

Carnap, Reichenbach, Freyer. The Social Adaptiveness of Ethics, in the Context of Logical Empiricism and the German Youth Movement

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- This is a first sketch of what in a couple of years might become a whole book. Working title:
The policy of „non-cognitivism“
- The first time where non-cognitivism (i.e., **the meta-ethical conception that rejects the idea of value statements being truth apt**) shows up in its fully-fledged form is in the 1910th, in the context of **the German Youth Movement**
- **Non-cognitivism (in its fully-fledged) form is closely tied with political considerations:**
- Some varieties of non-cognitivism are based on a **totalitarian policy**, others are inevitably linked with a **democratic standpoint**
- These different policies of non-cognitivism represent different solutions to the problem of **cultural progress:**
- **How can culture make progress, if we take it for granted that there are no absolute values that might be taken as guiding stars?**

Overview

1. The role of the German Youth Movement
2. The Meißner Formula (1913)
3. Freyer, Kurella and Carnap on values in 1918
4. Freyer (1930) on values and the state
5. Reichenbach (1951): Democratic Non-Cognitivism
6. Carnap's non-cognitivism and scientific humanism (1963)

First Part: Germany, 1913 - 1918

1. The role of the German Youth Movement

- 19th century German philosophy was driven by the vision of a **consensus over fundamental values**
- Values might be context-dependent but each context, it seems, more or less inevitably leads to certain values, the aim of culture is to arrive at a stage of uniqueness (Cohen: „Einheit des Kulturbewusstseins“)
- After 1900, however, the vision of consensus collapsed
- Culture was seen as a medium full of tension, disagreement and unbridgeable gaps
- This new, non-consensual understanding of culture was shared, in particular, by the younger generations:
- **The German Youth Movement represented the lost consensus about values**

The Free German/Students Movement

- The German Youth Movement emerged in the last decade of the 19th century, primarily, in the form of several groups of high-school students who **celebrated nature and wandering** („Wandervogel“)
- The various groups of the **Free Germans** or **Free Students Movement** were all founded around and after 1910 (mainly by former members of the Wandervogel)
- The Free Germans **rejected the corporations rituals of drinking and fencing** and replaced them with non-alcoholic activities in nature
- In 1913 they organized a **meeting at the Hohe Meißner** (a Mountain in the middle of Germany) which was attended by about 2000 Free Students

