

**Carnap, Reichenbach, Freyer.  
Non-cognitivist ethics and politics  
in the spirit of the German Youth-Movement**

Christian Damböck  
Institut Wiener Kreis  
[christian.damboeck@univie.ac.at](mailto:christian.damboeck@univie.ac.at)

**1. The political side of non-cognitivism: how to fit democracy through the eye of the needle of moral reasoning**

Moral non-cognitivism is recently discussed in an aseptic surrounding of logics and meta-ethics. These recent discussions do not seem to involve any political aspects, for they only concern *logical* problems of moral reasoning at a very high and abstract meta-level. Though even these aseptic aspects of the problem were somewhat introduced by Rudolf Carnap, in some of his later writings, this paper argues that the non-cognitivism of Carnap and his Berlin colleague Hans Reichenbach were initially intended as deeply political conceptions that frame a certain way how society may deal with values and norms. Here, the non-cognitivism of Carnap and Reichenbach converges with the classical democracy theory of so-called legal positivist Hans Kelsen, also a moral non-cognitivist but one who unambiguously interprets value problems *as* political problems.<sup>1</sup> In Carnap and Reichenbach we find traces at least of this democracy theoretical aspect of non-cognitivism. However, the genuinely political character of the Carnap-Reichenbach-brand of non-cognitivism becomes fully visible only if we go back to the origin of these views in the German Youth-Movement of the second decade of the twentieth century. The first author who noted this striking continuity was, already in 1977, Andreas Kamlah.<sup>2</sup> According to Kamlah, Reichenbach became a non-cognitivist *in spite of* his Logical Empiricism:

„Reichenbach’s non-cognitivist ethics can be traced back to his youth in the German Youth-Movement, therefore it is by no means a result of his logical empiricism.“ (p. 480)

However, one could also turn the tables here and view the moral philosophy of (left wing) Logical Empiricism to be a result of the German Youth-Movement. The Kamlah-interpretation may work, to be sure, only if we disconnect the moral philosophical views of Carnap and Reichenbach from the philosophical framework called “Logical Empiricism”. This seems to be what Kamlah has in mind, motivated by his conviction that Logical Empiricism has to offer certain very plausible and respectable views on the philosophy of science, whereas the (alleged) moral philosophy of Logical Empiricism is only a disaster: Kamlah proposes to go for Habermas who (correctly, in this respect, for Kamlah) accused “positivism” to “repudiate reflection” (p. 482). Kamlah and, interestingly, even Hans-Joachim Dahms,<sup>3</sup> propose to reject the whole of non-cognitivist meta-ethics of the Logical Empiricists and to replace it with a value absolutism (of the Frankfurt school fashion). The systematic aim of this paper is to demonstrate that non-cognitivism is by no means a

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. (Kelsen 2006, p. 236) and, for a recent treatment of democracy, in the spirit of Kelsen and non-cognitivism, (Möllers 2008). On the political aspects of non-cognitivism see also (Damböck unpublished manuscript).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. (Reichenbach 1977, pp. 480-483).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. (Dahms 1994, p. 115f).

dangerous thing. Rather, it becomes a very strong option once we tackle it at the level of politics. Though it is true, indeed, that *a variety* of non-cognitivism involves a totalitarian (Social-Darwinian) political view, it is no less true that democracy theory is hardly possible at all without the acceptance of moral non-cognitivism. If normative questions are *cognitive* then democracy can be only the second-best choice, because it would be folly to ask *everyone* how to solve a political problem, if we could ask an expert who actually *knows* how to solve it. A democratic world view where normative decisions belong to the people, to everyone, is plausible, in turn, only if we reject moral cognitivism. To demonstrate (a) that this attitude is what Carnap and Reichenbach had in mind as well as (b) they defended it against the background of their political experiences, in the context of the German Youth-Movement and the First World War, is the aim of this paper.

But let's start with a brief re-examination of Carnap's (and Reichenbach's) later views on philosophy of values. There are two classical texts to be considered here. Carnap's reply to Abraham Kaplan in the Schilpp-volume and the chapter "The nature of ethics" in Reichenbach's *The Rise of Scientific philosophy*.<sup>4</sup> Carnap's conception their, unlike Reichenbach's, is certainly not explicitly political. Rather, Carnap gives the outline of a meta-ethical conception at a very abstract and formal level. For Carnap, *non-cognitivism* is the theory that value-statements are not truth-apt, whereas cognitivism identifies them to be truth-apt (Schilpp 1963, p. 999). Following Carnap's proposal, non-cognitivism can be characterized by means of a two-place predicate *utinam*. Here, *utinam* (X, V) expresses the utterance of a value statement V in a certain context X. Non-cognitivism holds that we cannot take V to be true or false in any uncontroversial way, i.e., there is no reasonable way to introduce a truth predicate that identifies value statements to be context-independently true or false. Carnap also distances himself from the term "emotivism" (p. 1000). Moral attitudes, according to Carnap, not necessarily converge with "momentary emotions". They express the attitude of a person which might appear to be entirely neutral, at an emotional level (or even full of emotions). That part of the value statement that makes it a value statement, however, is by no means the emotional part but the pure attitude. Value statements are to be expressed as what Carnap calls "pure optatives" (p. 1000ff).

Moreover, non-cognitivism as intended by Carnap in 1963 is not identical or even compatible with moral *naturalism*, i.e., the claim (as defended by Dewey) that moral statements are true in a certain context. In other words, non-cognitivism in the sense of Carnap also rules out the introduction of a contextual truth predicate for values. Additionally, Carnapian non-cognitivism is not compatible with *rationalism*, i.e., the claim that certain moral statements are inevitably defended by rational human beings (and people who reject them are just irrational). Both naturalism and rationalism are ruled out by the following statement:

It is logically possible that two persons A and B at a certain time agree in all beliefs, that their reasoning is in perfect accord with deductive and inductive standards, and that they nevertheless differ in an optative attitude component. (Schilpp 1963, p. 1008)

The incongruence with naturalism, rationalism, contextualism, and emotivism also implies that Carnap's variety of non-cognitivism is not a variety of moral (*quasi-*)*realism*. Rather, the possibility to choose values freely – without risking to lose contact to any external source that defines "rational" or "correct" values –, is a crucial aspect of the conception of Carnap (and Reichenbach). Though Carnap could not be acquainted with the recent conceptions of quasi-realism and rationalism of values, as defended by Simon Blackburn and Alan Gibbard (see our references below), he

---

<sup>4</sup> Cf. (Schilpp 1963, pp. 999-1013; Reichenbach 1951, pp. 276-302).

got in touch in the 1930a, with a contemporary philosopher who also defended a non-cognitivist view that was strongly realist at the same time, namely, the Brentanist Oskar Kraus. The latter was so deeply distracted by Carnap's anti-realist variety of non-cognitivism that as Carnap remembers in his autobiography "he had seriously pondered the question whether it was not his duty to call on the state authorities to put me in jail".<sup>5</sup> What Kraus had in mind was a non-cognitivism where people become qualified by means of a notion of "correctness" of their attitudes. Though value statements are not truth-apt, for Kraus, the emotional frames so-to-speak of persons are truth apt. Thus, one arrives at a correct moral statement only if she belongs to a correct mind frame. This conception converges, in turn, with the "rationalism" as suggested by Gibbard (an anorexic who consistently starves herself to death is just "irrational", for Gibbard).<sup>6</sup>

Whereas the non-cognitivism of Reichenbach and Carnap is neither (quasi-)realist nor rationalist it is also not a position that holds that everyone has to accept every moral attitude of others or that discussion and conflict about moral question is impossible. This peculiar feature of non-cognitivism as defended by Carnap and Reichenbach is best circumscribed by what Reichenbach called a "democratic principle" as opposed to an "anarchist principle" of someone who thinks that moral attitudes are arbitrary and that everyone may unmolestedly utter whatever she wants. Whereas the anarchist – who seems to defend a position pretty close to Alfred J. Ayer's *subjectivism* (cf. our remarks below) – inevitably has to grant everyone to defend whatever values she would like to defend, the value theorist who follows Reichenbach's "democratic principle" is very well entitled to have strong opinions, even and in particular about moral imperatives of others. This is the formula of Reichenbach:

Everybody is entitled to set up his own moral imperatives and to demand that everyone follow these imperatives. (Reichenbach 1951, p. 295)

This principle combines a more *neutral* and a clearly *political* attitude, at the meta-ethical level. It *has* something to do with democracy, and it also has something to do with the idea that we should keep our values *adaptive*. Listen to your peers and wherever their claims sound plausible to you try to adjust your own moral claims. But this does not involve that moral claims, according to Carnap and Reichenbach, never can be *absolute*:

This [the democratic principle] is not meant to imply that the empiricist is a man of easy compromise. Much as he is willing to learn from the group, he is also prepared to steer the group in the direction of his own volitions. He knows that social progress is often due to the persistence of individuals who were stronger than the group; and he will try, and try again, to modify the group as much as he can. The interplay of group and individual has effects both on the individual and on the group.

Thus the ethical orientation of human society is a product of mutual adjustment. (p. 300)

Non-cognitivism deserves a two-fold commitment at a meta-ethical level. On the one hand – and this holds for *every* instance of non-cognitivism – it implies to accept the claim that value statements are not cognitive. On the other hand, however, it also involves a commitment that is certainly less neutral, though still formulated at a meta-ethical level. This additional commitment is necessary, in order to adjust the general way how values are related with each other and with the reality in which they are formulated. Non-cognitivism, as initially formulated by Reichenbach in

---

<sup>5</sup> (Schilpp 1963, p. 82). The fact that even Kraus was a non-cognitivist was not appreciated in the literature by now. Cf. Kraus's highly interesting discussion of Carnap's conception in (Kraus 1937, pp. 439-441).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. (Gibbard 1990, p. 165).

1913 (see section 4 below), is firstly a *formal* ideal. But if we only claim that this formal ideal holds, the meta-ethical agenda is by no means exhausted yet. We have to choose between a number of further options. All of these options, in turn, involve a certain political stance. Thus, if non-cognitivism is meant to provide a comprehensive picture about the meta-ethical side of moral, it has to choose between those options. Politics, in turn, is a meta-ethical thing or at least slops over from the empirical level of concrete moral experiences and political practice to the meta-ethical level.

But what exactly are those options between whom a non-cognitivist has to choose? To my knowledge, there seem to be four different political options, involving four different ways of dealing with the challenge of non-cognitivism at a meta-ethical level. The challenge of non-cognitivism is simply the fact that there are no moral facts at all. What conclusion should we draw from this fact? The four possible conclusions are: (A) anarchism, (B) totalitarian absolutism, (C) totalitarian relativism, (D) democracy.

