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Positivist Post-Positivism Nietzsche's Reception in the Vienna Circle

HOPOS 2010, Budapest, June 25th 2010

Why Nietzsche?

"Nietzsche, though a professor, was a literary rather than an academic philosopher. He invented no new technical theories in ontology or epistemology; his importance is primarily in ethics; and secondarily as an acute historical critic."
(Bertrand Russell 1946: 728)

"post-positivism picks up a line of criticism launched by an early anti-positivist, Nietzsche, who famously wrote: 'facts are precisely what there is not, only interpretations'"
(John Zammito 2004: 10)

Outline

1. Nietzsche's Positivism
2. Neurath and Nietzsche
3. Carnap and Nietzsche
4. Nietzsche's Post-Positivism

1. Nietzsche's Positivism

1869 plan to study natural sciences

"I saw myself with grief and misery, very thin, very hungered: the *realities* where quite missing in my knowledge and the *ideals* where useless! — A quite burning thirst came over me: from then on actually I did nothing more than physiology, medicine and natural sciences — even to essential historical studies I went back only, when my task imposingly forced me to"

Ecce Homo (1888): 325

1. Nietzsche's Positivism

Nietzsche read scientific works of his time:

e.g. R. Mayer, W. Roux, H. v. Helmholtz

E. Du Bois-Reymond (e.g. *Ignorabimus*-lecture)

R. Avenarius (e.g. *Vierteljahrszeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Philosophie*)

E. Mach (*Analysis of the Sensations* 1886)

"Contrary to received opinion, Nietzsche's reading of Avenarius and Mach shows that he was familiar with, and even stimulated by, some of the principal ideas of what was to become logical positivism, the philosophy of the Vienna Circle and analytic philosophy"
(Th. Brobjer 2004: 41)

1. Nietzsche's Positivism

At least a positivistic middle period in Nietzsche

But, did Nietzsche influence the Vienna Circle?

Mach and Nietzsche exchanged publications

R. Eisler (1902), H. Vaihinger (1911), H. Kleinpeter (1913), P. Frank (1917)

"much of what Mach says is strikingly similar to what Nietzsche says"
(N. Hussain 2004: 126)

Connections between Nietzsche and the Vienna Circle have – of course – been noted by several scholars such as K.R. Fischer, G. Gabriel, F. Stadler, Th. Uebel, E. Nemeth ...

2. Neurath and Nietzsche

"Now we could do methodically what many researchers from the beginning of the 19th century had already practically achieved in individual cases and subsequently aimed for as a whole: *the exhaustive description of the sciences*. What the supporters of the Vienna Circle under the influence of Mach, Avenarius, Poincaré, Duhem, Abel Rey, Enriques, Einstein, Schröder, Frege, Peano, Hilbert, Russell as well as James and Nietzsche and others had proposed individually could be coordinated from now on"

Neurath: *The development of the Vienna Circle* (1936): 697

2. Neurath and Nietzsche

- Disrespect against academic philosophy
- Respect for contemporary science
- Findings in Psychoanalysis and Behaviourism
- Severe criticism of metaphysics
- Critique of Kant ("the Essay-Philosopher showed Kant's anti-scientific attitude" - 1938, p. 882)
- Critique of religion and ethics on the basis of historical and empirical considerations
- Defense against right-wing adoption (Anti-Spengler - 1921)
- but 1945 Neurath has Nietzsche on a list of problematic authors (together with Spengler)

3. Carnap and Nietzsche

"One has to admit that, in 1928, when Carnap published his 'Pseudo Problems' for the first time, *irrationalism* under the label of 'revival of metaphysics' was gaining ground in a threatening manner. Namely in Germany, under the influence of the works of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Eduard von Hartmann, Bergson, Klages and others, a renunciation from the objectivity of reason, yes, a hostility towards reason becomes visible in the writings and other documents of the public consciousness"

G. Patzig *Afterword to Carnap's Pseudo Problems* 1969: 94

3. Carnap and Nietzsche

Carnap does not count Nietzsche among the 'new metaphysicians' in his *Pseudo Problems*.