2. The Meißner Formula (1913)

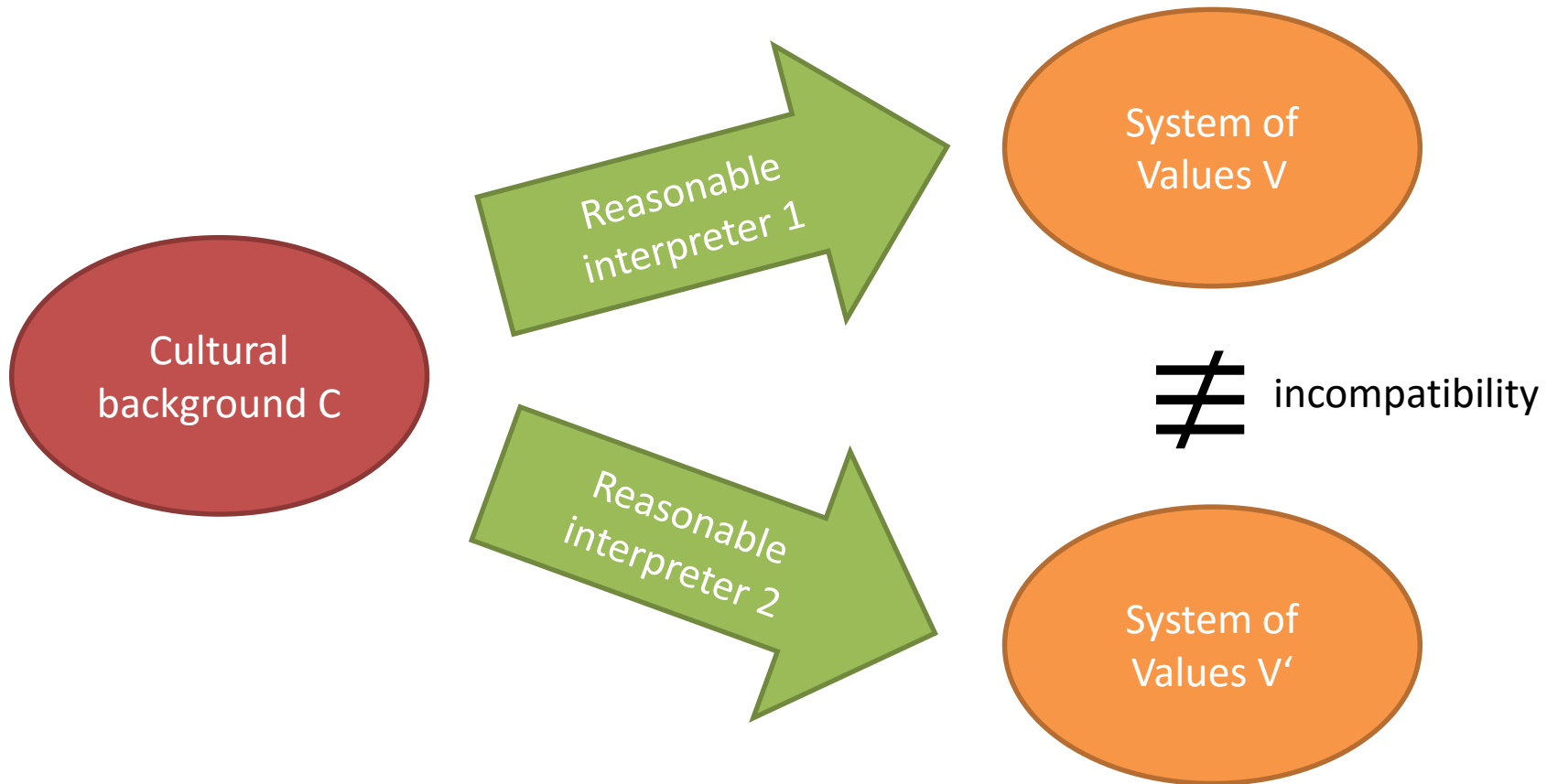
- Attendees of the meeting at the Hoher Meißner were, among others:
 - **Rudolf Carnap** and **Hans Reichenbach** who later on became crucial members of the left wing of logical empiricism
 - The sociologist, defender of a fascist policy **Hans Freyer** who was a close friend of Carnap until the middle of the 1920s
 - The communist **Alfred Kurella**, who later on became a notorious member of the GDR government, responsible for cultural policy
- The group was as heterogeneous as possible (cf. Botsch/Haverkamp, 2014)
- Nevertheless they managed it to fit the whole of this **fair of world views** into a joint mission statement, the so-called **Meißner formula**:

[1] The Free German Youth intends to model its life on its own purpose and responsibility, with inner authenticity. This inner freedom is jointly defended, under all circumstances. Free German Youth Days will be organized, with the objective of mutual understanding. All joint meetings of the Free German Youth are alcohol and nicotine free.

3. Freyer, Kurella, and Carnap on values in 1918

- Hans Freyer (1918) : *Antäus. Foundation of an Ethics of Conscious Life*
Alfred Kurella: [2] „here is the road toward the Meißner oath, inner authenticity and responsibility“ (Kurella 1918)
- Alfred Kurella (1918): *German Volksgemeinschaft. An open letter to the Führerrat of the Free German Youth* (btw. Carnap read this book with great interest in 1918)
Kurella tried to reconcile between „the two wings“ of the Youth Movement, the socialist (viz. his own) and the völkisch
- In 1918 Carnap wrote circular letters to a number of friends, in order to discuss political and moral issues, in particular, the question of war (with the aim to arrive at a consensus)

- In all these writings from 1918, the main topic was the struggle between certain value systems that were considered to be
 - equally reasonable
 - products of the very same culture (of the German Youth Movement)
 - mutually incompatible
- The idea was to somewhat reconcile between the incompatible systems but at the same time to leave people their own values
- The project of reconciliation failed (of course)
- But the positive lesson that Carnap and other (former) members of the German Youth Movement took from the discussion was **to finally accept non-cognitivism with all its implications and to reject the idea of objectively valid value statements**



How to deal with the new freedom?

