

[Forthcoming in
Christian Damböck & Georg Schiemer (eds.). *Rudolf Carnap Handbuch*. J.B. Metzler
Verlag, 2024]

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The Chicago Years (1936-1951)

Shipping up to Chicago

Between 1932 and 1935, Rudolf Carnap was living in Prague and teaching at the city's German University. His last two years there, however, were largely devoted to the search for an American position, as the political and existential threats of nationalist Germans became unbearable even in Czechoslovakia after Hitler had come to power in 1933. Following many discussions, exchanges of letters, and requests to many colleagues - in which his three recent American acquaintances, namely W.V.O. Quine, Charles Morris, and Ernest Nagel played a leading role (Verhaegh 2022) - Carnap got lucky.

In February 1935, he was invited to give a talk at Harvard's tercentenary celebrations in September 1936 and to accept an honorary doctorate. Another invitation came later in August, this time from the University of Chicago, to teach a course in the Winter Quarter running from January to March 1936. Carnap happily accepted both. He was uncertain though of what would happen after March - he was going to give lecture courses at the prestigious Harvard Summer School, prior to attending the tercentenary in September. Between all these engagements, he was planning numerous lectures here and there and hoped for a call with an invitation from a university or even a small college.

On December 15, 1935, Carnap thus boarded the steamer "Bremen" in tourist class, and after a week sailed into New York City, where Ernest Nagel and company welcomed him and Ina. Carnap chose an earlier date for his journey to attend the big meeting of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association in Baltimore on December 31 to present his text on "Testability and Meaning" and to introduce himself.

A well-prepared field

Carnap was not the first member of the Vienna Circle to go to the United States, however. Schlick had already lectured there twice, Herbert Feigl went first to Harvard in 1930 and then to Iowa, and even Otto Neurath had delivered some talks in the early 1930s and made a name for himself. As Sander Verhaegh (2020a, 2020b) has shown, Schlick and Feigl mounted an intensive campaign to promote their version of logical positivism, and by the time Carnap arrived, logical positivism was widely known and debated in the country.

But Carnap was lucky also because all those young scholars who had embarked on a pilgrimage to Europe in order to study the latest logical and philosophical trends - like Nagel, Morris, Quine, Sidney Hook, and Alonzo Church - had already returned home and started to prepare the ground for the analytic takeover. Quine famously lectured on Carnap's syntactical issues (Creath 1990, see also Chapter 30 by Verhaegh), while Morris published various articles to promote the ideological integration of American pragmatism with European logical positivism (collected in Morris 1937). Finally, with the 1936 establishment of the Association for Symbolic Logic and its platform, the *Journal of Symbolic Logic*, the European dominance in logic (which initially had attracted many young minds to Germany and Poland) was weakened, as all the European refugee logicians now received the kind of institutional and organizational support that they had never had on the old continent. As a result, Carnap arrived on well-prepared ground

and as an established scholar, someone of whom many had heard and who was viewed as the leading representative of a European movement revolutionizing both the practice and theory of philosophy.

Carnap took great advantage of this situation. While and after lecturing in Chicago about science and its logical frameworks, he availed himself of every opportunity and delivered numerous talks on the East Coast (Urbana, Iowa, New Rochelle, New York, and at Yale, Princeton, and Cornell). As a regular attendee and speaker at Morris' discussion group on the logic of sciences, Carnap was able to correct many misinterpretations and could update the students' and philosophers' views on the Vienna Circle. To this end, he also participated in every department lunch and dinner, and took long walks with many colleagues and interested philosophers (when he first visited Princeton in April 1936, he even had a chance to talk over methodological issues with Einstein).

When the winter semester was over, Carnap was offered a professorship in Chicago's Department of Philosophy, and though he kept his eyes open for alternatives, he was again happy to accept. Before he started to teach, he delivered a talk on "Truth in Mathematics and Logic" at the joint meeting of the Association for Symbolic Logic and the American Mathematical Society on September 1 (Carnap 1936), which was attended by 350 people and broadcast even in Europe. A few days later, he gave his talk on logic, entitled "Factors Determining Human Behavior" (Carnap 1937), at the Harvard symposium, where his fellow speakers included the Nobel-prize winning physiologist Edgar Adrien, the biochemist James Collip, who had co-discovered insulin, such psychologists as Jean Piaget, C.G. Jung, and Pierre Janet, the former Harvard president A. Lawrence Lowell, and the cultural anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski. A few weeks later, he was awarded an honorary doctorate at a ceremony led by James Conant and attended even by President Roosevelt, who spoke about freedom in his address.

