

THE VIENNA CIRCLE EXHIBITION
UNIVERSITY OF VIENNA
MAIN BUILDING
MAY – OCTOBER 2015



universität
wien

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GRAPHICS: BEA LAUFERSWEILER

HONORARY COMMITTEE: CARL DJERASSI
MARTIN KARPLUS
WALTER KOHN
HELGA NOWOTNY
PETER PULZER
EDWARD TIMMS
ERIKA WEINZIERL

EXHIBITION

THE VIENNA CIRCLE – EXACT THINKING IN DEMENTED TIMES

On the occasion of its 650th anniversary, the University of Vienna will organize an exhibition on the Vienna Circle from mid-May to mid-October 2015. The exhibition will be held in the main building, with a direct entrance from the Ringstrasse (formerly Dr. Karl Lueger Ring, now Universitätsring). The curators are Karl Sigmund and Friedrich Stadler, both professors at the University of Vienna. The architect is Hermann Czech, the media advisor Peter Weibel, both among the most eminent Austrian artists, and the honorary committee consists of Carl Djerassi, Walter Kohn, Martin Karplus, Edward Timms, Peter Pulzer, Erika Weinzierl and Helga Nowotny. It is planned to show a reduced version of the exhibition in the USA, possibly to commemorate in 2016 the 80th anniversary of the assassination of Moritz Schlick, the head of the Vienna Circle.

ABOUT THE VIENNA CIRCLE

In 1924, a philosopher (Moritz Schlick), a mathematician (Hans Hahn) and a social reformer (Otto Neurath) founded a philosophical circle in Vienna.

The group discussed questions such as: how can the efficiency of mathematics be explained? What is the role of logical propositions? What is the basis of scientific knowledge?

Young thinkers such as Kurt Gödel, Rudolf Carnap or Karl Menger joined the group, others (such as Karl Popper or Oskar Morgenstern) stood close. The circle quickly became the center of logical empirism. It had close contacts with Albert Einstein, Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Its topics were soon picked up in Prague and Berlin, Cambridge and Harvard.

The public phase of the Vienna Circle in 1929 began, through the Verein Ernst Mach. The Vienna Circle quickly became a favorite target for antisemitical and reactionary currents at the University of Vienna. The political surroundings turned increasingly adverse.

In 1934, Hahn died. Neurath had to flee into exile. Schlick was murdered in 1936 by a former student. The Vienna Circle dissolved even before the Nazi takeover, and it did not regain a foothold in Vienna after the war. But it exerted a decisive influence on the intellectual and scientific history of the 20th century.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Visualizing philosophy is a challenge for multi-media science communication, but we can use Peter Weibel's 'augmented reality' installations to present a rich fund of images, documents and texts.

A central part of the exhibition will be devoted to the history of the racist and political persecution leading to the exodus of the Vienna Circle and the brutal suppression of Vienna's 'Golden Autumn'.

Many of the central topics of the Vienna Circle are still with us. A direct line leads from the abstract investigations of Carnap and Gödel on symbolic logic to programmed computers and the algorithms governing our life today. The 'Vienna pictorial statistics' of Neurath led to the pictograms directing streams of passengers all over the world. The Circle had close contacts with eminent writers and architects. There was also a tight connection with quantum physics and with Albert Einstein (Schlick was Einstein's prophet and 'Hausphilosoph', and Gödel became Einstein's best friend).

During the first half of the last century, Vienna's role in philosophy was crucial. In the constellation of Mach, Boltzmann, Wittgenstein, Gödel and Popper, the Vienna Circle played a central role. Its story includes murder and suicide, persecution and nervous breakdowns, and it is fuelled by heated controversies, ranging from the debate between Popper and Wittgenstein about whether philosophical problems exist at all. The exhibition will deal with the extraordinary intellectual and cultural flowering leading to the Vienna Circle, on the one hand. On the other hand, it will emphasize the terrible ravages of political fanaticism and anti-semitism, and the ruthless destruction of a pinnacle of exact thinking.



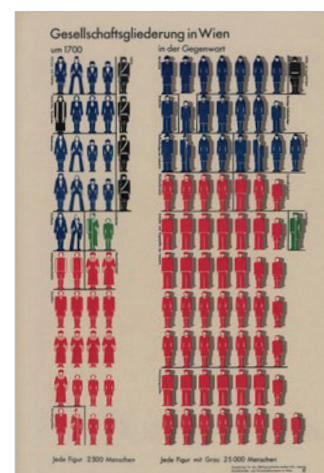
University of Vienna



Moritz Schlick Hans Hahn Otto Neurath



Anti-semitic riots



Pictorial statistics by Otto Neurath and Marie Reidemeister