- What shall we do, in cases of insoluble disagreement between value systems?
- There are two important answers to this question
 - The **totalitarian option**: value systems have to fight against each other and the fittest may survive
 - The **democratic option**: value systems may peacefully coexist and do the best in order to benefit from each other
- Both options attempt to demonstrate how to deal with value disagreement **in a fruitful way**
- They not just provide **any** solution to the problem of value disagreement but one that may allow us **to use the power of value disagreement as the driving force of cultural progress**

Second Part:
Leipzig, 1930
Los Angeles, 1951 and 1963

A. The totalitarian variety of Non-Cognitivism

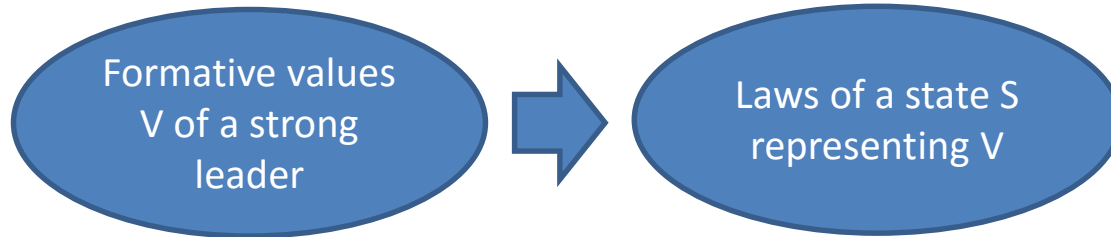
4. Freyer on values and the state in 1930

- NON-COGNITIVISM:
[3] The moral subject is set into the world, in order to decide in those concrete value constellations events bring on: an ultimate instance, a solitary judge, an organ that perceives the demands of the world, an energeia that forms the moral value from the matter of values. (p. 112)
- Because everyone acts morally, by means of inner authenticity and responsibility alone, [4] „the possibility exists that the moral world breaks apart on this line“ (p. 112).
- We inevitably get **pluralism** and **particularism**, because non-cognitivism holds
- Interestingly enough, however, this does not lead to a tolerant policy, for Freyer, but rather the opposit

- TOTALITARIANISM (FASCISM):
[5] The political powers are set into the world, in order to realize a closed value conception that is potentially available in a *Volk* at a certain place of the world. They are mandataries of this possibility of the human and therefore its party. (p. 112)
- There are *different* cultures and therefore different states being based on incompatible value systems
- Also, the citizens not necessarily share the values of their own state
- According to Freyer, this leads to a policy of *struggle* [Kampf], both inside of a state and between states
- **With struggle we automatically get cultural progress**
- **Without struggle, culture stands still**

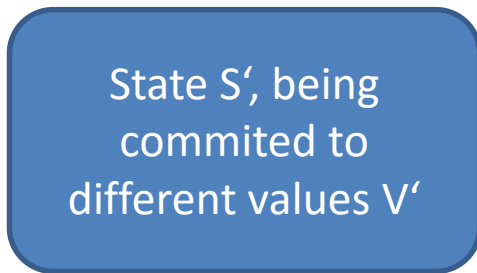
Macrostructure

The Freyerian state (harmonious part):



Struggle:

Enemy state:



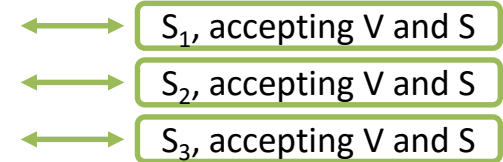
Prepare for war
and/or
begin war

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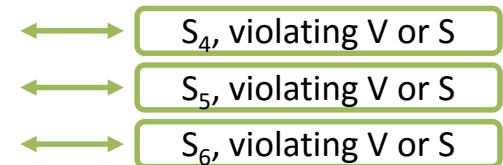
**The fittest survives
(and cultural progress takes place)**

Microstructure

Good citizens:



Bad citizens:



**(1) Become educated
or neutralized**

**(2) Destroy the state
and establish a new one**

B. Microstructure: the democratic alternative

5. Reichenbach (1951): Democratic Non-Cognitivism

THE DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLE:

[6] We may differ in many respects, perhaps about the question of whether the state should own the means of production, or whether the divorce laws should be made easier, or whether a world government should be set up that controls the atom bomb. But we can discuss such problems if we both agree about a democratic principle [...]:

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

PIECEFUL COEXISTENCE:

[7] [This democratic] principle is not an ethical doctrine, answering all questions of what we should do. It is merely an invitation to take active part in the struggle of opinions. Volitional differences cannot be settled by the appeal to a system of ethics constructed by some learned man; they can be overcome only through the clash of opinions, through the friction between the individual and his environment, through controversy and the compulsion of the situation. (p. 296)

RESPONSIBILITY

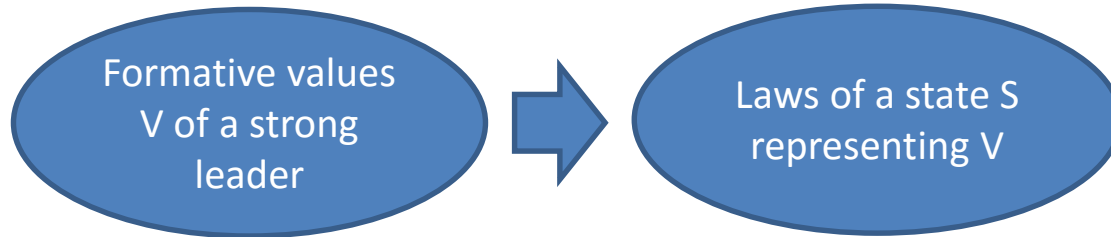
[8] This is not meant to imply that the empiricist is a man of easy compromise. Much as he is willing to learn from the group, he is also prepared to steer the group in the direction of his own volitions. He knows that social progress is often due to the persistence of individuals who were stronger than 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. (p. 300)

Adaptive Values and cultural progress

- I trust my volitions (**inner authenticity and responsibility**), develop my own convictions and try to convince others
- I also trust that others trust their own convictions and try to convince others
- Therefore, I become open for innovative ideas of others and others get the chance to benefit from my ideas
- **Culture benefits and develops because of the adoption of the democratic principle**
- **Cultural progress** is (only) possible without struggle and violence, by means of **cultural exchange**
- (Freyer fails to see this option, it seems)

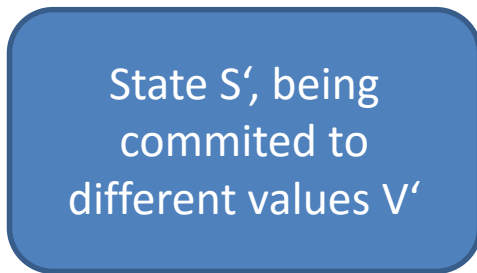
Macrostructure

The Freyerian state (harmonious part):



Struggle:

Enemy state:



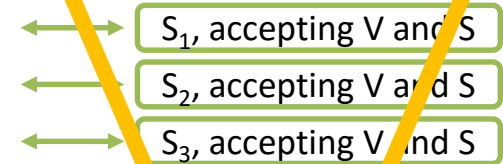
Prepare for war
and/or
begin war

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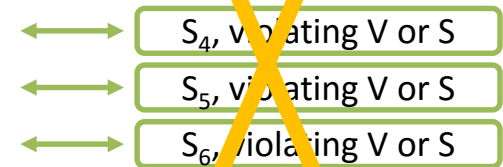
**The fittest survives
(and cultural progress takes place)**

Microstructure

Good citizens:



