

Selected Philosophical Essays

Carl Gustav Hempel (1905–1997) was one of the preeminent figures in the philosophical movement of logical empiricism. He was a member of both the Berlin and Vienna Circles, fled Germany in 1934, and finally settled in the United States, where he taught for forty-five years in New York, New Haven, Princeton, and Pittsburgh.

The essays in this collection come from the early and late periods of Hempel's career and chart his intellectual odyssey from a commitment to rigorous logical positivism in the 1930s (when Hempel allied himself closely with Carnap) to a more sociological approach that was close in spirit to the work of Neurath and Kuhn.

Most of these essays are hard to track down, and four of them are appearing in English for the first time. Cumulatively, they offer a fresh perspective on Hempel's intellectual development and on the origins and metamorphoses of logical empiricism.

Richard Jeffrey has prepared the collection for publication, and he has supplied introductory surveys to the essays as well as the brief biography on Hempel that begins on page viii.

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Richard Jeffrey (left) with the author, Carl G. Hempel (right).

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CARL G. HEMPEL
Edited by RICHARD JEFFREY



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Preface

Peter (= Carl Gustav) Hempel and I projected something like this volume some six years ago as a representative selection of his earliest and latest philosophical writings, a companion piece to the familiar collection, *Aspects of Scientific Explanation*,¹ of writings earlier and later than those. We began by translating his 1934 Berlin doctoral dissertation – a piece which I finally decided to leave out. (It is available in the Hempel collection in the Hillman Library of the University of Pittsburgh.) Included in its stead are two articles (chapters 6 and 7) that are based on that dissertation, which was published in the 1930s. The first one, a translation from the German by Christoph Ehrlenkamp, has been revised by Peter's old friend and collaborator, Olaf Helmer. The only other paper we managed to translate was Peter's 1937 "Le problème de la vérité," chapter 4 here. Other translators of essays here were Wilfred Sellars (chapter 9) and Christian Piller (chapters 10 and 14).

In this book Peter speaks for himself; I have kept editorial comment to a minimum. But I must give some account of his long and remarkable life. The following brief biography is adapted from *Erkenntnis* 47 (1997) 181–83, and it is reprinted here with permission.

¹ Carl Gustav Hempel, *Aspects of Scientific Explanation* (New York: Free Press, 1965).

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Preface

CARL GUSTAV HEMPEL
JANUARY 8, 1905–NOVEMBER 9, 1997

He lived in “interesting” times, which drove him out of Germany, first to Belgium and then to the United States – where he died sixty years later in Princeton, his adoptive home, much loved and full of honors.

Born in Oranienburg, near Berlin, he studied mathematics, physics, and philosophy at the universities of Göttingen, Heidelberg, Berlin, and Vienna, receiving his doctorate in Berlin just a week before Hitler assumed the mantle of Führer-Reichskanzler in 1934. Hempel had nearly finished his dissertation (*Beiträge zur logischen Analyse des Wahrscheinlichkeitsbegriffs*) under the supervision of Hans Reichenbach when the latter was abruptly dismissed from his Berlin chair in 1933 shortly after Hitler become Chancellor. The ensuing problem of finding competent referees was sidestepped when Wolfgang Köhler and Nicolai Hartmann agreed to serve nominally in Reichenbach’s place. By then Hempel and his wife, Eva Ahrends, had moved to Brussels, where his friend and collaborator Paul Oppenheim had made it possible for them to support themselves. In August 1937 they moved to Chicago, where Rudolf Carnap had obtained Rockefeller research fellowships for Hempel and his friend Olaf Helmer. From 1939 to 1940 he taught summer and evening courses at City College in New York before being appointed to an Instructorship at Queens College, New York; here he remained until 1948, having reached the rank of Assistant Professor. It was in this period that Eva Ahrends died, shortly after giving birth to their son. Three years later, Hempel married Diane Perlow. He was an Associate Professor at Yale University from 1948 to 1955, when he moved to Princeton as Stuart Professor of Philosophy, a post he held until mandatory retirement at age 68 in 1973. For the next two years he continued to teach at Princeton as a Lecturer, and then he moved to the University of Pittsburgh as University Professor of Philosophy in 1977. Upon his retirement from Pittsburgh in 1985, he returned to Princeton, where he continued his philosophical work for another decade. He is survived by his wife, Diane, and by

Preface

his children, Peter Andrew Hempel and Miranda TobyAnne Hempel.

Although himself of unexceptionable “Aryan” stock, Hempel exhibited an insensitivity to such matters of a sort that constituted an offense in Germany at that time – namely, “Philosemitism,” an offense against which his father and other well-wishers warned him more than once. Indeed, his wife Diane is Jewish; and his first wife, Eva, had inherited “Jewish blood” from her father, as had his teacher, Reichenbach, from his. That is what made Germany uninhabitable in 1934 for him as well as for them and made him slow to revisit the place after the war.

