mankind, disfiguring its slim body. But mankind has to be freed from it.<sup>146</sup> In *Natur und Kultur*, Schlick revived these lyrical thoughts and included them into his political program.

Against the background of his anti-internationalist political ideology of states in *Preußentum und Sozialismus*, *Der Mensch und die Technik*, and *Der Untergang* it is obvious that Spengler rejected the idea of a unified mankind without states and wars for various reasons. First of all, he dismissed the idea of a peaceful and stateless society as a “foolishness [*Albernheit*]” and a

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>144</sup> Martin Buber, “Die Frage an den Einzelnen,” in *Die Schriften über das dialogische Prinzip*, (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, [1936] 1954), 239.

<sup>145</sup> Schlick, *Natur und Kultur*, 102. In his paper “Moritz Schlick’s Idea of non-Territorial States,” Schleichert discusses Schlick’s utopian idea in detail. He also provides examples of communities and states that almost fulfilled the criterion of Schlick’s non-territorial states, for instance the Roman Catholics and the Jewish diaspora who spread over the whole planet. However, these are communities within a world full of national states. Schleichert also makes aware of Yugoslavia as a tragic counter-example. Yugoslavia was a multi-ethnic state that collapsed due to nationalistic problems among its citizens. These problems could only (at least partially) be solved by separating the different ethnicities. Hubert Schleichert, “Moritz Schlick’s Idea of non-Territorial States,” in *The Vienna Circle and Logical Empiricism: Re-evaluation and Future Perspectives*, ed. Friedrich Stadler, (Dordrecht: Springer, 2003), 52, 56.

<sup>146</sup> Moritz Schlick, “Lebensweisheit. Versuch einer Glückseligkeitslehre,” in *Moritz Schlick Gesamtausgabe, Abschnitt I Band 3. Lebensweisheit. Versuch einer Glückseligkeitslehre. Fragen der Ethik*, ed. Mathias Iven, (Wien-New York: Springer, [1908] 2006), 128.

terrible boredom. For Spengler, wars, and conflicts between states, in general, were considered “creative [*schöpferisch*],” in the sense that they shape the state’s identity.<sup>147</sup> Undoing all the differences between people and forcing them into a united society of constant contentment would take away this source of creativity and would most likely lead to murder and suicide.<sup>148</sup> The idea of one mankind is, furthermore, simply inconsistent with the basic premise of *Der Untergang*. Cultures suddenly emerge and grow, and its people develop different ways of living. As a result, there will always be a plurality of essentially incompatible cultures. In the introduction of *Der Untergang*, Spengler added that the word “mankind” is nothing but a zoological term, and mankind is not a historical concept. Imagined as a unity, “the mankind,” would not have a soul, and therefore no goal, nor idea, nor plan.<sup>149</sup>

In *Anti-Spengler*, Neurath reacted to this last passage and criticized Spengler’s position as unjustified. He diagnosed that, in the course of history, peoples from different parts of the world, indeed, became less and less hostile against each other. Some of them even merged. According to Neurath, Spengler did not provide any proper reason why mankind could not be united one day. Furthermore, he refused Spengler’s assumptions about the incompatible essences of cultures. Different peoples could practice different but compatible ways of living in one “human civilization [*Menschheitszivilisation*]” or one “human culture [*Menschheitskultur*].”<sup>150</sup> Like Schlick, Neurath sympathized with the idea of overcoming states and of replacing them with a peaceful, united world-encompassing society. However, while Schlick argued for a united mankind as an apolitical thinker, Neurath argued for it from the perspective of a socialist cosmopolitan. This becomes apparent in the *Manifesto*, in which he (together with Hahn and Carnap) noted that there is an internal connection between the unification of mankind, the change of the social and economic circumstances, and the scientific conception of the world.<sup>151</sup> It also becomes apparent in his article “Menschheit.” Against Spengler’s position in *Preußentum und Sozialismus*, Neurath considered socialism as a movement to overcome national states, and against Spengler’s position in *Der Untergang*, he assumed that mankind as a whole can indeed have its own goal. Taking both aspects into account, he said that the “world revolution [*Weltrevolution*]” should come to establish “world socialism [*Weltsozialismus*].” In this vision of the future, Neurath saw a mankind that has established a global order of peace “[*Weltfriedensordnung*]” with socialism as the guiding economic principle.<sup>152</sup>

Against Adorno’s diagnosis of the Spengler reception, I am inclined to say that both Neurath and Schlick, as positivists, indeed fought for the utopian idea of a united mankind and against the “hotchpotch” of multiple cultures.<sup>153</sup> However, their approaches were different.