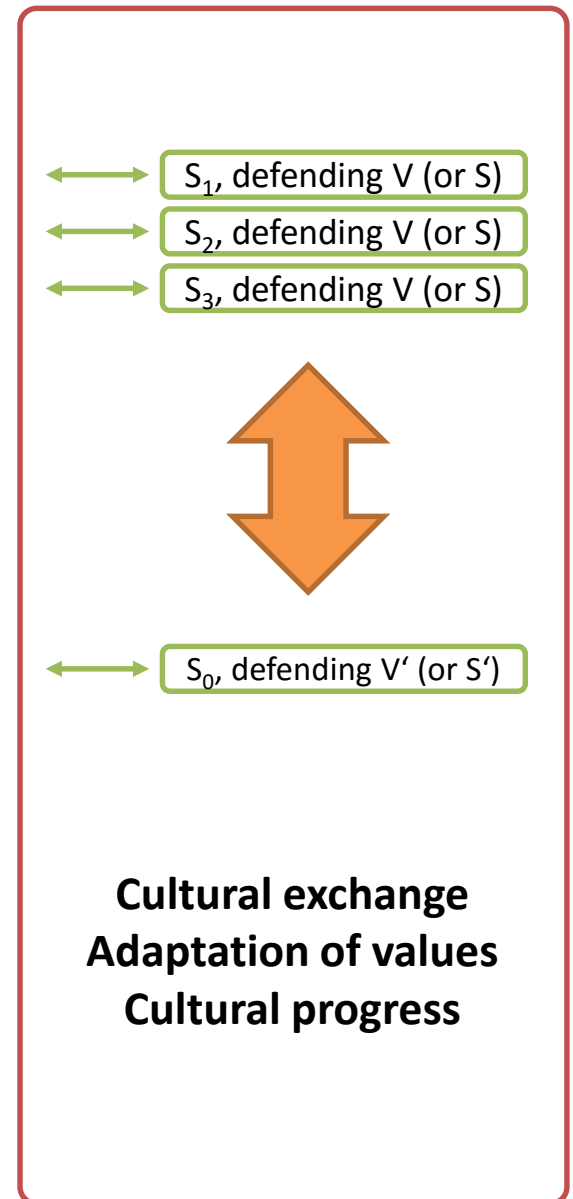
Bad citizens:



(1) Become educated
or neutralized

(2) Destroy the state
and establish a new one

Microstructure



C. Macrostructure: the democratic alternative

6. Carnap's scientific humanism (1963)

AGAINST LIBERALISM; FOR SOCIALISM AND A
WORLD GOVERNMENT:

[9] It was and still is my conviction that the great problems of the organization of economy and the organization of the world at the present time, in the era of industrialization, cannot possibly be solved by „the free interplay of forces“, but require rational planning. For the organization of economy this means socialism in some form; for the organization of the world it means a gradual development toward a world government. (Schilpp 1963, 83)

THE ULTIMATE AIM:

[10] However, neither socialism nor world government are regarded as absolute ends; they are only the organizational means which, according to our present knowledge, seem to give the best promise of leading to a realization of the ultimate aim. This aim is a form of life in which the well-being and the development of the individual is valued most highly, not the power of the state. [...] If we look at the problem from the point of view of this aim, we shall recognize **the dangers lying in the constant increase of the power of the state** [...] Thus one of the main problems [...] is the task of finding ways of organizing society which will reconcile the personal and cultural freedom of the individual with the development of an efficient organization of state and economy. (p. 83-84)

Macrostructure

The Freyerian state (harmonious part):

Formative values
V of a strong
leader



Laws of a state S
representing V

Struggle:

Enemy state:

State S', being
committed to
different values V'

prepare for war
and/or
begin war

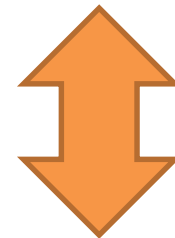
**The fittest survives
(and cultural progress takes place)**

Microstructure

← S₁, defending V (or S)

← S₂, defending V (or S)

