

## Neurath, Otto. *Gesammelte ökonomische, soziologische und sozialpolitische Schriften. Band 3*

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## Neurath, Otto. *Gesammelte ökonomische, soziologische und sozialpolitische Schriften. Band 4*

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## Neurath, Otto. *Gesammelte Schriften, Band 8. Ergänzungsband. Varia – Verstreute Schriften*

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Rome wasn't built in a day. Likewise, it took Otto Neurath's *Gesammelte Schriften* (Collected Works) over forty years to reach completion. The initiator Rudolf Haller, Heiner Rutte, and their team had presented the first two volumes in 1981, fittingly in the Viennese *Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum* (Museum for Societal and Economic Affairs), which Neurath had established in 1925. At first, there was no concrete plan but merely a vague hope that the two volumes covering most of Neurath's philosophical and methodological writings would lay the foundations for an encompassing anthology of Neurath's oeuvre. The enormous challenges of such an endeavor were surely envisaged.

First, Neurath's publications span a staggering array of themes. While he might be best known for his contributions to philosophy and to pictorial statistics, he was much more than the “energetic . . . driving force . . . [and] the big locomotive” (Rudolf Carnap) of the Vienna Circle and logical empiricism. Neurath formally started his academic career with a dissertation in economic history in 1906, supervised by Gustav Schmoller and Eduard Meyer, and a subsequent habilitation in Heidelberg (1917) on “war economics.” Yet, his publications would ultimately also include physics, history of logic, political economy, urban planning, sociology, literary history, and much more. Second, many of Neurath's articles were dispersed in obscure outlets, published anonymously or using pseudonyms. Although it can occasionally become a tad repetitive to peruse Neurath when he recites the same ideas to different audiences, I applaud the editorial teams of all eight volumes for retrieving some almost-forgotten treasures.

Despite organizational and financial hurdles, the collection continued to grow. In 1991, Haller and Robin Kinross finished editing volume 3 on Neurath's work on visual education; and in 1998, Haller and Ulf Höfer published two volumes containing Neurath's economic, sociological, and political writings from 1903 to 1918. Unfortunately, the outline for two additional volumes, covering 1919–45, failed to be put to action. With Haller's death in 2014, the last hopes for completion dwindled. Moreover, at this point the five published volumes were out of stock and secondhand copies cost a small fortune (as this reviewer painfully remembers).

Thus, it was a joyous surprise when Friedrich Stadler and his team rekindled the editorial project on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of Neurath's death in 2020. They managed to get the first five volumes republished and continued where their precursors had stopped. This resulted in three new

<sup>‡</sup>This has been updated since its original publication. A notice detailing this can be found here: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0067237824000432>

volumes: Höfer finalized the two remaining volumes dedicated to economic, sociological, and political writings, covering 1919–20 and 1921–45 respectively; and together with Christopher Burke and Neurath biographer Günther Sandner, he edited an eighth and concluding volume to the Collected Works. It contains articles that had not matched previous volumes as well as hitherto overlooked pieces which the editors unearthed. Some tough editorial decisions on what to include are convincingly justified in the introduction. As a wonderful service to Neurath scholars, the volume also contains the latest version of Neurath's bibliography, thereby updating earlier work by Marie Neurath and Stadler.

This review will obviously be unable to provide more than a broad outlook and a few glimpses of the diverse ideas covered in the 1,700 pages of the three new volumes. The first volume documents Neurath's most prolific phases and a turning point in his life: 1919. That year, Neurath served as president of the Bavarian central economic planning office. He was initially appointed by a parliamentary coalition and later remained in his position in both of the short-lived Munich Soviet Republics. His numerous publications from that time allow some insights as to how a self-proclaimed *theoretical* economist lives a practitioner's life in the "earthly plane" (Thomas Uebel and Nancy Cartwright). After the downfall of the Bavarian socialist experiment, Neurath had to stand trial for high treason. Not least due to interventions from prominent scholars and the Austrian government, he was merely forced to leave Germany. The incident, however, cost him his habilitation and the chance for an ordinary academic career. This restraint should be kept in mind when considering the format, topics, and tone of many of his subsequent writings.

Expanding on Uebel's discussion in a preface to volume 6, we may wonder whether there is any value in Neurathian political economy beyond the historical and documentary interest. For many of the specific policies Neurath addresses or for contextualized planning schemes, there is not. The detriment of (central) planning as such has not been universally realized, but Neurath has arguably been surpassed in the respective debates as well. Where Neurath's social scientific relevance has not waned (or at least should not have) is his scientific utopianism and, relatedly, his suggested "rational way to look upon the economy" (see, e.g., volume 7, pp. 496–535). Roughly speaking, scientific utopianism stresses that there are always alternatives to the status quo and to some proposed course of action. Social scientists are tasked with creatively constructing and meticulously exploring the likely consequences of different policies on the conditions of life (and on resources). The focus on conditions of life instead of cost-benefit-analysis is, by the way, coherent with Neurath's supposed archenemies in the Austrian School of Economics, as I have argued elsewhere.