(A) The *anarchist* or subjectivist option was (in)famously chosen by Alfred J. Ayer, in his *Language, Truth and Logic*.<sup>7</sup> For Ayer, non-cognitivism means that there is no possibility at all to discuss values, as soon as the discussants adopt *different* value systems: “argument is possible on moral questions only if some system of values is presupposed”. (p. 111) At the political side this involves anarchism (and nihilism), because everyone necessarily has to adopt her own values without the slightest possibility of taking into account the arguments of others who do not share all of these values.

(B) The *totalitarian absolutist* option is the option of moral quasi-realism, where in spite of the adoption of a non-cognitivist stance the theory becomes defended that only those who belong to a certain group of morally reasonable persons also adopt reasonable and acceptable values. Thus, questions of moral or political relevance can only be answered in a reasonable way by members of the latter group. This conception is, technically spoken, a non-cognitivist one. However, as the examples of Kraus, Gibbard, and Blackburn show – and as has been correctly highlighted for the case of Gibbard by Paul Boghossian<sup>8</sup> – quasi-realist or rationalist varieties of non-cognitivism function politically spoken exactly in the same way as their cognitivist counterparts (viz. naturalism, transcendentalism, Platonism). Thus, in the context of this paper, we mostly will subsume the absolutist option of non-cognitivism *and* all varieties of cognitivism. Totalitarianism in the realm of non-cognitivism, on the other hand, is mostly assumed here to be a variety of option (C):

(C) The *totalitarian relativist* option is the option that was adopted by Hans Freyer, Carl Schmitt and other relativist advocates of totalitarianism (references will be given below). Here, the non-cognitivist conception becomes accompanied by a certain variety of Social-Darwinism: Everybody is entitled to defend her moral claims unconditionally, and to try to forth others also to accept ones moral claims. Thus, a struggle of morals takes place and the Social-Darwinist assumption involves that those value systems survive who are somewhat superior to the others.

(D) The democratic option was adopted by Hans Reichenbach and other Logical Empiricists. Unlike the social-Darwinist principle of struggle and power, the democratic principle is based on an assumption that recommends adopting peaceful coexistence and compromise. Try to keep your

---

<sup>7</sup> Cf. (Ayer 1946, pp. 102-120). The term “anarchism” was introduced for that position (though without any mentioning of Ayer) in (Reichenbach 1951, pp. 292-295).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. (Boghossian 2001, pp. 19-23). With respect to moral questions, Boghossian highlighted the convergence between realism and non-cognitivism in the Q&A session of a conference at Kirchberg, August 2015. Gibbard and Blackburn, in turn, both highlight that there are moral facts, according to their meta-ethical conceptions. Cf. (Blackburn 1998, pp. 304-310) as well as Gibbard’s notion of “objectivity” (Gibbard 1990, p. Part III).

value systems adaptive, listen to others, discuss with them and stay hard-minded only in those cases where your own convictions forbid to adopt any diversion from a certain value claim.

These different options, in particular, (C) and (D), will be discussed with more detail in the following sections. Here we only want to point them out firstly at a more logico-analytical level. *If* we adopt non-cognitivism and think that values are not facts but only something that belongs to and depends on our subjective emotional dispositions, then the question arises of how to deal with cases of diverging values. (A) we may decide simply not to care about diverging values and to adopt anarchism, (B) we may arrive at the conclusion that diverging values are the result of mental dispositions being somewhat ill-guided (irrational, insane), (C) we may decide to encourage people to defend their own convictions forcefully and unconditionally, trying to suppress other opinions under all circumstances and (D) we may encourage people to keep their values adaptive, try to learn from others and defend their values unconditionally only if they come to the conclusion that they are not able at all to accept any compromise. In all these cases a political stance becomes formulated which is based on an attitude toward those who defend diverging values [(A): ignore them, (B): hospitalize them, (C): suppress them, (D): try to understand them].

There is no comprehensive treatment of the relationship between non-cognitivism and democracy by either Carnap or Reichenbach. We only find hints and sketches at various places of their work that, as we all know, was rather focussed on philosophy of science and logic. *Why* Carnap and Reichenbach developed their practical philosophy more like an hidden agenda is an important and complex question of its own which by no means can be treated here.<sup>9</sup> There can be no doubt, however, that both Carnap and Reichenbach, at the end of their intellectual careers, thought that the most important agenda that was left for philosophy was philosophy of values (and democracy). This is proven, for the case of Reichenbach, by the key role that philosophy of values plays in his *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy*, and it was highlighted by Carnap, in his autobiography (Schilpp 1963, pp. 81-84) as well as in an interview he gave in 1963 to Willy Hochkeppel. Hochkeppel asked Carnap whether he sees any open questions for (his) future research in philosophy. Carnap responded “oh, there is a good many”. However, he was mentioning only a single topic, namely, logical analysis of value statements.<sup>10</sup> Note also that in his autobiography Carnap set the stage for his overall philosophical world view not at the level of mere logical discussions, say, by means of a purely formal “principle of tolerance” or the like, but at an explicitly political level: the agenda was what he called “scientific humanism” – we will come back to this below. But if this humanist attitude was so fundamentally important for Carnap (and probably even for Reichenbach). Where do we find this agenda in the philosophical work of these philosophers? The aim of this paper is to do a little bit of philosophical archeology, in order to excavate this agenda that is, oddly enough, somewhat hidden for the most parts of the published writings of these philosophers. We will not try to explain here *why* the philosophers of non-cognitivism and democracy Carnap and Reichenbach never managed it to make their political agenda sufficiently explicit. We only try to reconstruct the hidden story: collect the remains and put them together in a way that allows us to view the political side of these “left wing” Logical Empiricists.<sup>11</sup> This can be only first steps, to be sure, because the overall task is not to be managed in the course of a single philosophical paper.

---

<sup>9</sup> The answer might have much to do with the phenomenon of de-politicization of philosophy in the context of the climate of Cold War in the US. Cf. (Reisch 2005).

<sup>10</sup> (Carnap 1993, p. 145).

<sup>11</sup> This is a generalization of the term “left Vienna Circle” which goes back to a narrative by Otto Neurath. Cf. (Uebel 2004).

## 2. The pre-history: relativism does not imply non-cognitivism

Recent historical research has shown that *relativism* is basically a product of 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophy (in Germany).<sup>12</sup> Before 1800, philosophers took values to be something being fixed once and for all, either in the sense of ideas in a platonic realm or in the sense of things being fixed by means of rationality and logic. It was only with Kant and his famous Copernican Turn that this picture began to change. The Copernican Turn (of Copernicus) changed our perspective on the universe fundamentally, because it rejected the idea that the sun and the stars are rotating around us (or the planet earth respectively) and adopted the view that everything is rotating around the sun. A similar change of perspective was proposed by Kant, with respect to those *concepts* that frame our experience – among others, notions of space and time as well as aesthetical notions and values. For Kant, those notions, unlike the story that rationalists and empiricists tell us are neither something that is already given in the world outside and only has to be perceived by us (the empiricist story) nor something that is to be established by mere terms of logical necessity (the rationalist story). Whereas those traditional stories imply that those concepts that frame our experience are as they are only by means of things being entirely independent from the circumstances of the persons that forms those concepts, Kant stated that those concepts, by contrast, are entirely man-made. In spite of this fundamental turn, however, Kant himself was by no means a relativist, because he thought that there is something he called a “transcendental” story, that is, a certain disposition of our mind that enforces us to develop those notions that frame our experience in a certain way that is fixed once and for all – simply because we are all exactly alike. Enlightenment, in other words, developed a notion of “humanism” that was based on the (quasi-religious) claim that to be human is a certain mental disposition that is everywhere and always exactly the same.

Even Hegel, the philosopher who started to historicize philosophy and reason, was still an absolutist in Kantian terms. The only difference with Kant was that the possibility of error became reconsidered in a world-historical dimension. Whereas in Kant’s provincial transcendental world, everyone always needs to have the same mental disposition – thus, failure to adopt the correct eternal concepts that frame our experience, can take place only as a matter of personal failure, in Hegel’s conception error and truth become matters of historical development. The ancient or medieval ages produced erroneous understandings of those notions that frame our experience because they represented immature stages of the development of world history (and spirit). Only the age of Hegel (and Napoleon) arrives at a mature stage where we are in a position to view those notions that frame our experience correctly. Hegel’s ingenious move was astonishing, in particular, for the reason that it was kind of automatically self-refuting. Almost nobody seriously believed that Hegel was the exceptionally gifted philosopher who became the first human being that is able to view the absolute truth about everything. On the other hand, most people found the mere idea of historisation of reason rather convincing. Thus, the self-refuting aspect of Hegel’s megalomaniac ideas lead to an age of philosophy where all those notions that frame our experience became viewed as inevitably (and eternally) context-dependent and therefore relative.

But relativism does not involve non-cognitivism here, because the obvious next step of a relativization of Kant and Hegel would be to keep the idea of a transcendental background story that follows with necessity from the mental disposition of a human being, but simply to relativize this mental disposition in such a way that *each historical context* produces a certain specific type

---

<sup>12</sup> The following story describes in a nutshell the upshot of (Damböck 2017), cf. chapter 1 and 4, in particular, and the references as provided there.

of mental disposition. Here, though mental dispositions can be different in different historical contexts, in one and the same historical context each person that belongs to this context must have exactly the same mental disposition. This conception was defended, in particular, by the so-called Southwest-German School of Neo-Kantianism (Wilhelm Windelband, Heinrich Rickert) but it generally can be seen as a variety of *naturalism*.

In the latter form (and with respect to values) the contextual variety of relativism was defended, among others, by Georg Simmel (a philosopher that was very important for the German Youth-Movement).<sup>13</sup> For Simmel, there is an *individual law* that guides the moral dispositions of each person (and which depends on the historical context, of course).<sup>14</sup> If the individual law, as it was the case in 1914, according to Simmel, dictates us to reject pacifism, then it is simply false for a German individual in 1914 to adopt pacifism, whereas, in a possible future state of history, it might turn out that the individual law becomes more peaceful and pacifism becomes an opportunity. Thus, Simmel is clearly a value relativist, because he rejects eternal values, but he still thinks that every historical context *determines* certain values and we are just wrong (insane, wicked, irrational) if we do not follow our “individual law” and consequently fail to realize (our) values correctly.