By attending such prestigious events and appearing in newspapers and magazines, Carnap not only disseminated the latest ideas around logical positivism, thus shaping its growing reception, but also established a name for himself as the leading scientific philosopher of the time. However, when his first semester as a professor at the University of Chicago started in October 1936, he presumably still did not know what exactly awaited him there.

Under the Guiding Eyes of Aquinas

American scholars and scientists were known to be deeply religious, having a strong commitment to human values and a moral stratification of scientific and personal matters. One of their academic centers was the University of Chicago, where the university president, Robert Maynard Hutchins, and his right-hand man, Mortimer Adler, tried to impart a deeply religious, humanistic education for many years. Both were philosophical adherents of (neo-)Thomism (though Adler was rather extremist in his fight against professors and intellectuals he considered dangerous for the moral education of the nation), and they had strong connections to Thomist journals, conferences, publications, and lecture series. Nonetheless, the situation was quite complex; as one student noted, "the University at that time was often stereotyped as a place where Protestant students were taught Roman Catholic philosophy by Jewish professors" (Kaplan 1991, 34).

Hutchins and Adler reformed undergraduate education at Chicago by focusing on classical texts, even within the Department of Philosophy - to achieve their goals, they launched a major "Great Books" series, a collection of primary sources for the historically minded. Because of that, the university made the front page of *Life* magazine in July 1945, where this morally-driven historical education of the youth was covered on many pages. As Carnap recalled later, the historical method was based on a close reading and immanent understanding of classical authors through their own, original concepts and contexts, disregarding any modern developments. "This education in historical carefulness and a neutral attitude seemed to me useful and proper for the purpose of historical studies, but not sufficient for training in philosophy itself" (Carnap 1963, 41). Carnap was not a historian, of course; his more systematic view of philosophy (as an active field of development), criticism, and progress obviously clashed with the Thomists' historical-philological-metaphysical

understanding of cultural concepts. (In fact, those clashes proved to be highly stimulative for Carnap's thinking; see Damböck's introduction to Carnap 2024.)

While the religious scholars of the era often viewed positivists as the demolishers of cultural, human, and moral values via their advocacy of dehumanized, abstract reasoning and quantitative, data-driven analysis, Carnap had "the weird feeling" that he was "sitting among a group of medieval learned men with long beards and solemn robes ... I would perhaps dream that one of my colleagues raised the famous question of how many angels could dance on the point of a needle" (Carnap 1963, 42). In the end, Carnap forged a psychologically helpful interpretation of all the atavistic beliefs he encountered: He basically came to view the Thomists around him as mementos of the past that were always encouraging one to remember "that philosophical thinking has made great progress in the course of two thousand years" (1963, 42-43). Often, the fights in the background against the positivists (and their allies, such as Morris) were so intense that rumors spread that Adler and others had prevented Philipp Frank from getting a one-year position in Chicago. While Frank brought Carnap to Prague in the early 1930s, he was not able to bring him over to the United States as an ally because of the Thomist resistance.

Carnap in Chicago

Despite the critical and hostile atmosphere, Carnap's scholarly pursuits were flourishing in and outside of Chicago. After coming out of the closet with his semantic sensitivities at the 1935 Paris Congress, he discussed semantics with many of his new American colleagues and again went to Paris in 1937 to debate Neurath and others who were still skeptical of the overly formalistic tendencies within the philosophy of language. But all the critical voices - and there were a lot of them in the 1930s and 1940s among American pragmatists and naturalists (Tuboly 2021) - prompted Carnap to formulate his ideas in a systematic manner. He first presented his idea of how he could save semantics from its alleged metaphysical underpinnings in detail in his newly established series, *Studies in Semantics*, whose first volume was published in 1942 as *Introduction to Semantics* (see Chapter 50). It was closely followed by a volume on the *Formalization of Logic* (1943), and another one in 1947 on modal logic (*Meaning and Necessity*).

Carnap had been thinking about modalities (necessity, possibility, and impossibility) since the early 1930s, but despite the efforts of Oskar Becker and others in Europe, modal logic was flourishing in the United States mainly due to the work of Lewis, Parry, Church, Quine and many other logicians and philosophers. Thus, when Carnap arrived in Chicago, and became a regular visitor to Harvard as well, he quickly immersed himself in the world of modalities as a systematic field of philosophical analysis. As his old brother-in-arms Hans Reichenbach was also dedicating himself to a modal understanding of scientific laws, Carnap was reassured that he was on the right path, despite Quine's long-standing animadversions (see Chapter 51).