As a university student he had been preparing himself to teach mathematics in high school after receiving the doctorate. He thought he would have enjoyed that life. And at Princeton he generally chose to teach introductory courses – undergraduate courses in logic and the philosophy of science as well as graduate seminars in which he brought novices to the point at which they could make their own contributions. What lay behind that preference was not a logical empiricist’s sense that more advanced students of vernacular philosophy would have been better off knowing less, but a kind of love or reverence or care for naïve minds, a sense, as he once put it, that they are the salt of the earth.

There was no arrogance in him; he got no thrill of pleasure from proving people wrong. His criticisms were always courteous, never triumphant. This quality was deeply rooted in his character. He was made so as to welcome opportunities for kindness, generosity, courtesy; and he gave his whole mind to such projects spontaneously, for pleasure, so that effort disappeared into zest. Diane was another such player. (Once, in a restaurant, someone remarked on their politeness to each other, and she said, “Ah, but you should see us when we are alone together. [Pause] Then we are *really* polite.”) And play it was, too. He was notably playful and incapable of stuffiness.

Some have marvelled at his willingness to change his mind. Such philosophical lightness seems incompatible with the meticulous attention to details of arguments and definitions for which he is famous: the paradoxes of confirmation, the critique of the

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Preface

logical positivist conception of empirical meaningfulness, the analysis of explanation, and so on. But the lightness was a lack of nostalgia for bits of doctrinal baggage with their familiar stickers. He had no interest in ownership of such pieces; he really did just want to know the truth, and if a decade or two of close thought and argument should persuade him that some piece was empty, he would shove it overboard – with zest. He was rooted in truth no less than in kindness.

I do not expect to meet his like again.

Richard Jeffrey
Princeton, NJ
July 1998

Dates

CARL G. HEMPEL

Born in 1905 in Oranienburg, Germany. Studied mathematics, physics, and philosophy at the universities of Göttingen, Heidelberg, Berlin, and Vienna. Ph.D. University of Berlin, 1934.

Left Germany in 1934. Private research and writing in Brussels, Belgium, from April 1934 to August 1937. Research Associate in Philosophy, University of Chicago, 1937–38.

Instructor in philosophy in summer school, then in evening extension, at City College, New York, 1939–40.

Instructor, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Queens College, Flushing, New York, 1940–48.

Associate Professor, Professor of Philosophy, Yale University, 1948–55.

Professor, Stuart Professor of Philosophy, Princeton University, 1955–73; Stuart Professor of Philosophy, Emeritus, 1973–97; Lecturer, 1973–75.

University Professor of Philosophy, University of Pittsburgh, 1977–85.

Visiting Professor at Columbia University, 1950; Harvard, 1953–54; Hebrew University, Jerusalem, March–July 1974; University of California, Berkeley, Winter Quarters, 1975 and 1977; Carleton College, 1976; University of Pittsburgh, 1976; University of California at Irvine, April–May 1978. Lectures in Beijing at

Dates

Peking University and before the Academy of Science; in Shanghai at Fudan University and before the Society of Dialectics of Nature.

Guggenheim Fellow, 1947–48; Fulbright Senior Research Fellow, Oxford University, 1959–60; Fellow, Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, 1963–64; Honorary Research Fellow in Philosophy, University College, London, 1971–72; Gavin David Young Lecturer, University of Adelaide, Australia, June–July, 1979; Fellow, Wissenschaftskolleg Zu Berlin, 1983–84; Fellow, The Mortimer and Raymond Sackler Institute of Advanced Studies, Tel Aviv University (February 15 to April 15, 1984).

President, American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division; Vice-President, Association for Symbolic Logic; Fellow, American Academy of Arts and Sciences; member, Académie Internationale de Philosophie des Sciences; member, American Philosophical Society; Corresponding Fellow, The British Academy; Fellow, Society of the Lincei (Rome).

Honorary doctorates:

- Dr. of Science, Washington University, 1975
- Dr. of Letters, Northwestern University, 1975
- Dr. of Humane Letters, Princeton University, 1979
- Dr. of Humane Letters, Carleton College, 1981
- Dr. rer. pol., h.c., Freie Universität Berlin, 1984
- D. Litt., University of St. Andrews, 1986
- Ekrendoktorat der Philosophie, Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt, 1987
- Dr. of Letters, University of Pittsburgh, 1989
- Doctor ad honorem in philosophy, University of Bologna, 1989
- Honorary Doctorate, University of Konstanz, 1991

Died in Princeton, New Jersey, 1997.