

Axiomatization of Otto Neurath's Encyclopedism

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Social Science, Visual Education and Neurath's "Image of Science"

Abstract

On January 1, 1925 Neurath became the director of the "Social and Economic Museum", one of the important institutions for adult education in "Red Vienna". Here he developed the "Viennese method of picture statistics". During the whole period of the Vienna Circle Neurath was not only a most active member of the group but became an internationally well known expert on picture language and visual education. Though Neurath thought of his picture language as a truly scientific language, the philosophical significance of his ideas on visual education have scarcely been analyzed until now.

In my talk I want to show first that some central features of Neurath's and Arntz's picture language are related to Neurath's position in the "Methodenstreit" in Social Science (see Uebel 1996 and 2002). The "Viennese Method" of pictorial statistics reflects the combination of "individualism" and "holism" Neurath was advocating. The "Viennese Method" was an excellent intellectual instrument to develop Neurath's version of comparative economics further.

Second: in the context of his reflections on visual education Neurath elaborated his views on how science could contribute to "social enlightenment". The aim of social enlightenment is not primarily to distribute scientific knowledge on social issues to the public, but to communicate and exercise a specific way of considering social phenomena. Visual education tries to transfer a specific "scientific attitude", "a quality not restricted to scholars only; there are laymen who have it and scientists who do not have it" (Neurath 1946).

Third: The way Neurath characterized the "scientific attitude" he wanted to encourage by visual education, invites us to look at scientific practice from an

unusual angle. Scientists and philosophers can learn something new about their own practice by looking carefully at what happens when social phenomena are represented in pictorial statistics.

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