This implies that all varieties of contextual relativism of this form are incompatible with non-foundationalist non-cognitivism, simply because they are varieties of foundationalism. However, there is also another variety of 19<sup>th</sup> century relativism which is obviously closer to non-foundationalism, although it typically rejects moral relativism as a whole. This is the variety that can be found in the *Völkerpsychologie* of Chajim H. Steinthal and Moritz Lazarus as well as in the philosophy of the Marburg School. In Hermann Cohen, for example, we find another form of contextual value absolutism which does not involve the idea of values being the absolute flipside of contingent “being”. Rather, for Cohen, even values are a mode of “being”, because like every “idea” they are construed by the human mind.<sup>15</sup> Those constructs, however, are to be thought absolute, for Cohen, not because they belong to an external realm or Platonic heaven, but because religious reasoning encourages us to face the challenge of construing something that is absolute and therefore mandatory for everyone. But this notion of a system of values being accepted by the whole of mankind is not to be misunderstood as a search for something that already exists and only must be *discovered* by philosophers and scientists. Rather, it is the task of philosophy (or, more precisely, religion) to convince mankind that such a universal compromise is both possible and desirable *and* to develop such a universal compromise that brings about what Cohen famously called “unity” (of mankind, of consciousness, of culture). This unity is neither something that already exists (as a hidden secret, something we only need to excavate) nor something that we necessarily have to create. *If* we decide to commit ourselves to this idea of unity then we are doing so because of our religious and/or philosophical convictions (because we believe in a certain ideal of unity). There might be other people as well who do not share our believe. Those Germans, for example, who selfishly follow their anti-Jewish sentiments are certainly not devoted to any ideal of unity, they rather defend a moral of disunity where one people (the Germano-Christian *Volk*) becomes the moral yardstick, rather than any all-encompassing idea of unity. The only chance that we, as religious (and Jewish) human beings, in the sense of Cohen, have here is to try to convince our contemporaries, in order to somewhat convert them to believe in our ideal of unity. But *the reasons* we can provide here,

---

<sup>13</sup> Freyer, for example, studied with Simmel and formulated his own meta-ethical conception in criticism of Simmel. Cf. (Muller 1987, pp. 45-57).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. (Simmel 1913).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. (Cohen 1907, pp. 389-433, in particular 418).

are nothing we can build on in any culture- or time- or even subject-independent way. It is not like showing people the path to becoming able to read in the book of natural values – because, for Cohen, unlike Simmel or Rickert, there is no such book at all. Rather, the only possibility we have is to preach, in order to make people reasoning about the world in the sense that we believe is the only (religiously) acceptable one. Still this is so only because we believe that it is so.

Cohen and other members of the Marburgian school tradition were not non-cognitivists or value anti-relativists, because the notion of real and absolute values was a key notion for them. However, because the notion of “absolute” did not point to anything “given” (“gegeben”) but only to something that is “assigned” (“aufgegeben”) there is an obvious kinship here to later conceptions of (democratic) non-cognitivism. In particular, the idea that we only obtain a (social-)democratic system of values of some kind, if we believe in the idea of a world view that unites people (in a peaceful way) and is able to bring about a (universal) compromise is something we find both in Cohen’s more religiously driven worldview and in the secular version of democratic non-cognitivism of Carnap and Reichenbach. There is no indication though that either Carnap or Reichenbach took their ethical view directly from Cohen (or Cassirer or Dilthey). However, it seems likely that there is an indirect influence of some kind here: the ideas were already in the air but they got a new philosophical foundation in the context of the German Youth-Movement, one that was so fundamentally new that it is not quite clear at the end to what extent the new variety actually is based on or directly related with the older options.

Similar things can be said for another philosopher who was read by most Logical Empiricists, namely Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche developed a highly idiosyncratic philosophy of values which was anti-realist and showed at least traces of non-cognitivism, expressivism, fictionalism.<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche was certainly not a naturalist in the sense of Simmel or the Southwest-Germans. For him, values were a matter of free choice, something we just stipulate somewhat arbitrarily, as a matter of taste. This conception therefore has hardly anything to do with the democratic stance of the Logical Empiricists and the unifying attitude of the Marburg School. There might be similarities, though, with the radical subjectivism of Alfred J. Ayer (viz. option (A)), which is also some variety of the Logical Empiricist tradition, though one that is deeply at odds with the conceptions of Carnap and Reichenbach. But even the views of Carnap and Reichenbach somewhat overlap with Nietzsche, because Nietzsche’s conception of values is certainly both anti-realist and anti-foundationalist. Thus, the meta-ethical core is quite similar, in Carnap, Reichenbach, and Nietzsche. However, they disagree at the political side. Whereas Carnap and Reichenbach belong to the same democratic tradition to which also Cohen belongs, Nietzsche is rather an advocate of the more totalitarian brand which we also find in the non-cognitivism camp, for example, in Schmitt and Freyer. But as already indicated, it is hard to say whether and in what sense there might be any direct influence here. The Logical Empiricists did study Nietzsche, but they hardly took him to be a serious philosopher from whom one could get disputable hints on epistemological core topics. As Gottfried Gabriel once put it, Carnap had Frege’s writings on the desk and Nietzsche on the bedside table.<sup>17</sup> Nietzsche was mainly considered by Carnap and other Logical Empiricists to be a philosopher who develops a convincing variety of “metaphysics”, i.e., something that was no longer considered philosophy at all but poetry (and there were the bad poets – people such as Hegel or Heidegger – and the good ones – Nietzsche, in particular). Thus, it is not very likely that Carnap or even Reichenbach took portions of their views on ethics from Nietzsche, at least not consciously.

---

<sup>16</sup> Cf. (Leiter 2015).

<sup>17</sup> (Gabriel 2004, p. 12).



Nietzsche was a poet for them, whereas the Neo-Kantians, for example, were much more accepted as serious (but failed) philosophers. The case might be different though, for other members of the Youth-Movement. Freyer and Gustav Wyneken, for example, obviously draw on Dilthey and formulate their utopian views on the invention of new values for a new generation (see the next two sections) as a variety of ideas that can be found in Nietzsche's philosophical writings. Thus, even here, it is more likely that the meta-ethical views of Carnap and Reichenbach were influenced by Nietzsche only *indirectly*, via Wyneken and Freyer.

### 3. The Meißner Generation

The last section can be summed up by the conjecture that there are a number of meta-ethical views that both show similarities with (democratic) non-cognitivism and were (at least indirectly) available to Carnap and Reichenbach. For several reasons it is unlikely though that either Carnap or Reichenbach drew *directly* from some or all of these views while developing their own meta-ethical conceptions. The immediate background for the development of the ethical views of Carnap and Reichenbach was something different, namely, the spirit of the German Youth-Movement of the so-called Meißner generation. Both Carnap and Reichenbach were active in the German Youth-Movement, before the First World War and they both were influenced by the pedagogue Gustav Wyneken, the initiator of the 1913 meeting at Hoher Meißner.<sup>18</sup> We focus here only on those aspects of Wyneken and the Meißner meeting being related with meta-ethical views.

Rather abstract discussions of values played an important role in the German Youth-Movement. In the programmatic essay *Schule und Jugendkultur*, Wyneken claimed that the period of youth that covers, according to his view, the time period between and age of 16 and 25,<sup>19</sup> should be used for the development of new values, rather than only for the adoption of traditional value systems.

The specific content of this age should therefore also not be a mere adoption, i.e. practical repetition of that what he had learned at the second stage [the age of childhood], but the enhancement of that objective mental possession [Geistesbesitz]; thus, because there is something new that becomes learned and socially acquired, a new generation becomes necessary; and only because of the fact of acts of creation in the realm of that objective mental possession the creation of a new generation becomes directly justified.<sup>20</sup>

This doctrine, according to Wyneken, involves a significant modification to Kant's notion of a "categorical imperative". This notion ("act in such a way that the principle of your action might become principle of common action") is "not purely formal, as Kant believes". "Rather, the principle of all human acting should be: subserve spirit [diene dem Geist]". And this implies "to act, as if present man is overcome – in this sense, self conquest is the essence of moral". (p. 11) In other words, it is the duty of youth to develop new moral imperatives and to overcome the old ones.

---

<sup>18</sup> See the other contributions to this volume, in particular, those by Hans-Joachim Dahms, Thomas Mormann, Flavia Padovani, Günther Sandner, and Meike Werner.

<sup>19</sup> Note that in Germany before the First World War the right to vote started only at an age of 25. Thus, Wyneken's notion of "youth" covers exactly the time period where people prepare for their active political life.

<sup>20</sup> (Wyneken 1919, p. 12): „Der spezifische Inhalt dieses Alters soll also nicht etwa die Anwendung, d.h. praktische Wiederholung dessen sein, was er auf der zweiten Stufe gelernt hat, sondern die Erweiterung jenes objektiven Geistesbesitzes; dadurch wird, weil etwas Neues da ist, was erlernt und sozial angeeignet werden muß, zugleich eine neue Generation nötig; und nur durch die Tatsache von Neuschöpfungen im Bereiche jenes objektiven Geistesbesitzes rechtfertigt sich direkt die Erzeugung einer neuen Generation.“

Interpreting Wyneken, one might modify a famous dictum by Goethe here: What you inherited from your parents, overcome it, in order to possess it. And this doctrine of innovation, so to speak, is decidedly focused on moral rules (not only on other creations of the human mind such as art work or scientific innovation). Youth is obliged to *extend* our objective mental possession, for Wyneken, in particular, in the sense of a creation and adoption of new moral values.

But this doctrine is by no means to be understood as a moral *subjectivism* of some kind, because the social side of the problem plays a key role, for Wyneken, as well as for other representatives of the German Youth-Movement. The new values not only have to be *created*, they also need to become *socially acquired* [sozial angeeignet]. A new system of values is capable to *extend spirit*, only if it is developed in a social context, in a cooperative way, as a result of discussion, compromise and mutual adjustment.

This aspect of a socially cooperative creation of new values, being adequate for the spirit of a new generation, also played a key role in the Meißner meeting and its famous result, the so-called Meißner formula. Before the authors set out the Meißner formula, they unequivocally set the task as one of a creation of new values:

The youth, before it enters the struggle of life, had to go to the desert like Jesus so to speak, mature in silence and acquire those inner values that should last for the whole of life.<sup>21</sup>

The Meißner formula immediately follows that passage:

Free German Youth, on their own initiative, under their own responsibility, and with deep sincerity, are determined independently to shape their own lives. For the sake of this inner freedom they will under any and all circumstances take united action.<sup>22</sup>

The formula highlights (a) “own initiative” and “own responsibility” and (b) the attempt to take “united action” “under any and all circumstances”. At the next page of the document, these motives become reiterated again, with a focus on values or individual “laws” and “bounds”, as the authors call it:

One searches for an aim and does not find it in an unequivocal way; the proffered ideals one does not recognize as the exhausting expression of the innermost direction of life. What else remains to be done than to search in the own chest, to set oneself law and bound, to trust the own power and the joint work of many?<sup>23</sup>

The slogan of the Meißner generation was to create new values, to establish a new system of ideals and aims, but not in an anarchic way, in the sense of a mere subjectivism. Rather, the Meißner generation highlighted the importance of cooperation. New values can work only if we somewhat produce them as joint work. Therefore, we have to listen to each other, discuss and try to take other proposals as seriously as possible.