In *Natur und Kultur*, Schlick provided an adequate criticism of Spengler’s unjustified negativistic conception of man. However, his political philosophy is problematic because it is only based on a psychological analysis of moral and lacks crucial understanding of sociology, and economics. In his review of *Natur und Kultur*, Helmut Kaiser argued that, first of all, it is a dangerous oversimplification to identify good actions with those actions that cause pleasure

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<sup>147</sup> Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, 1007.

<sup>148</sup> Spengler, *Der Mensch und die Technik*, 4.

<sup>149</sup> Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, 28.

<sup>150</sup> Neurath, “Anti-Spengler,” 147-148.

<sup>151</sup> Otto Neurath, Hans Hahn, and Rudolf Carnap, “Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung,” 10.

<sup>152</sup> Neurath, “Menschheit,” 200.

<sup>153</sup> See Adorno, “Spengler nach dem Untergang,” 128.

and bad actions with those that cause pain.<sup>154</sup> Despite his honorable dedication to argue against Spengler and to fight against the upcoming fascism, as Kaiser went on to say, Schlick's attempt to solve the existential hardship of the people by replacing national states with one "good" world-state was, therefore, naïve. Every demagog would be eager to proclaim that she can found and protect the one and only "good" world-state.<sup>155</sup> According to Kaiser, Schlick ignored the bigger picture of how modern societies and states work. More precisely, coming from a "bourgeois [*bürgerlich*]" background, he ignored that states are shaped by the capitalist economic systems and that the existential hardship is, therefore, primarily the result of "class antagonisms [*Klassengegensätze*],"<sup>156</sup> and not the result of physical distance.

One does not have to be a Marxist to see that Schlick's admirable counter-project against Spengler rests, indeed, on an abstract and ahistorical conception of how people interact, and why they do so. From this point of view, Neurath's utopian vision might be more promising and shows his awareness of the concrete social and economic situation of the people. Neurath did not only recognize the difficulties of establishing a common moral ground, due to the diversity of all the ethnicities in the world; he also recognized that the unification of mankind requires a change of the economic and social system to break the class antagonisms.<sup>157</sup>

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have compared systemically central philosophical positions of Oswald Spengler and the Vienna Circle. I have then discussed the points of criticism that the members of the Circle brought forth against Spengler, and I have also evaluated them. It turned out that many members were unable to criticize Spengler properly for multiple reasons. In some cases, their arguments rested on a scientific or logical ground that Spengler simply did not share. In other cases, they misconceived some of the concepts that Spengler used. Almost all of the Circle's members underestimated the inciting potential of Spengler's anti-scientific philosophical project. One reason for this inability might have been that Spengler's approach was unique and contradicted the standards for philosophical reasoning that the members of the Circle were familiar with. That does not mean that they were bad philosophers of science; it just shows how hard it was to oppose the "brute force [*brutale Gewalt*]" of Spengler, as Adorno called it.<sup>158</sup> Among the critics, however, Otto Neurath turned out to be his strongest opponent. He did not only expose various contradictions and implausible consequences of his assumptions; he also made aware of the inciting potential and the dangerous anti-scientific spirit and provided strong philosophical and political counter-positions.

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<sup>154</sup> Helmut Kaiser, "Moritz Schlick, Natur und Kultur," *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 3/5 (1955), 655.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 657-658.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 661.

<sup>157</sup> Otto Neurath, "Menschheit," 200.

<sup>158</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Spengler nach dem Untergang," 116.

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