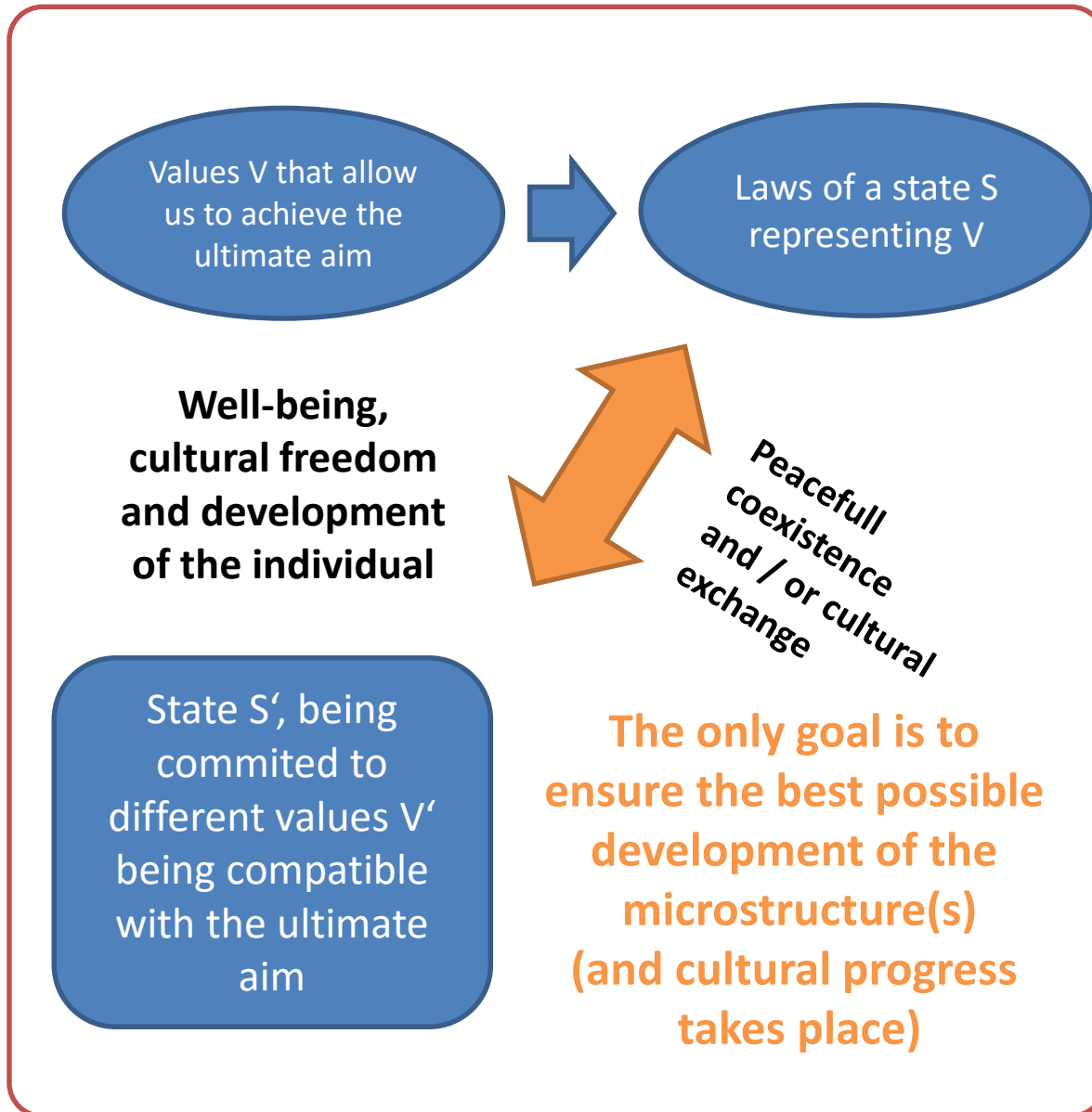
← S₃, defending V (or S)