---

<sup>21</sup> (Mittelstraß 1919, p. 12): „[...] [die Jugend] müsse, ehe sie in den Lebenskampf eintrete, sozusagen wie Jesus in die Wüste gehen, in der Stille reifen und sich die großen richtunggebenden inneren Werte erwerben, die für das ganze Leben vorhalten.“

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Translation from (Becker 1946, p. 100).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 13: „Man sucht nach einem Ziel und kann es nicht eindeutig finden, die angebotenen Ideale erkennt man nicht als den erschöpfenden Ausdruck innerster Lebensrichtung an. Was bleibt da anderes übrig, als in der eigenen Brust zu suchen, sich selbst Gesetz und Schranke zu setzen, der eigenen Kraft und der gemeinsamen Arbeit vieler zu vertrauen?“

This stance of the German Youth-Movement toward values converges in some respects with philosophical views as characterized above. It involves a value relativism of some kind, because values are no longer viewed to be eternal and fixed. However, the stance of the Youth-Movement also diverges from the naturalism of Simmel and Rickert, because values here are nothing we simply have to get in accordance with a certain context. Rather, values become *created*, as a result of a communicative process, while there is no indication at all that the result of this process might be preset by the historical context. Rather, the German Youth-Movement defends a decidedly *utopian* view. The values we create do not just reflect the historical status quo. Rather, they create the vision of a future state of the world that will become so and so, only if our attempt to convince people to adopt our new values and act accordingly becomes successful. In other words, there is a significant amount of *freedom* here that we do not find in the naturalism of Simmel and Rickert (and of course also not in the transcendentalism of Kant). On the other hand, the stance of the German Youth-Movement shows close similarities with the views of the Marburg school. The Youth-Movement does *not* adopt a Cohen-like absolutism of a definite value system, being not given but assigned (*aufgegeben*). However, at a less absolutist level, the idea of a system that has to create a unity of some kind, in order to bring people together, establish a compromise, becomes reiterated here. The Youth-Movement does not intend to get the whole of humanity together and to establish a final stage of absolute values everybody shares. This is not even present here as a regulative ideal. Rather, the Youth-Movement seems to think that continuous change of values is necessary, in order to allow for new generations creating a better world. There is no teleology involved here that might be comparable with the views of Cohen. However, the idea to take values as something being *created* or *construed* by the human mind (and not just *perceived*) is something that the Youth-Movement shares with the Marburg School. Additionally, the Youth-Movement also involves some kind of a (weak) unity hypothesis, because it demands to keep our values adaptive, to listen to others and try to create something *together*.

The Youth-Movement becomes even closer to a non-cognitivist view than Cohen and the Marburg school. Both conceptions are based on a decisive feature of non-cognitivism, namely the idea that values are nothing that is natural or given, in whatever sense. Value statements are not valid, because of some external facts but only because (and only if) someone adopts them. And they are valid only for those who adopt them. However, Cohen adds an additional emphasis to this overall non-cognitivist picture, which is not quite non-cognitivist, namely, the idea that those value systems we create are acceptable only if they serve the ideal of unity. This is not non-cognitivist (in the sense of Carnap and Reichenbach), because it adds a foundationalist emphasis. The stance of the Youth-Movement is weaker and insofar closer to the later views of Carnap and Reichenbach. But even here we have at least the possibility of the addition of a foundationalist emphasis. If the (German) youth creates a new system of values, jointly and cooperatively, does this imply that this new system is *valid* then (and somewhat natural), at least for a certain time period, until a new generation arises? It seems not unlikely that some of the advocates of the German Youth-Movement had something like that in mind. Thusly viewed the new stance would diverge from the naturalism of Simmel, only because of a certain time-shift. Whereas the *naturalist presentist* Simmel takes those values to be natural that reflect the present state of history (and he claims that (1) there are such values, in an unequivocal way and (2) we should adopt them), the *naturalist utopians* of the German Youth-Movement take those values to be natural that reflect a possible future state of the world that was stipulated to be desirable by a new generation (and they claim (1) that there is such a utopia, in an unequivocal way and (2) we should adopt those values that result from it).

For a fully-fledged non-cognitivist, in the sense of Carnap and Reichenbach, all these techniques would be possible, but only in the sense of subjective decisions, not in the sense of overall foundationalist norms. Thus, a non-cognitivist might try to find out those values that perfectly reflect the present state of the world. And because she additionally thinks that it is a good thing to adopt such values, she adopts them. But the latter is no less a part of the value system as adopted as any other value being adopted here. It is by no means able to add an external foundation. Similarly, a non-cognitivist might try to find out a utopian value system that appears to be acceptable to all members of her social group. And because she and her mates think that it is a good thing to adopt such values, they adopt them. But the latter is no less a part of the value system as adopted as any other value being adopted here. It is by no means able to add an external foundation. In other words, there are certain possible varieties of meta-ethical views being compatible with key ideas of both the Marburg School and the German Youth-Movement, which are also non-cognitivist in a fully-fledged way. We have to grant that our search for unity or for a utopia that unites our social group is nothing that might add any external foundation to our value system. In doing so we become fully-fledged non-cognitivists. It is unlikely, however, that Cohen or at least parts of the German Youth-Movement might have accepted such a strictly non-cognitivist view.

#### 4. Reichenbach's early non-cognitivism: non-cognitivism as a compromise

The meta-ethical stance of the German Youth-Movement is *compatible* with non-cognitivism but not every advocate of the Meißner-formula was necessarily a non-cognitivist. On the other hand, there were a couple of philosophers who definitely understood the Meißner-formula in a non-cognitivist way. Most importantly, Hans Reichenbach provided in 1913 a variety of the results of the Meißner meeting "The free students idea. Its content as unity" where he arrived at a more unequivocally non-cognitivist conception of values.<sup>24</sup>

Reichenbach's essay promises to deliver "a unified compendium of all these ideas [that were tossed by individual leaders into the chaos of Free Student ideology]", to uncover "the single idea that is the basis for all these ideals". (p. 108) In particular, Reichenbach, in his introductory remarks, criticizes an essay of Felix Behrend:

[...] this powerful little book fails to formulate clearly the ideal as an ideal; it suffers from the unfortunate notion that this ideal is not a strictly delineated subjective goal [subjektives Wollensziel] but an 'objective' interest of a large number of people – viz., students who do not belong to a fraternity – who cannot do otherwise than joyfully embrace this 'objective' institution, once they have discovered it, as their main purpose in life. (p. 108f)

But what is the alternative? Behrend's somewhat naturalist proposal would claim that there is one single system of values that once discovered necessarily has to be adopted by all members of the Free Students movement. What Reichenbach denies here is already the idea that there might be a single system of values being conceivable as a result of some kind of the discussions of the Free Students. Rather, the "unifying idea" Reichenbach is setting out in his essay is the idea that there cannot be any such system at all:

The fault in the system could no longer be hidden. There is, for once and for all, no such thing as an objective interest; interest always consists in a subject's taking a position with regard to an object. There is no universally binding rule determining how a subject will decide. Only the individual himself is able to say what he considers to be his

---

<sup>24</sup> Fortunately, there exists an English translation of most of Reichenbach's early writings, from the Youth-Movement period. I henceforth always quote from this source here (Reichenbach 1978).

interest. This depends upon the nature of his evaluations, upon the stance he takes respecting values in general, and nobody can expect to refute a person's values by means of reason. Evaluation has nothing to do at all with logic. Should it turn out that certain interests are common to a larger number of people, it would simply mean that they are the subjective interests of this group of people – that is, of those people who embrace them – but never in any way will they become objective interests, interests that every other person similarly situated must acknowledge. [...] no matter what interests the Free Students represent, they are invariable the interests of a particular group of people; only the free volitional decision of the individual can determine membership in this group. (p. 109)

The last sentence of this paragraph suggests that the preceding sentences might be rather incidental, preliminary remarks, and that again a particular system of values might become set out in Reichenbach's essay, though one from which it becomes clear that only the members of the Free Students movement share these values. This is not the case, however. Rather, what Reichenbach says in the beginning of this passage *is* already the premise from which the result follows immediately. In other words, as a result of their discussions, the Free Students do not propose any particular system of values but rather a certain *meta-ethical* stance that denies that any such result might be possible at all: non-cognitivism.

The desired end of the Free Students can be summarized as follows:

*The supreme moral ideal is exemplified in the person who determines his own values freely and independently of others and who, as a member of society, demands this autonomy for all members and of all members.* (p. 109)

What happened in the Free Students movement seems to have been roughly the following. They had endless discussions, aiming at what Wyneken had proposed, namely, to found a new generation being surrounded by a new system of values. However, they did not succeed at all. The only real success was that they realized that even in a highly unique and homogeneous group such as the Free Students moral disagreement occurs. And this moral disagreement is impossibly explained only by means of rational failure. It is not the case that there are those in the group who uncovered the correct values and those who failed to understand them. Everyone in the group had the best rational basis and developed new values being absolutely transparent and autonomously construed. Still, disagreement remains. Thus, as a result of the discussion the Free Students are only able to propose something "formal", i.e., a new meta-ethical stance.

This ideal is purely formal, for it says nothing as to the direction the individual should follow in choosing for himself. No contents ought to be stipulated, for the very reason that it is intended as an ideal. Only the form of an ideal may be put forward categorically: sketching in the contents is the personal duty of each individual. The fascination of the human character lies precisely in its complexity; it is the very variety of special interests and personal viewpoints that gives life its zest. (p. 110)

The following passage of Reichenbach's essay consists of the most radical part of non-cognitivism, seen as a "formal ideal":

Only one universal demand can be made: the formal ideal; that is, we require that each person, of his own free will, set the goal to which he will aspire and follow none but a suitable course of action. The individual may do whatever he considers to be right. Indeed, he ought to do it; in general, we consider as immoral nothing but an inconsistency between goal and action. To force a person to commit an act that he himself does not consider right is to compel him to be immoral. That is why we reject every authoritarian morality that wants to replace the autonomy of the individual with principles of action set forth by some external authority or other. That is the essence of our morality, that is the fundamental idea underlying our moral sensibility, and only those who hold this view from the depth of conviction may count themselves among our ranks. (p. 110)

Note that this passage still covers the “formal” ideal, i.e., an entirely new *definition* of the notion of “value”. For the non-cognitivist, a value *is* nothing but a subjective decision of the individual. Thus, morality is *per definition* the notion to follow these subjective decisions called values. A person is *per definition* immoral if she fails to follow her own moral convictions. On the other hand, the only general normative proposal non-cognitivism can make is that people may follow their own moral convictions. If there are certain non-individual aggregations of values – sets of rules being formulated by a certain group or state – then these aggregations cannot have the character of a moral authority. Thus, *to follow* certain imperatives, only because they are to be found in a certain set rules being formulated by a group or state, is definitely immoral, because it violates the non-cognitive imperative to follow *one’s own* individual convictions. This is all what Reichenbach says in the passage above.