The early 1940s and 1950s gave Carnap another chance to redefine his relation to the Unity of Science Movement (see Chapter 49). In September 1936, he approached the University of Chicago Press, together with Neurath and Morris, and they were able to reach an agreement that they would handle the *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science* (originally planned to include 20 volumes prior to the 1939 Harvard Congress) in its entirety. With that, Chicago became the American center of the movement, and Carnap not only lectured countless times on the topic - after Philipp Frank had settled in America, they organized various discussion groups at Harvard together and tried to facilitate interscientific discussions in the spirit of unification (Hardcastle 2003).

One of the regular topics of these discussion nights were statistics, probability, and their usage across the sciences (not least due to Richard von Mises, who was also at Harvard at the time). Meeting often with Herbert Feigl (who had held a long-standing interest in the topic since his student years), Carnap realized the importance of induction and probability for the philosophy of science, especially in the context of the American war effort and the rapid logicalization and formalization of data management, which resulted in the objectivity-motivated figures of Cold War rationality (see Chapter 53). Again, despite the topic's European roots (which went back to Friedrich Waismann and the Circle), Carnap was able to systematically formulate his views only in the freer

atmosphere of American universities that not just made interscientific discussions possible, but even fostered them.

These discussions were close to Carnap's heart, so much that he even attended the lectures of other academics. One major example was Bertrand Russell's seminar on meaning and truth, which he gave during the winter semester of 1939 in one of the biggest auditoriums of the university, packed with hundreds of students, colleagues, "townspeople, including housewives and businessmen" (Slezak and Jackanicz 1977, 11). Carnap went there with Morris and "[Russell] had the felicitous ability to create an atmosphere in which every participant did his best to contribute to the common task" (Carnap 1963, 35). Though Russell felt that he was not liked by President Hutchins and the neo-Thomists, he remembered the seminar with great enthusiasm, describing it later as "extraordinarily delightful" (Russell 1968, 331). The positive and close understanding of Russell's late philosophy that Carnap acquired there brought on him the wrath of Neurath, who had read the published outcome and then implored Carnap to save empiricism in their correspondence (see the letters in Cat and Tuboly 2019).

Carnap's relation with Russell continued when the latter delivered the William James lectures at Harvard in 1940, at the time of Carnap's visiting professorship there. That same year, Alfred Tarski was also at Harvard, and together with Quine and Nelson Goodman, they formed another temporary discussion group to address matters of logic, semantics, and the foundations of mathematics. As Greg Frost-Arnold (2013) has shown, these discussions already drew the dividing lines that would come to characterize the history of analytic philosophy in the following decades.

As untrodden paths continued to be close to Carnap's heart, much like during his European years, he attended László Moholy-Nagy's "New Bauhaus" in Chicago around 1937-38 and gave a lecture about the nature and role of science and its relation to life (on the origins of the Carnap-Bauhaus relation, see Chapter 7). Again, as he did before, he claimed that science merely gives us ways and means to learn - it only "supplies a map showing all paths, you decide" (ASP RC 110-08-21). This form of withdrawal from public affairs, restricting science to its educational function, instead of positing values for concrete actions, would be interpreted in many different ways in the years to come (Damböck 2022).

Escaping Chicago

Carnap noted that in Chicago, Charles Morris came closest to his own philosophical position, but in fact, Morris was his only friend in the Department of Philosophy (Kaplan 1991, 34). At times, C.G. Hempel and Olaf Helmer surely provided some European comfort when they were his assistants in 1937-38 (see Chapter 27), but at his own institute, Carnap was walking on thin ice. There was sort of a disparity in strength at the department: "though Carnap was increasingly being recognized as a logician and philosopher of world fame," according to Kaplan (1991, 35), "at the University he had very few serious students." In fact, he often viewed most of his audience as "spies" or "tourists."

Among the Thomists, religious scholars, historians, and all the politically active, education-driven reformers of the declining modern West, Carnap possibly did not help his cause with his uncompromising rationality, consistency, and interest in pure truth within the classroom. Carnap not only attended Russell's seminar for the sake of discussion, but even joined up his own seminar with Russell's to play, as Morris recalled, "devil's advocates in raising questions in terms of our own positions" (Slezak and Jackanicz 1977, 11). On that occasion, being an old-fashioned aristocrat, Russell "wielded a rapier - thrust, cut, and parry, with flashing wit and insight." On the other hand, "Carnap was a whole panzer division all by himself, a *Star Wars* fighting machine clanking inexorably with heavy tread and crushing all in its path." (Kaplan 1991, 40). Conquering the United States from its religious center was made possible only by his countless connections on the East Coast, at first, and later on the West Coast as well, when in 1954 he became professor at UCLA, succeeding his old friend, Hans Reichenbach.

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