Science and scientific thought experiments are the optimal means to explore expected outcomes, including large-scale unintended interactions between emotional, sociological, and economic factors. However, the decisions between various imagined scenarios ("utopias") is a political one, ideally to be subject to informed discussion and democratic processes. Thereby, although Neurath was an ardent champion of (fallible and incomplete) scientific knowledge and of planning, he cautiously avoided many pitfalls of expertocracy.

Readers will also find economic writings in volume 8 of the Collected Works, for instance a critical review of Ludwig Mises's *Theory of Money and Credit* from 1912. It foreshadows Neurath's and Mises's mostly indirect encounter in the socialist calculation debates, which features especially in volume 7 and in which these two protagonists agreed—against most socialist writers—that a socialist economy must dispense with meaningful money prices for the means of production. They evaluated such a state of affairs completely differently, however: Mises emphasized the ensuing lack of knowledge how to combine means of production efficiently and estimated disastrous proportions for the resulting loss of prosperity. By contrast, Neurath had criticized false incentives for acting individuals provided by money prices in the first place. He believed that calculation in kind, undertaken by a central planning agency, is the preferable mode of making decisions as to what to produce, where, and in which manner. Moneyless socialism would do exactly that.

Remarkable about Neurath's review of Mises's monetary theory is the fact that Neurath approvingly encapsulates a core idea of twenty-first-century Modern Monetary Theory. Mises and other defenders of commodity backed money overlook that general acceptability of a means of exchange ("a money")

“can be achieved by state threats” (volume 8, p. 42, my translation)—at least within a country. Where Neurath arguably errs (like most contemporary Misesians), especially considering his nominalist stance in philosophy, is in denying that it is a *terminological* difference between metallist and chartalist theoreticians of money, whether bills payable in money and other claims on money are to be considered “money” or not.

Neurath’s writings on architecture in volume 8 hint at another (partial) antagonist: Le Corbusier. These two modern planners differed as to the addressee of knowledge how to improve housing or urban development. Le Corbusier regarded a dialogue between experts and high-level political decision makers sufficient, whereas Neurath advocated informing and including affected citizens in the creation of plans as well as in the choosing of plans among alternative options. Ivan Ferreira da Cunha’s recent work illustrates that this more practical disagreement is a symptom of an underlying philosophical gulf. Le Corbusier’s notion of beauty as fundamental harmony of the universe, perceptible and designable by the genius architect, and ascertainable with infallible certainty and universal validity is anathema to the empiricist and anti-metaphysical Neurath. We have come full circle to Neurath’s (anti-)philosophy in volumes 1 and 2 of the Collected Works.

Whoever desires to track the countless other cross-connections between Neurath’s published works from philosophy and economics, via education and policy, to Chinese fables and beyond, now has a convenient and affordable option to do so.

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## Zimmerman, Joshua D. *Jozef Pilsudski: Founding Father of Modern Poland*

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Joshua Zimmerman has written what is likely to be the definitive biography of the Polish political conspirator, military commander, and statesman Józef Piłsudski for the foreseeable future. The “founding father of modern Poland,” who guided the establishment of Poland as an independent state and as a democracy after World War I, has been the object of cult-like devotion in his own country since at least his victory over the Bolsheviks in 1920, and was, in the 1920s and 1930s, also widely admired and esteemed outside of it. “He belonged to the group,” wrote one American author in 1936, “small throughout history, whom God chooses to carve out human destiny” (5). Zimmerman notes that while Piłsudski retains a place of central importance in Polish culture, he is now little known outside of it, suggesting that one of the aims of this book is to reintroduce this formidable figure to the English-speaking world.

*Jozef Pilsudski* is an exhaustive exploration of the Marshal’s (as he is sometimes called) public and private life, beginning with his family background and childhood and continuing into Poland after his death. The writing throughout is clear and accessible, devoid of jargon and unnecessary theorizing. (Zimmerman, however, made an odd decision to preserve the proper Polish spelling for all places and names, with two exceptions: the name Piłsudski, rendered as “Pilsudski” throughout, and Józef, spelled as “Jozef”—but only when referring to Józef Piłsudski [and not, for example, to Józef