In particular, Reichenbach does *not* defend any variety of moral *subjectivism* here. Subjectivism is either a variety of contextualism (in the sense of: a value statement is true, if and only if it is defended by a person X: it is X-true then) or a variety of non-cognitivism which, like Ayer’s (in)famous conception, states that the subjective character of values implies that it does not make sense to take value statements of others seriously at all. Because the former variety is not a non-cognitivism, for Reichenbach the only possible option would be Ayer’s subjectivism. However, this is definitely not what Reichenbach holds. Whereas Ayer unequivocally claims that *discussions* about values are absolutely useless and ultimately impossible, Reichenbach claims the exact opposite. In other words, Reichenbach is fully aware of the fact that the “formal ideal” alone is not sufficient, in order to create a fully-fledged and somewhat omnipotent non-cognitivist conception. Rather, if we accept the formal ideal of non-cognitivism, an important further question arises, in particular, if we take into account the most radical aspects of non-cognitivism as formulated in the quotation above. The question is: How can and should we deal with the moral convictions of others?

For a cognitivist the answer to this question is quite clear. She simply has to take the respective foundationalist strategy her variety of cognitivism offers and demand that everyone *makes use* of this strategy. For a non-foundationalist non-cognitivist however the situation is less clear. The “formal ideal” in itself does not *logically* involve any strategy here. Ayer’s option is certainly a possibility, but only one among others. And to decide for or against one of these options inevitably means *to add something* to the formal ideal. The result, then, is no longer a purely formal view of ethics, but one that already sets out a certain moral preference. This preference is not yet a particular moral ideal, to be sure, because it still belongs to a meta-level. However, it certainly *restricts* the possibilities of value systems being developed and defended. If M is the set of all possible value systems that accept the overall premise of non-cognitivism (i.e., the formal ideal of Reichenbach), then each additional meta-ethical claim picks out only a proper subset of M, while particular elements of M become ruled out.

It might seem that in his 1913 essay, Reichenbach fails to see that the addition of what he their calls “socialism” already adds something substantial to the mere formal ideal of non-cognitivism.

When we demand the autonomy of the individual and require at the same time that the individual grant to everyone else the same right to self-determination, we are really presenting one and the same thought from two different aspects. (p. 110)

However, Reichenbach goes on to say:

The second is an extension that is necessary to complete the ideal, an addition that transforms what is desired for the individual into a universal law. The recognition of the principle of autonomy as a universal precept – that is, one applying to everybody – does not entail a constriction of this principle; it merely gives the principle its proper content. (ibid)

This is somewhat misleading, to be sure. What exactly is the difference between “a constriction” (which does not take place) and the “proper content” (that certainly restricts the possible moral systems being construed)? Be that as it may. It is clear that Reichenbach, already in his 1913 essay, proposes a variety of non-cognitivism, which is committed to what Reichenbach later called the “democratic principle”. For Reichenbach, our moral task is, (a) to accept the “formal ideal” of non-cognitivism, (b) to take the moral views of others seriously, (c) to try to convince others to follow one’s own moral views, and (d) “to educate [Free] students to the acceptance of this ideal”. (p. 111) Although (c) is not explicitly mentioned by Reichenbach in his 1913 essay it becomes clear from the context that this is also something he would have defended even then (because discussion only makes sense if I not just take the opinions of others seriously but also try to convince others to share my opinion).

The key features of democratic non-cognitivism in the sense described by Reichenbach almost four decades later, in his famous 1951 book, were already present in 1913. But there is something to be found in the 1913 essay that we do not find in the 1951 book, namely, an explanation for the reason why Reichenbach rejects every attempt to uncover values being somewhat “natural” (either in the sense of eternal and fixed values or in the sense of values that naturally reflect a certain context). Naturalism *was* a pretty common conception in 1913. It was strongly defended by Simmel and even the Meißner formula could be interpreted in the sense of a weak naturalism of some kind. If we (as the Meißner youth) decide to establish new values and to found a new “generation” on the basis of these values, these values, once we identified them, would function pretty much in the same way as the natural values of Simmel or Rickert. Everyone who belongs to the new generation would be enforced then *to accept* these values (at least as long as the new generation remains to be “new”: until it becomes replaced by another, even newer generation). Insofar, the Meißner formula and Wyneken’s moral conception very well imply a certain form of naturalism.

However, what actually took place around 1913 was something that Wyneken and other representatives of the then “old” generation could simply not foresee. The German youth struggled to establish a consensus on values, following Wyneken’s proposal. But they simply failed to manage this. There appeared to be insoluble disagreements among the representatives of the German youth, in spite of the fact that they all belonged to the same cultural background. As a consequence of this, Reichenbach and other members of the German Youth-Movement *shifted* the Wyneken task to the background. They no longer tried to establish universal agreement on values but decided only to agree to disagree so to speak. Even this conception actually *is* a naturalism of some sort. But not one that is bound to particular values and directives for action. The new naturalism of the Meißner generation holds that it is natural to have different value systems that appear to be at least partly incompatible; and it also holds that this is not a bad thing at all.

The decisive move in Reichenbach’s essay is that one on p. 109 as quoted above, where he uncovers what he calls the “fault of the system”, namely, that “there is, for once and for all, no such thing as an objective interest”. *This* is something that is not to be found in Wyneken and in the Meißner formula (because we can interpret these accounts in such a way that the task of a new generation is only to establish new objective interest). On the other hand, Wyneken and the Meißner formula are *compatible* with the more revolutionary claim as it was made by Reichenbach

here. Non-cognitivism, in other words, is the Meißner formula *plus* the rejection of the overall idea of the possible existence of an objective interest. The Meißner formula in itself is, in turn, nothing particularly revolutionary at all, for, the idea of giving oneself a new ethics is something that already can be found in late 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophers like Nietzsche. However, what is revolutionary indeed is the additional claim that there is no reason whatsoever to believe that attempts toward the establishment of a new ethics may (necessarily) arrive at a consensus.

## 5. Wartime changes

Reichenbach was a democratic non-cognitivist who denied the possibility of natural or objective values, in 1913, in 1951, and also in 1931. Interestingly enough, however, there is a document from 1918 *Die Sozialisierung der Hochschule [Socializing the University]*, where Reichenbach formulates a somewhat different view. Although even here he grants the existence of diverging values (which may not be overcome by “the economic levelling of human beings”) (p. 140) he also formulates something that he seemingly would not have been willing to say in 1913, 1951 and 1931:

The significance of society consists in its serving as the precondition for the existence and expansion of communities. It is, then, never to be regarded as an end in itself. For the meaning and purpose of human existence is always the realization of spiritual values. Which value system is to be preferred will be left open here, but that there is one superior system, and that man’s supreme duty is to pursue it, will be taken for granted throughout these remarks. The reader is consequently asked always to bear in mind our basic tenets: that the building of communities working towards the perfection of values is the most important achievement and that the fulfilment of human tasks is possible only through this achievement. (p. 139f)

Whereas in 1913 (as well as in 1931 and 1951) the key achievement was the assessment that there is “no such thing as an objective interest”, in 1918 Reichenbach took it for granted that “there is one superior system” of values and that “man’s supreme duty is to pursue it”. This sounds much more like a value absolutism, indeed. Thus, it seems that Reichenbach temporarily changed his mind here, in a way that led to an almost entirely different conception of values.

How could this happen? First, it has to be noted that the difference between the 1913 and the 1918 variety of Reichenbach’s meta-ethical conception is not as huge as it may seem at a first glance, because both conceptions fit under the same umbrella of the Meißner formula. The difference is only that Reichenbach, in 1913, chose the relativist option as described above, whereas in 1918 it seems that he came back to the naturalist point of view as originally intended by Wyneken himself. It is by no means plausible though that when Reichenbach talks about “one superior system of values” in 1918 he might have in mind an eternal system of values of an ahistorical platonic heaven. Rather, there can be no doubt that what he has in mind here is something that is deeply historically variable, is still an open question and could be conceived as *absolute* at best in the broken sense of Cohen’s absolutism which is not given (*gegeben*) but assigned (*aufgegeben*).

This conjecture fits well into the picture we obtain when we look at other meta-ethical conceptions that were formulated by members of the German Youth-Movement around 1918. First, there is the then famous meta-ethical view of Hans Freyer, which is also based on the idea of “objective” or “absolute” values. These values, however, are only the regulative ideal of an utopian world view, where the individual as an “officer of objective spirit” (“Beamter des objektiven Geistes”) develops her individual convictions: objective values are considered a joint work of these



officers.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the difference between Reichenbach 1913 and Reichenbach/Freyer 1918 is that in 1918 a *consensus* of all “officers of objective spirit” is considered an option which involves a “supreme duty”, namely, to create such a consensus, whereas in 1913 the possibility of a consensus is rejected and democratic adjustments and search for compromise are demanded instead. Objective values in 1918 are values that *everybody* shares – something that is considered impossible in 1913, while it now defines the general overall aim of ethics.

We do not know whether Freyer also changed his mind after 1914, in a similar way as Reichenbach (viz. defended a more explicit non-cognitivism before that time). What we do know, however, is that Freyer, like Reichenbach, later on became a fully-fledged non-cognitivist (again). In his writings about a “revolution from the right” from around 1930, Freyer explicitly defended a variety of totalitarian (Social-Darwinian) non-cognitivism, as we will see below. No objective values anymore. This makes it highly plausible that the temporary commitment toward objective and absolute values as it can be found in Freyer and Reichenbach might have something to do with the main political event of this time, namely, the First World War. Although Freyer and Reichenbach took entirely different stances toward the war – Reichenbach was a strict pacifist from the start, Freyer always considered the war to be a very good thing – it seems that they both, facing the war, developed more value absolutist attitudes. In the case of Freyer, absolutism is almost evidently a result of so-called ideas of 1914, which among other things involved a broad national consensus. Intellectual (political, moral) struggles and discussions were suspended, in order to become able to fight the enemy more efficiently. Freyer’s *Antäus* and related writings were written during war-time.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the objective attitude here might simply mean to develop a unified political and moral attitude of the German *Volk*, following the ideas of 1914.

But why did Reichenbach also pick up absolutism, in spite of the fact that he polemically rejected the war and even skipped his friendship with an intellectual such as Wyneken, exactly because Wyneken became an advocate of the ideas of 1914?<sup>27</sup> Possibly, we find some indications that may allow us to suggest an answer to that question, in the work of another later Logical Empiricism, namely, Rudolf Carnap.