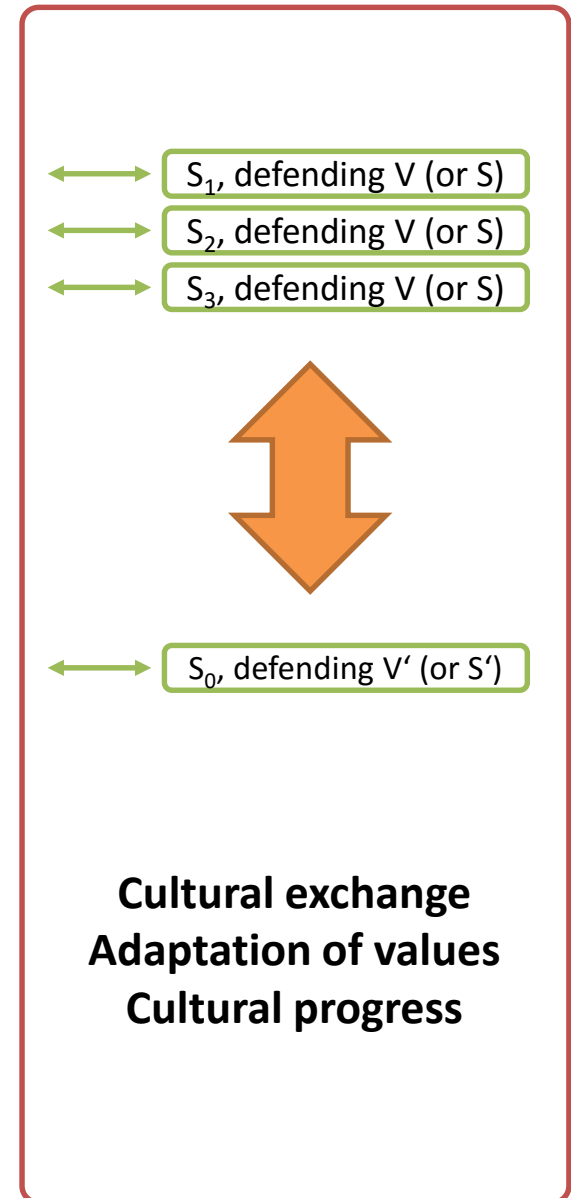
← S₀, defending V' (or S')

**Cultural exchange
Adaptation of values
Cultural progress**

Macrostructure



Microstructure

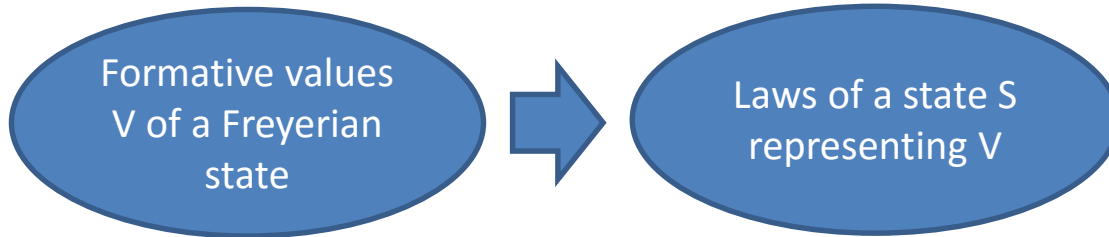


Is this naive?

- This picture only works in a peaceful world of tolerant and open-minded societies and states
- Thus, if a Freyerian society / state emerges (National-Socialism, Islamism, Neo-Liberalism, etc.) struggle is inescapable
- In other words, a Freyerian society / state necessarily **enforces the advocates of democracy and humanism to adopt a Freyerian reasoning in themselves**
- But the only aim of this commitment toward struggle is to re-establish democracy and freedom and to disestablish the Freyerian society/state
- Struggle, for the democrat, is by no means the germ of cultural progress but only a tool that allows us to defend our freedom-based notion of cultural progress

Macrostructure

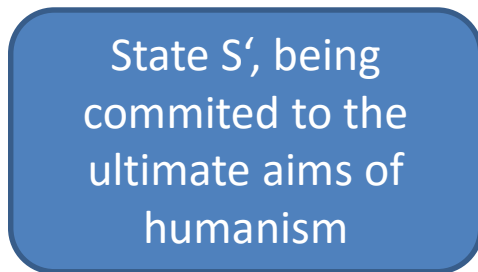
A Freyerian state:



Struggle:



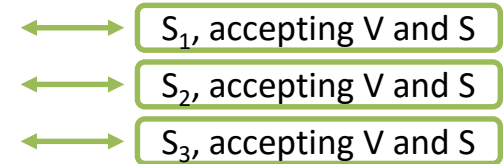
Carnapian state:



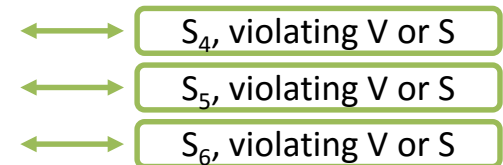
The only aim is to re-establish a Carnapian state (in the meantime cultural progress is hampered)