To the contrary, he writes elsewhere:

"A large part of his work has predominantly empirical content. We find there, for instance, historical analysis of specific artistic phenomena or an historical-psychological analysis of morals. In the work, however, in which he expresses most strongly that which others express through metaphysics or ethics, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* he does not choose the misleading theoretical form, but openly the form of art, of poetry"

Carnap (1931) *The Elimination of Metaphysics*: 80

3. Carnap and Nietzsche

Carnap read some Nietzsche and acknowledges mutual agreement in philosophical issues:

Nietzsche did serious historical-empirical work

Nietzsche found the right form to address the metaphysical ambition

Nietzsche is no "musician without musical ability"

"With Carnap, so to speak, Frege's *Begriffsschrift* lies on the desk and Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* on the bedside table" (G. Gabriel)

1. Did Carnap take Nietzsche serious?
2. Did he had an influence on Carnap's philosophy?

3. Carnap and Nietzsche

1. Example: Theories of Meaning:

"(Meaningful) statements are divided into the following kinds. First there are statements which are true solely by virtue of their form ('tautologies', according to Wittgenstein ...)"

"With respect to all other statements the decision about truth or falsehood lies in the protocol sentences. They are therefore (true or false) *empirical statements* and belong to the domain of empirical science"

Carnap (1932): *The Elimination of Metaphysics* ... p.76

("It is altogether impossible to make a statement that expresses a value judgement" *ibid.*: p. 77)

3. Carnap and Nietzsche

"Is language the adequate expression of all realities? Only due to forgetfulness can men ever come to believe: he possesses truth to such a degree. If he will not be content with truth in the form of tautology, i.e. with empty covers, he will ever only buy illusions for truths. What is a word? The representation of a nerve-stimulus in sounds. To conclude from the nerve-stimulus to a cause outside us is already the result of a wrong and unjustified application of principle of causation"

Nietzsche (1872): *Beyond Truth and Lie in the extramoral Sense* p. 875

3. Carnap and Nietzsche

2. Example: Critique of Dualism and the given I:

"The I-relation is no original feature of foundational elements, of the Given (...) Those theories are the victim of a prejudice, for which mainly language is responsible and its subject-verb-form of sentences"

Carnap (1928): *The Logical Structure of the World* §65

"The existence of the I is no element of the Given. *sum* does not follow from *cogito*" (ibid.: §163)

Reference to Avenarius, Natorp, Schlick et.al. and Nietzsche's *The Will to Power* (§ 276, 304, 309 ...) (cf. Nietzsche BGE § 17: "grammatical custom")

3. Carnap and Nietzsche

What is "the Given" in the constitutional system?

"The 'Given', that is the experiences themselves in their totality and closed unity" The "Elementary experiences – Elementarerlebnisse" (1928: 67)

"The result is: in the world of epistemic objects there are (as in any domain insofar it could be ordered) unlimitedly many forms of ordering, but only one, unified form of the to-be-ordered, the elements" (1928: 162)

Elementary experiences comply with elements

We should establish a scientific worldview

Philosophy can only help to clarify our language

4. Nietzsche's Post-Positivism

Nietzsche as a critique of Positivism:

"Opposing positivism, who stands still at the phenomena 'there are facts only', I would say: No, precisely facts is what there is not, only interpretations. We can not fix a fact in itself: it is probably irrational to aim for something like that."

Nachlass (Frühjahr 1887): 7[60]

Difference between Logical Positivism and textbook-notions of the "received view"

Nietzsche's interpretational Perspectivalism is opposed to Logical Positivism

4. Nietzsche's Post-Positivism

"we invent most parts of our experiences and we can hardly be forced to watch any process *not* as an 'inventor'. This all will say: we are essentially, since ancient times – *used to lying*. Or, to put it more virtual and hypocritical, say more convenient: You are much more an artist than you know".

Beyond Good and Evil (1886): 113f

Physiology (Helmholtz, Gestaltwahrnehmung)

Language: Coping, not Copying (Gerber)

Explanation: anthropomorphic projection (Hume, Mach)

4. Nietzsche's Post-Positivism

"that all Interpretations so far are perspectival evaluations, by means of which we succeed living – this goes through my works. The world, insofar as it concerns us, is wrong i.e. is no matter of fact but a poetic work and up rounding of a marginal sum of observations"

Nachlass (Herbst 1885-Herbst 1886), 2 [108]

Against the Myth of the Given:

Experience is an active process and contains of non-eliminable subject-sided moments

The measure is not truth or contemporary science but aesthetic judgements and 'life'

Nietzsche's Post-Positivism

"Given that this is also an interpretation only
– and you will be eager enough to object
that? – well, even better. —"

Beyond Good and Evil (1886): 37