Carnap and Reichenbach were both members of the Free Students Movement. However, they did not get in touch before the beginning of the 1920s. Also, there is no indication that Carnap read Reichenbach’s writings from 1913 or 1918. The case of Carnap is of particular interest here, because he somewhat intermediates between Freyer and Reichenbach. Like Reichenbach, Carnap was influenced by Wyneken. But he also was a defender of war in 1914.<sup>28</sup> And as a result of lecturing Wyneken’s *Der Krieg und die Jugend* in 1915, he did not, like Reichenbach, distance himself from Wyneken at all. Rather, Carnap’s diary entries from that time suggest that Wyneken’s *Kampfschrift* which he read in March 1915 animated him to become an even stronger advocate of war.<sup>29</sup> Carnap’s attitude towards the war became more ambivalent only gradually. In March 1916 he had a walk with his mother where he reported to her about “my rejection of war”. However, still

---

<sup>25</sup> (Freyer 1920, p. 324). This article was published only in 1920 but written already in 1914. Cf. (Muller 1987, pp. 51-57). Muller’s book is still the best monograph on Freyer that provides rigorous and clear reconstructions of all of his principal writings.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. (Freyer 1919) as well as the aforementioned article „Das Problem der Utopie“.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Flavia Padovani’s contribution to this volume.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. the contributions to this volume by Gereon Wolters, Thomas Mormann, and Meike Werner.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. (Carnap forthcoming) entry March 24, 1915: “Wyneken gelesen [Ziel des Krieges nicht politisch, sondern ethisch: Nicht „größeres Deutschland“, sondern „jüngeres Deutschland“; innere Wahrhaftigkeit und Gerechtigkeit. „Sorgen wir nur für Kultur in Deutschland, - deutsche Kultur wird sie dann von selbst werden.“]“ After this entry Carnap’s attitude as a soldier becomes significantly more ambitious and confident.

in September 1916 he talked about the “meaning of war” to be “not a reduction of the number of people but a naturally necessary trial of strengths of the conflicting *Völker* [naturnotwendiges Kräfteausmessen der sich ins Gehege kommenden Völker]”.<sup>30</sup> It was obviously not until 1917 that Carnap actually became more critical of the “meaning of war”. As a consequence, in spring 1918 he initiated a number of circular letters that he sent to some of his friends from the Youth-Movement.<sup>31</sup> The aim of these letters was to determine a new joint attitude toward the war, or, as he put it in an unpublished paper from fall 1918, entitled “Germany’s defeat – Meaningless Fate or Guilt”.<sup>32</sup>

To me at least it seems as if we not only join a belief in the objective validity even of the political value judgments and demands, but also agree to a great extent on the *content* of the demands. Insofar as this is not yet the case, we have the important and urgent duty to work towards consensus on political principles through discussion and, in particular, also through circular letters. (p. 5, n 1)<sup>33</sup>

In the first of his political circular letters Carnap described the political aim in the following way:

In discussions with friends, acquaintances and comrades on [...] the end of war [...] I often realized how little-known these recent events are, who appear to me the most important ones, because they uncover those forces that will determine the shape of the future: the attractive forces that will form a cosmos out of the chaotic atomism of the world, that will replace anarchy with an organically ordered society. [...] [Thus] I view recent events to be the birth pangs of a new age, the invasion of mankind to the life of a higher level, in the realm of legal and communal life.<sup>34</sup>

Those “recent events” that Carnap is observing here (while most of his friends fail to notice them) are an (alleged) international process where “politics of violence” is overcome and the “forces of rapprochement forge ahead”. Carnap is suffering from the fact that some of his best friends, in particular, the pedagogue Wilhelm Flitner, whom he is explicitly mentioning in his first circular letter, fail to see these “recent events”. Thus, the main aim of the “political circular letters” is to make these (alleged) developments visible to his friends. For that purpose, Carnap collects and comments clippings from international newspapers.

Now, what is the difference between those approaches developed by Freyer and Carnap around 1918? They both arrive at the conclusion that objective values, objective political demands are necessary. But they come to this conclusion from entirely different argumentative directions. And objective values are also located here at entirely different levels. For Freyer, the point is that a certain *Volk* or tribe must arrive at a consensus about the actual objective values of the *Volk* or

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, September 22, 1916.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. (Werner 2015) and (Damböck 2017, pp. 191-199).

<sup>32</sup> Cf. (Mormann 2010).

<sup>33</sup> „Mir wenigstens scheint es so, als seien wir uns nicht nur einig in dem Glauben an die objektive Geltung auch der politischen Werturteile und Forderungen, sondern auch in weitem Umfang einig über den *Inhalt* der Forderungen. Soweit das noch nicht der Fall ist, haben wir die wichtige und dringende Aufgabe, durch Aussprache und besonders auch durch Rundbriefe auf Uebereinstimmung in den politischen Grundsätzen hinzuwirken.“

<sup>34</sup> RC 081-14-07, „Berlin, 20.2.1918“: „Bei Gesprächen mit Freunden, Bekannten und Kameraden über [...] das Ende des Krieges [...] habe ich häufig bemerkt, wie wenig bekannt diejenigen Ereignisse der Gegenwart sind, die mir die wichtigsten zu sein scheinen, weil in ihnen sich die Kräfte zeigen, die aus dem chaotischen Atomismus der Welt einen Kosmos gestalten werden, die in der Völkersonologie eine organisch geordnete Gemeinschaft an Stelle der Anarchie setzen werden. [...] [So] sehe ich das Geschehen der Gegenwart an uns sehe darin die Geburtswehen einer neuen Zeit, das Eindringen der Menschheit in das Leben einer höheren Stufe auf dem Gebiete des Rechts- und Gemeinschaftslebens.“

tribe, in order to become fit for the “naturally necessary trial of strengths of the conflicting *Völker*”. Here, the point is that the objective values belong to a single *Volk* only, whereas other *Völker* need to have *different* objective values. Only if we have such a struggle of value systems at the international market place, social progress can take place, because the fittest system survives. This is at least what Freyer will explicitly say a couple of years later (following Carl Schmitt then: see the next section). In 1918 he is defending objective values, against the background of the ideas of 1914, but obviously with similar aims in mind as in his later Social Darwinian conception.

Carnap, on the other hand, arrives at the conclusion that objective values must exist, only because he thinks that there must be one all-embracing international consensus that *unites* all *Völker* and tribes, with the result that war and “politics of violence” become obsolete. The “objectivity” of these political values and demands only means that they are shared by the whole of mankind. It is a necessary condition, because only if everyone shares these values and demands, war can be avoided. This is objectivity of exactly the same type as that one which in 1948 became the basis of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations. Objectivity as a universal consensus of mankind, in order to avoid war and crime against humanity. This has nothing to do with the objectivity as intended by Freyer, and it also has nothing to do with objectivity of values in the sense of Rickert (or even Simmel).<sup>35</sup> The latter conception – unlike Thomas Mormann’s longstanding interpretation holds – is disconnected here, because Rickert was not defending a value “objectivism”, in the sense of Carnap’s approach where “objective” always is a synonym of “intersubjective”.<sup>36</sup> Rather, Rickert was not behind “objectivity” at all but had a pretty straightforward value *absolutism* (Platonism) in mind.<sup>37</sup>

Carnap realized that the “politics of violence” that lead to the disaster of the First World War can be avoided only if *everyone* rejects it. This leads automatically to the vision of an international consensus that systematically transgresses national borders (of value systems of individual *Völker*). Therefore, Carnap tried to counteract national prejudices in bringing in the international perspective of French and British newspapers. There must be a *common point*, a *lowest common factor* that allows us to bring together all nations at one table of worldwide peace. These objective political values and demands *must* exist, indeed. Although Carnap’s attempt failed, he pointed out something with his attempt that almost everyone would share today. Moreover, he pointed out something here that he by no means would have to reject later, as he developed a more rigorous and radical conception of non-cognitivism. Non-cognitivism by no means rules out the *possibility* of consensus, in the sense of the Declaration of Human Rights. It only rules out that we may arrive at a consensus here, because of some dubious external facts.

To sum up, Freyer’s notion of “objective values” from 1918 was a direct outcome of his understanding of the ideas of 1914, taking “objective” as inevitably bound to a certain *Volk* or tribe, as a more efficient tool that allows us to sharpen and deepen international conflict, which becomes necessary against the background of a Social Darwinian worldview. Carnap’s (and probably also Reichenbach’s) notion of “objective values” took a road at the radical opposite side of the political spectrum. Objectivity meant here a universal (and, of course, peaceful) consensus of mankind which becomes necessary, in order to overcome that “politics of violence” that lead to the First World War. The notion of a struggle of value systems was rejected by Carnap, as a result of his

---

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Mormann’s aforementioned presentation.

<sup>36</sup> This is true for the *Aufbau* – cf. (Richardson 1998, p. 186f) – but it holds even more for the circular letters where the format implies that the aim only can be objectivism in the sense of an intersubjective consensus.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. my argumentation in (Damböck 2017, p. 173f) as well as (Carus 2007, pp. 105-108).

overall rejection of war and the silly idea of “a naturally necessary trial of strengths of the conflicting *Völker*”. He replaced this notion with one of peaceful coexistence, as established by some political rules and demands that become shared by the whole of mankind (after it had rejected the Social Darwinian worldview).

## 6. Outlook: The later non-cognitivism of Freyer and Carnap

Freyer and Carnap discussed philosophical topics for some time in the early 1920. In particular, Freyer had some importance for the development of Carnap’s *Aufbau* between 1920 and 1923.<sup>38</sup> But they knew each other since their time in the Jena Sera Circle before the First World War. What makes their relationship so interesting is a characteristic mixture of convergences and divergences. They *share* the overall non-cognitivist attitude towards values, but they *disagree* at the political level and therefore also defend quite different varieties of non-cognitivism. This mixture of convergences and divergences became even stronger in 1926, as Freyer published his crude but unambiguous manifesto of a fascist *Führerstaat*.

Convergences, on the one hand, became more obvious then because both Carnap and Freyer no longer adopted any objectivity talk and embarked at a fully-fledged non-cognitivism. Carnap, in the *Aufbau* and in his Bauhaus lectures from 1929, defended the “irrational” status of values who belong to the subjective disposition of an individual only.<sup>39</sup> Freyer, in turn, highlighted the entire freedom of the “moral subject” – the “final instance” to decide which values to adopt.<sup>40</sup> There is nothing *beyond* these subjective and irrational values the “final instance”, the “moral subject” stipulates for herself. However, this adoption of fully-fledged non-cognitivism in both Freyer and Carnap is accompanied with even stronger disagreement at a political level. Carnap, although he always remained rather defensive with respect to his own political and moral commitments, obviously rejected the idea of cognitive values for similar reasons as Reichenbach: because he wanted to support an intellectual climate of peaceful coexistence, of what he later called “scientific humanism”. Carnap accepted

[...] the ideals of a harmonically organized society, in which means of compensation or rather destruction such as war are no longer possible; a harmonic togetherness even within smaller circles of peoples; emphasis of mutual assistance instead of mutual competition or even aggression. My own system of values is this what in America is called “humanism” ...<sup>41</sup>

This attitude *fits* well with a non-cognitivist standpoint, because (as highlighted by Reichenbach) it fits well with a democratic stance and the notion of mutual adjustment and cooperation, at a political and moral level. The circular letters were written by Carnap, one may suggest here, simply because he also shared this democratic attitude at heart and rejected the totalitarian attitude of philosophers who claim to obtain a certain moral “knowledge” that the layman is lacking. Similarly, Carnap might have rejected moral naturalism, for exactly the same reason, because it obstructs the idea that moral believe belongs to the human subject alone. If it is *natural* to defend

---

<sup>38</sup> See Adam Tamas Tuboly’s contribution to this volume as well as (Damböck 2017, pp. 184-190).

