

Richardson, A. W. (2023). *Logical Empiricism as Scientific Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press. 80 pp.

In his book *Logical Empiricism as Scientific Philosophy*, Alan W. Richardson posits a novel perspective on the philosophical significance of logical empiricism. Despite its relatively concise nature, the book is sufficiently comprehensive in its reassessment of literature from the past four decades to substantiate its argument. Richardson's argument posits that the fundamental commitment of logical empiricism lies not in its adherence to empiricism or logical analysis in and of itself, but rather, it is an endeavour to establish philosophy as a scientific discipline that is integrated within the scientific conception of the world.

This philosophical foundation emerged during a pivotal period, as logical empiricism became a central project within the academic philosophy from the late 1920s to the 1960s. The movement's genesis occurred in Europe, with primary centres of activity situated in Vienna and Berlin, prior to attaining its most significant phase in the United States. This migration to the United States was precipitated by the escalating rise of fascism in Europe, which compelled numerous scholars and proponents of logical empiricism to seek refuge and pursue opportunities elsewhere.

Among these scholars, Herbert Feigl is widely regarded as a trailblazer in the realm of emigration to the United States, a trend that would subsequently be emulated by an array of prominent intellectuals throughout the 1930s. This notable migration included figures such as Gustav Bergmann, Rudolf Carnap, Philipp Frank, Carl Hempel, Hans Reichenbach, and Edgar Zilsel, among others. Under the leadership of Moritz Schlick, the Vienna Circle became the centre of the early development of logical empiricism. The group commenced regular meetings in 1922, marking the onset of Schlick's leadership. A physicist by training, Schlick had assumed the chair of philosophy of inductive science in Vienna, a position previously established for Ernst Mach in 1895.

The authors of the 1929 manifesto, particularly Rudolf Carnap, Otto Neurath, and Hans Hahn, emerged as central figures in articulating the movement's philosophical vision. The manifesto enumerates ten additional core members of the Vienna Circle, including Gustav Bergmann, Herbert Feigl, Philipp Frank, Kurt Gödel, Viktor Kraft, Karl Menger, Marcel Natkin, Olga Hahn-Neurath, Theodor Radakovic, and

Friedrich Waismann. Notably, Friedrich Stadler's definitive history acknowledges that the number of intellectuals in Vienna affiliated with the Circle was considerably larger, with approximately twenty additional figures involved in various capacities (Soames, 2017).

The movement's influence extended well beyond Europe, as logical empiricism played a crucial role in shaping the contours of American academic philosophy, especially after World War II. Its contributions encompass the development of formal logic, metalogic, semantics and philosophy of language, philosophy of science, and formal epistemology. The ascendance of analytic philosophy in the United States, England, and, subsequently, throughout the world is largely attributable to the pre-eminence of logical empiricism. However, since the 1970s or even earlier, analytic philosophy has begun to understand itself as having moved beyond the philosophical doctrines and techniques associated with logical empiricism (Richardson, 2023).

The fundamental tension in logical empiricism emanates from its position between two different orientations. On the one hand, logical empiricism aspires to transform philosophy into a purely scientific endeavour, employing formal and logical methodologies to examine scientific knowledge. Conversely, logical empiricism also became an integral part of the broader tradition of analytic philosophy, which did not always demand the same rigorous scientific standards.

This tension was exemplified in the discussion between Carnap and Quine, wherein Quine critiqued Carnap's analytic-synthetic distinction as an empirically unsustainable "dogma of empiricism" (Van Quine, 1960). Max Black has argued that the logical empiricist approach is overly limited and fails to acknowledge the existence of other valid forms of knowledge. In his review of Reichenbach's work, Harris (1952) even characterized logical empiricism as an "arid desert" that impeded the development of philosophical thought. These critiques underscore the positivistic and reductionist character of logical empiricism, which has a tendency to reduce all meaningful knowledge to empirically verifiable statements.

However, as Richardson has noted, this characterization oversimplifies the movement's complexity. Logical empiricism encompasses a range of methodologies and theoretical frameworks. Neurath's approach is characterized by a naturalistic foundation, Frank's by historical and interpretive elements, and Morris's by a synthesis of empirical, pragmatic, and formal methodologies in the analysis of

meaning. This diversity of approaches underscores the heterogeneity in their understanding of the relationship between logic, experience, and scientific knowledge.

Logical Empiricism as Scientific Philosophy reveals that the shift from “scientific philosophy” to “analytic philosophy” in the reception of logical empiricism in post-World War II America was more the result of institutional and social factors than solely the internal development of philosophical argument. The logical empiricists who immigrated to America found themselves compelled to adapt to a novel philosophical landscape, resulting in more expansive and inclusive interpretations of their philosophical project.

In challenging the prevailing narrative that portrays logical empiricism as a failed project due to its inherent doctrinal deficiencies, Richardson offers a compelling alternative. Instead, Richardson demonstrates that logical empiricism represents a deliberate and significant endeavour to align philosophy with contemporary scientific standards while preserving the distinct characteristics that define philosophy as a distinct discipline. As previously mentioned, this book presents a sophisticated and intricate discussion, which may be challenging for readers lacking a fundamental understanding of the history of 20th-century philosophy. Hence, the book is deemed suitable for academics and postgraduate students of philosophy of science and analytical philosophy, as well as researchers investigating the relevance of the methodology of logical empiricism in contemporary debates concerning the relationship between philosophy and science.

References

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