

# The influence of Vienna *fin-de-siècle* on Wittgenstein

Natalia Tomashpolskaia

PhD candidate (viva voce 7.6.2024)

*Advanced Studies in Humanities*|Programa de Doctorado en Estudios Avanzados en Humanidades

Línea: Filosofía, Ciencia y Ciudadanía

*Faculty of Philosophy and Arts*|Facultad de Filosofía y Letras

University of Málaga, Spain

Analyzing modernist projects of the reformation of the language and the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein in particular, many researchers, primarily, refer to the intellectual atmosphere of Vienna at the turn of the 20th century, emphasizing its importance for identifying the prerequisites for the formation of the philosophical views of Wittgenstein. Thus, C. Schorske, A. Janik (2001), S. Toulmin (Janik, Toulmin 1973), Hobsbawm (1994), Bourdieu (1933), and K. Nyiri (1987), Perloff (2016), Stadler (2015) — consider the necessity to identify the connection between Wittgenstein's philosophy and the spiritual activities of several other representatives of Austrian culture (Haller 1968; Smith 1978). For my research I used historical examinations of the period of the end of the Habsburg Empire (Schorske 1980), (Nyiri 1981, 1982, 1987), (Mulligan 1990), (Hobsbawm 1994), (Janik, Toulmin 1973), (Kenny, McGuinness, Nyiri, et al., 1982). It is important to develop the topic of the relationship between a thinker's life and his thought, to reflect on the nature of contextualism and how philosophical problems intrude into cultural history (Janik, Toulmin 1973, 3). Contextualism here is understood as a historical inquiry into the origins of Wittgenstein's problems in their actual setting.

In this paper, I shall reconstruct the Wittgensteinian field, an intellectual microcosm, in Bourdieu's (1993) words. Wittgenstein was a product of a very particular central European culture with its special worldview and the form of life. Here I consider the influence of the *Zeitgeist* on Wittgenstein's thought and life. I believe that it is important to pay attention to the intent unity of both the life and work of a thinker. Toulmin (1969) paid attention to the ideas of Kant, Schopenhauer, Bühler, Russell, Moore, and psychologists of language as the most influential for the development of Wittgenstein's thought. B. Kaplan (1971) considered the influences of other philosophers on Wittgenstein's thought and life in his article. Kaplan comprised three distinguishable claims: (1) the knowledge of the socio-historical-intellectual context of an author is the most essential to a correct and clear understanding of his writings; (2) the most important context for understanding Wittgenstein's thought that determines his general and special *Problem-stellungen* was not from Cambridge, Manchester, or *Wiener Kreis*; this context is directly related to and derives from his childhood, i.e., Vienna in 1889–1903, Vienna in 1907–1908 (the controversy between Wundt and Bühler, Wittgenstein's University studies at Technische Hochschule in Berlin), participation in World War I, and the intellectual atmosphere in the German-speaking world in the post-World War I years, and, also, a teaching experience as a school teacher in Austrian remote villages.

Otto Neurath in his reflections about the dominance of the anti-metaphysical attitude in Vienna in his book on the development of the Vienna Circle and logical empiricism in Austria 'Die Entwicklung des Wiener Kreises und die Zukunft des Logischen Empirismus' (1936) singled out the three main factors: (1) the liberal atmosphere in Vienna; (2) the predominance of the empirical and logical philosophy; (3) the unique cultural situation (Neurath 1981 [1936], 673). Indeed, Vienna in the *fin-de-siècle* represented a unique combination of philosophical, sociological, political, psychological, and cultural ideas, this city was a locus of intellectual innovation in all spheres of knowledge and arts. In his 1930s diaries, published as *Public and Private Occasions*, Wittgenstein (2003, 37) left a note: 'Loos, Spengler, Freud & I all belong to the same class that is characteristic for this age.' Vienna at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries became the centre of European modern culture, one of the intentions of the latter was the development and creation of a new language. The originality of this culture lies in its 'complementarity of scientific spirit and metaphysical tension, of empirical analysis and research into the absolute' (Poli 1997, 17). Haller (1986b) described three distinctive features of the Austrian

philosophy of that time: (1) a critique of language, (2) a search for a scientific method, and (3) an empirical verification of the particular. The analytic spirit inspired writers and philosophers to ask questions about the 'supreme matters but to frame them in terms of a severe and skeptical scientific precision' (Magris 1978, 242–3). The reason was as follows: the scientific philosophy developed in the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of the 19th century did not identify itself with the philosophy of science and thus applied its tools to epistemology, ontology, ethics, psychology, and metaphysics. In Habsburgs' Austria, modern, special, and anti-orthodox ideas and views raised outside the establishment and official mainstream, appeared and were discussed in coffee houses and modest flats. The most radical of them were psychoanalysis, art nouveau, modernistic music, literary criticism, and modernist architecture.

Wittgenstein's Vienna had a multifaceted and multidimensional character. For the Viennese intellectual elite of that epoch, the question of the causes of the deep moral and cultural crisis was of fundamental importance. And the sphere of language did not escape the fate of also being part of this crisis. The ambivalent linguistic situation largely contributed to the development of projects for the purification of natural language in philosophy and literature (Kraus, Wittgenstein), the creation of a new language in music (Schoenberg and the Second Viennese School (Leibowitz 1947)), and, indirectly, to the idea of rejection unnecessary decor in architecture and design (A. Loos).

The interest in language, viewed through the prism of philosophy, was raised in Vienna at the edge of the centuries. Some researchers defend a radical but, upon close analysis, quite reasonable thesis that all 'linguistic philosophy' owes its birth to the culture of Vienna at the turn of the 20th century (see Mulligan 1990). Cloeren (1988) in his prominent research on the origin and the history of *Sprachkritik* stated that this mode accompanied the mainstream of German-speaking philosophers of that time. Poli (1997, 16), discussing the features and the subject of Central European philosophy, wrote that the 'language-world relationship was a central element of the intellectual debate of those years, suffice it to mention Rainer Maria Rilke and Hugo von Hofmannsthal among writers, and Fritz Mauthner and Ludwig Wittgenstein among philosophers.' Stern in his essay on Grillparzer and Austria, called Vienna the real Babylon and *alma mater* of linguistic philosophy. I believe that there were two of the most important Viennese contemporaries who significantly influenced the development of Wittgenstein's ideas. They were Karl Kraus and Fritz Mauthner. From Kraus Wittgenstein adopted the ideas of *critique of language*, *pure or ideal language as a mirror of the world*, and *critique of language as an activity*, word language as a *primary source*, inexpressibility of ethics in word language. From Mauthner Wittgenstein adopted the ideas of *critique of language*, conventionalism of symbols in language notation, metaphysical pseudo-concepts, *picture of the world*, dependence of memory on language grammar, substantiation of substantives, silence as the only one which is not misleading, *games of language*, *ladder metaphor*.