<sup>39</sup> See (Carnap 1998, pp. §§ 59, 152), RC 110-07-49 and (Damböck 2017, pp. 199-203).

<sup>40</sup> (Freyer 1930, p. 112).

<sup>41</sup> (Carnap 1993, p. 147): „[...] die Ideale einer harmonisch organisierten Gesellschaft, in der solche Mittel des Ausgleichs, oder eigentlich der Vernichtung, wie Kriege nicht mehr möglich sind; ein harmonisches Zusammensein auch in kleineren Kreisen; die Betonung gegenseitiger Hilfe statt gegenseitiger Konkurrenz oder gar Aggression. Mein eigenes Wertesystem ist das, was in Amerika ‚Humanismus‘ genannt wird ...“

value *x*, then everyone who fails to defend *x* becomes placed under disability by those who *know* about naturalness of *x*. Here, non-cognitivism is clearly an attitude that is inevitably linked with the overall moral standpoint of “humanism”, although Carnap himself seemingly never explicitly highlighted this connection.

Another (partly already indicated) point is important with regard to the political aspect of non-cognitivism in Carnap. The “objectivity” demand of his 1918 initiatives was nothing that Carnap ever had to give up. The 1918 initiative failed, of course. But this did not have to imply for Carnap to reject the overall vision of a moral consensus. By contrast, this vision is an integral element of what he called “humanism” because peaceful coexistence and mutual assistance only become possible if we all share these fundamental values. Again, “objectivity” is meant here not in the sense of a value absolutist like Rickert, but rather in the sense in which a consensus of mankind such as the Convention of Human Rights becomes formulated.

The political relevance of non-cognitivism becomes more explicit in the case of Freyer. In his before-quoted “Ethical norms and politics” of 1930 he explicitly combines non-cognitivism (viz. what he calls the “moral subject”) with a political worldview which he adopted from Carl Schmitt. Politics is entitled to historically realize a “closed value system” (“geschlossene Wertgestalt”) which is “predefined at a certain place on earth for a *Volk*” (p.112). Interestingly, Freyer seems to combine here a non-cognitivism with respect to values as an outcome of the moral subject with a very strong cognitive naturalism with respect to values as an outcome of a *Volk*. Whereas the single person – the citizen of a *Volk* – has to choose values with absolute freedom, only following his own “moral conscience” the political instances representing a whole *Volk* have to implement a value system that is “predefined” – no freedom at all here. How can these two antinomic instances of value philosophy fit together? Why does Freyer think that these “fundamentally different structures of ought” are “both necessary parts of the structure of the mental world”? (p. 113)

On the one hand, Freyer needs the notion of a “closed value system”, in order to arrive at a notion of the political which like Schmitt’s is based on the concepts of “friend and foe”.<sup>42</sup> Political progress is possible, for Freyer and Schmitt, only if there are different states (or *Völker*) implementing different “closed value systems”. The Social Darwinist notion of “survival of the fittest” allows us to gain political progress, because the more powerful *Volk* (which automatically also defends the “better” value system) compels other *Völker* to accept its (more powerful and therefore better) “closed value system”. But how can we choose the very value system that is “predefined” for a certain “*Volk*”? Well, following the totalitarian conception of Freyer and Schmitt, a value system is predefined for a *Volk*, if and only if it is maximally powerful and maximally closed. If a *Volk* already has to offer such a politically efficient system of values, the non-cognitive status of the “moral subject” is not too relevant at all. The only point is that the *Volk* then is naturally represented by those citizens who share the predefined closed value system and the state consequently has the duty to convince the citizens and to implement legal mechanisms that suppress every citizen who persistently defends deviant values. In that case the political side of the antinomy dissolves the antinomy because it appears to be more powerful: it somewhat transcends the subjective side. But there are also cases (e.g., Germany and Europe, as viewed by Freyer in 1930) where the “value content of a states is in doubt and the cohesive power of their wills breaks down”. Then “we have a situation, in which the moral and the political ought necessarily and persistently will diverge”.

---

<sup>42</sup> Cf. (Schmitt 2009). Schmitt was extremely important for Freyer whose „revolution from the right” was entirely based on Schmitt’s notion of politics as the tension between “friend” and “foe”. Cf. (Freyer 1930, p. 105) and (Muller 1987, pp. 208-215).

In other words, a state where the subjective attitudes of the citizens and the objective attitude of politics fail to converge via a strong and aggressive “closed system of values” degenerates. But how can we actually find a way to avoid this degeneration of a state, how can we prohibit our *Volk* from becoming a victim of the antinomy of subjective values and objective political structure? This question, interestingly, is left open by Freyer in his 1930 article in *Kant Studien* (possibly, because it was politically too radical for this philosophical journal?), although Freyer had a very clear answer at hand, since the publication of his manifesto *Der Staat* in 1926.<sup>43</sup> There he set the stage for future politics, in a section entitled “The *Führer* and his *Volk*”. It is only a *Führer* who is able to dissolve the antinomy, because he is in a position to set the political agenda (by means of a “closed system of values”) and to get together the whole *Volk* under the same umbrella of this agenda. Actually, it is only a *Führer* that is able at all to constitute a *Volk* and a state – no *Volk* and no state without such a *Führer*:

The structure of the *Volk* is, like any other structure of people, the work of a *Führer*. Thus, *Führertum* is the very power that actually creates the state: as it creates out of its manhood the structure of the *Volk*. (p. 111)

The point is that this kind of unity of a *Volk* that is needed in order to dissolve the antinomy between subjective moral and objective politics can be established only in the context of a *Führerstaat*, according to Freyer, for only a *Führer* is able at all to create a powerful consensus of people who even fail to establish a *Volk* without such a consensus. Without such a consensus there is, properly speaking, no state and no *Volk* at all, for Freyer.

But here, in the fascist conception of a *Führerstaat*, non-cognitivism obtains a crucial role, indeed. Whereas in democracy, the non-cognitive nature of moral, according to Freyer, may only lead to degeneration of the state into the chaos of “compromise” and the “lie” of “pluralism”,<sup>44</sup> a new *Führer* who kind of outwits the people uses a potential of the non-cognitivist conception, namely, to create a new state, following entirely new values, only by means of the power of the human will. Non-cognitivism therefore becomes the key notion of Freyer’s “revolution from the right”, because only if non-cognitivism holds, this revolution which is a mere result of “action” and is by no means based on any rationally construed “utopia” is possible at all. Non-cognitivism, for Freyer, means that the world is open for a man-made revolution, initiated and outlined by the strong will of a *Führer*. Non-cognitivism, therefore, supports a very strong form of political irrationalism (and even nihilism). *Everything* is possible, everything is justified, as soon as and only if it belongs to the political vision of a successful *Führer* who manages it to take in tow a whole *Volk*.

In this new conception from 1926 and 1931, Freyer gives up his initial notion of “objective values” being a joint work of people, culture, whatever. These objective values become replaced with the notion of subjective values of a successful leader who manages it to create a *Volk* and a new state. Objectivity, in other words, is no longer interpreted as *inter-subjectivity* (viz. in the way in which Carnap *always* interpreted it) but becomes subsumed under a *Führer*-philosophy, which was quite characteristic for certain currents of Nazi-philosophy.<sup>45</sup>

Carnap was aware of the intellectual development of Freyer, around 1926.<sup>46</sup> However, unlike other intellectuals who defended value absolutism as a reaction to the relativism of Freyer, Schmidt

---

<sup>43</sup> (Freyer 1926).

<sup>44</sup> (Freyer 1931, pp. 59-61).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. also (Bollnow 1937) where „objectivity“ becomes reinterpreted in the sense of the truth of a *Führer* who has the exclusive access to those claims being “adequate” (“sachangemessen”).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. (Carnap forthcoming), entry June 18, 1933.

and other supporters of National-Socialism,<sup>47</sup> Carnap developed an even stronger non-cognitivist conception. And he could do so, because he was also aware of the fact that non-cognitivism initially establishes a very abstract meta-ethical claim (namely, the claim that value statements are not cognitive) which first has to be accompanied by a concrete political interpretation: this was the point of value discussions in the context of the German Youth-Movement. If value-statements are non-cognitive then we still can interpret them in various decidedly different and mutually incompatible ways. Around 1930, Carnap may not have had in mind here the subjectivist and the quasi-realist option as described above. What he certainly had in mind, however, were the democratic and the totalitarian option. There can be no doubt that he consciously chose the democratic option and rejected the totalitarian one, although oddly enough we hardly find any explicit statement by Carnap that directly affirms democracy (and the Human Rights). What we do find are only those rather general and regrettably vague remarks on what he called “humanism” or “scientific humanism”. Reichenbach, similarly, failed to become too concrete with regards to the democratic world view he was defending. There can be no doubt, however, that Carnap and Reichenbach *were* democratic thinkers who affirmed the Human Rights, whereas Freyer was radically opposed to both democracy and humanism.<sup>48</sup>

This divergence between the democratic world view of Carnap (and Reichenbach) and the totalitarian world view of Freyer becomes visible also at a level which is more closely related with the overall philosophical interests of Carnap and the Logical Empiricists, namely, at the level of the relation between values (as being irrational preferences of human beings) and those aspects of the human mind being entirely rational and logical. As we saw, for Freyer, the irrational aspect of values is directly related with the idea of totalitarianism or, more precisely, the *Führerstaat*. The *Führer* is able to overwhelm a *Volk* and manage it to share his closed value system, only because the values of that system are accepted by the *Volk* and remain entirely unquestioned. This “noble fraud” (“edler Betrug”)<sup>49</sup> requires that the *Volk* is willing to accept values, even if and in spite of the fact that they totally destroy their own human world views. *Führer* and *Volk* are required “not to give free rein either to their whims or humanity”. “The ultimate probation of the *Volk*, however, is that, guided by the authority of the *Führer*, it also submits to the structure and affirms all its hardships and incomprehensibilities with free decision.” (p. 120) The *Führer* makes the *Volk* “able and worthy for the state” and “draws on every means that is necessary”. It is a fundamental requirement here that the *Volk* becomes overwhelmed in a way that ensures that people are ready to accept values and decisions being at odds with their overall world view. Thus, to rationally reconstruct a value system and to ask oneself whether a decision fits well into ones overall value claims

---

<sup>47</sup> Most famously the value absolutism of the Frankfurt School is based on this argumentative figure. Cf. (Horkheimer and Adorno 1969). Oddly enough, even advocates of Logical Empiricism often follow this argumentation and reject non-cognitivism as being a crypto-fascism of some kind. Cf. our references to Kamlah and Dahms at the beginning of this essay.

<sup>48</sup> There are democracy theories being based on value absolutism. For example, Habermas’ influential “deliberative democracy” is a model that directly stems from the absolutist tradition in German philosophy. Cf. (Habermas 1992ch. VII). If democratic non-cognitivism holds then such a conception can ever arrive at something that deserves the title “democracy”. However, the most important philosopher of democracy in the interwar period, Hans Kelsen, was clearly an advocate of non-cognitivism, pretty much in the sense of Rudolf Carnap (and he developed his conception in the same intellectual breeding ground of “Red Vienna”). Thus, there is a good deal of democracy theory that is perfectly aware of the incompatibility of value absolutism and democracy. Cf. (Kelsen 2006, p. 236) and, for a recent treatment of democracy, in the spirit of Kelsen and non-cognitivism, (Möllers 2008). See also (Damböck unpublished manuscript).

<sup>49</sup> Cf. (Freyer 1926, p. 110): „Das schlichte Geheimnis aller Führung ist: die ändern so zu nehmen, wie sie sein sollen, diesen edlen Betrug aber derart anzustellen, daß sie dadurch so werden.“

is something the totalitarian world view fundamentally rejects. It is a main principle of totalitarianism, instead, to accept values with a kind of “freedom” that means that these values become accepted even and in particular if they are in contradiction with those values one used to accept. Totalitarianism (in the sense of Freyer and Schmidt) *totalizes* irrationality of values, because it affirms both the non-cognitive idea of irrationality of value claims *and* the anti-rationalist idea that one may accept value systems unseen, by means of a “free choice” which ignores the question whether a value system is consistent or not.

Here, the democratic option diverges, of course. This divergence, however, does not become explicit yet, in those early formulations of non-cognitivism that Carnap and Reichenbach developed until 1918. Then the only focus was the subjectivity and irrationality of values. Questions of consistency and rational reconstruction remain untouched. In the 1930s the picture entirely changed, however. Carnap formulated his conception of values then, only against the background of his overall rational world view. Most explicitly, this new picture can be found in the aforementioned Bauhaus-lecture on values from 1929 and in the famous 1934 paper “Theoretical questions and practical decisions”.<sup>50</sup> Whereas Freyer blatantly rejected all rational considerations with respect to values, Carnap took only the very value statement (or commitment) to be irrational. However, we are always entitled, for Carnap, to analyze our value commitments, in order to find out whether they are consistent with each other and, more importantly, whether we are willing to accept every consequence of a value commitment. If you affirm Hitler but reject the Holocaust, then your value system is heavily inconsistent. You *may* still decide to keep it (and go for Freyer’s irrationalism: Hitler is great, but the Holocaust is very bad, lets combine them, bravely following our great *Führer*), but if you also decide to go for rationality and a Scientific World Conception, then you cannot have both the affirmation of Hitler and the rejection of the Holocaust. You have to decide then, either to reject Hitler and the Holocaust or – to affirm both. Carnap became (and remained for the rest of his life) very explicit here, in his Viennese period, demanding that everyone *must* be rational and that the opposite stance of what he called “illogical reasoning” is by no means an acceptable “philosophy”. What Carnap, interestingly enough, took to be acceptable, from a non-cognitivist standpoint, was a value system being totally at odds with the values of humanism, as long as this value system appears to be consistent. There is no *logical argument*, for Carnap, that may allow us to rule out the value system of a consistent Nazi. We can only agree to disagree here, and, as a last consequence, mobilize all our legal and military forces, in order to avoid the world view of the consistent Nazi becoming realized: we do not have any *scientific possibility to refute him*. The situation is different in the case of an inconsistent personality. Here, in cases of “illogical reasoning”, Carnap diagnosed a certain “disease” that might become cured by psychologists and social scientists.<sup>51</sup> At any rate, Carnap was very explicit in rejecting the very fundamental of Freyer’s *Führer*-philosophy, namely, the all-encompassing irrationality of value systems. There can be hardly a doubt that Carnap was aware of this tension and defended his rational world view so sharply here, as a reaction to the blatant irrationalism of Freyer and his NS-allies. “Theoretical questions and practical decisions” is Carnap’s reaction to those varieties of non-cognitivism that, like Freyer’s conception of a non-cognitive *Führerstaat*, cancel rationality at all levels.

Ayer, A. J. (1946). *Language, Truth and Logic*. New York: Dover Publications.

---

<sup>50</sup> Cf. RC 110-07-49, (Carnap 1934, 1937) and (Richardson 2007).

<sup>51</sup> (Carnap 1937, p. 117f).



- Becker, H. (1946). *German Youth: Bond or Free*. London: Routledge.
- Blackburn, S. (1998). *Ruling Passions. A Theory of Practical Reasoning*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Boghossian, P. (2001). How are Objective Epistemic Reasons Possible? *Philosophical Studies*, 106, 1-40.
- Bollnow, O. F. (1937). Zur Frage nach der Objektivität der Geisteswissenschaften. *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft*, 97, 335-363.
- Carnap, R. (1934). Theoretische Fragen und praktische Entscheidungen. *Natur und Geist*, 2, 257-260.
- Carnap, R. (1937). Logic. *Edgar Douglas et al. (eds.): Factors Determining Human Behavior*. Cambridge (Ma): Harvard University Press, 107-118.
- Carnap, R. (1993). *Mein Weg in die Philosophie*. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun.
- Carnap, R. (1998). *Der logische Aufbau der Welt* (3ed.). Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag.
- Carnap, R. (forthcoming). *Tagebücher 1908-1935*. Herausgegeben von Christian Damböck. Unter der Mitarbeit von Brigitta Arden, Brigitte Parakenings, Roman Jordan und Lois M. Rendl. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag.
- Carus, A. W. (2007). *Carnap and Twentieth-Century Thought. Explication as Enlightenment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cohen, H. (1907). *Ethik des reinen Willens* (2ed., System der Philosophie, Vol. / von Hermann Cohen ; T 2). Berlin: Cassirer.
- Dahms, H.-J. (1994). *Positivismusstreit. Die Auseinandersetzung der Frankfurter Schule mit dem logischen Positivismus, dem amerikanischen Pragmatismus und dem kritischen Rationalismus*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Damböck, C. (2017). <Deutscher Empirismus>. *Studien zur Philosophie im deutschsprachigen Raum 1830-1930* (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts Wiener Kreis). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Damböck, C. (unpublished manuscript). *Demokratie kontra Populismus. Eine nonkognitive Sicht*.
- Freyer, H. (1919). *Antäus. Grundlegung einer Ethik des bewussten Lebens*. Jena: Eugen Diederichs.
- Freyer, H. (1920). Das Problem der Utopie. *Deutsche Rundschau*, 183, 321-345.
- Freyer, H. (1926). *Der Staat*. Leipzig: Ernst Wiegandt Verlagsbuchhandlung.
- Freyer, H. (1930). Ethische Normen und Politik. *Kant-Studien*, 35, 99-114.
- Freyer, H. (1931). *Revolution von rechts* (1. - 3. Tsd. ed.). Jena: Diederichs.
- Gabriel, G. (2004). Introduction: Carnap Brought Home. *Steve Awodey and Carsten Klein (eds.): Carnap Brought Home. The View from Jena*. Chicago: Open Court, 3-24.
- Gibbard, A. (1990). *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings. A Theory of Normative Judgment*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Habermas, J. (1992). *Faktizität und Geltung. Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaats*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.
- Horkheimer, M., & Adorno, T. W. (1969). *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente*. Frankfurt/Main: Fischer.
- Kelsen, H. (2006). *Verteidigung der Demokratie*. Herausgegeben von Matthias Jestaedt und Oliver Lepsius. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Kraus, O. (1937). *Die Werttheorien. Geschichte und Kritik*. Brünn: Verlag Rudolf M. Rohrer.
- Leiter, B. (2015). Nietzsche's Moral and Political Philosophy. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nietzsche-moral-political/>.
- Mittelstraß, G. (Ed.). (1919). *Freideutscher Jugendtag 1913*. Hamburg: Freideutscher Jugendverlag Adolf Saal.

- Möllers, C. (2008). *Demokratie - Zumutungen und Versprechen*. Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach.
- Mormann, T. (2010). *Germany's Defeat as a Programme: Carnap's Political and Philosophical Beginnings*. <http://philpapers.org/rec/MORGYD>.
- Muller, J. Z. (1987). *The Other God that Failed. Hans Freyer and the Deradicalization of German Conservatism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Reichenbach, H. (1951). *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Reichenbach, H. (1977). *Der Aufstieg der wissenschaftlichen Philosophie. Mit einer Einleitung zur Gesamtausgabe von Wesley C. Salmon und mit Erläuterungen von Andreas Kamlah*. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien.
- Reichenbach, H. (1978). *Selected Writings 1909-1953. Volume One. Principal Translations by Elizabeth Hughes Schneewind. Edited by Maria Reichenbach and Robert S. Cohen*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company.
- Reisch, G. A. (2005). *How the Cold War Transformed Philosophy of Science. To the Icy Slopes of Logic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richardson, A. (1998). *Carnap's Construction of the World. The Aufbau and the Emergence of Logical Empiricism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richardson, A. (2007). Carnapian Pragmatism. *Michael Friedman and Richard Creath (eds.): The Cambridge Companion to Carnap*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 295-315.
- Schilpp, P. A. (Ed.). (1963). *The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap*. Chicago: Open Court.
- Schmitt, C. (2009). *Der Begriff des Politischen*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot.
- Simmel, G. (1913). Das individuelle Gesetz: ein Versuch über das Prinzip der Ethik. *Logos*, 2, 117-160.
- Uebel, T. (2004). Carnap, the Left Vienna Circle, and Neopositivist Antimetaphysics. *Steve Awodey and Carsten Klein (eds.): Carnap Brought Home. The View from Jena*. Chicago: Open Court, 247-278.
- Werner, M. G. (2015). Freideutsche Jugend und Politik. Rudolf Carnaps Politische Rundbriefe 1918. *Friedrich Wilhelm Graf et al. (Hrsg.): Geschichte intellektuell. Theoriegeschichtliche Perspektiven*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 465-486.
- Wyneken, G. (1919). *Schule und Jugendkultur*. Jena: Eugen Diederichs Verlag.