Microstructure

Good citizens:



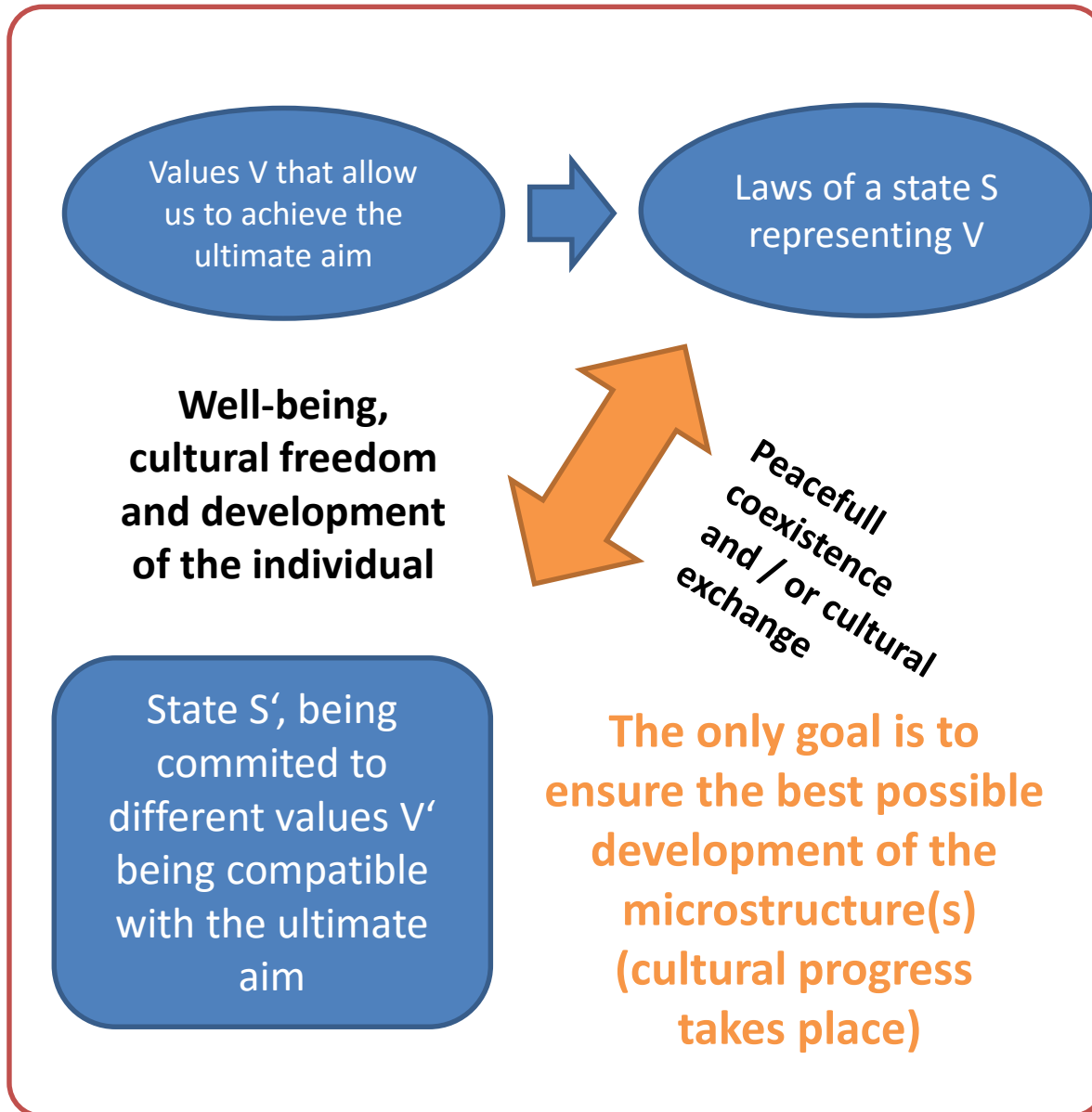
Bad citizens:



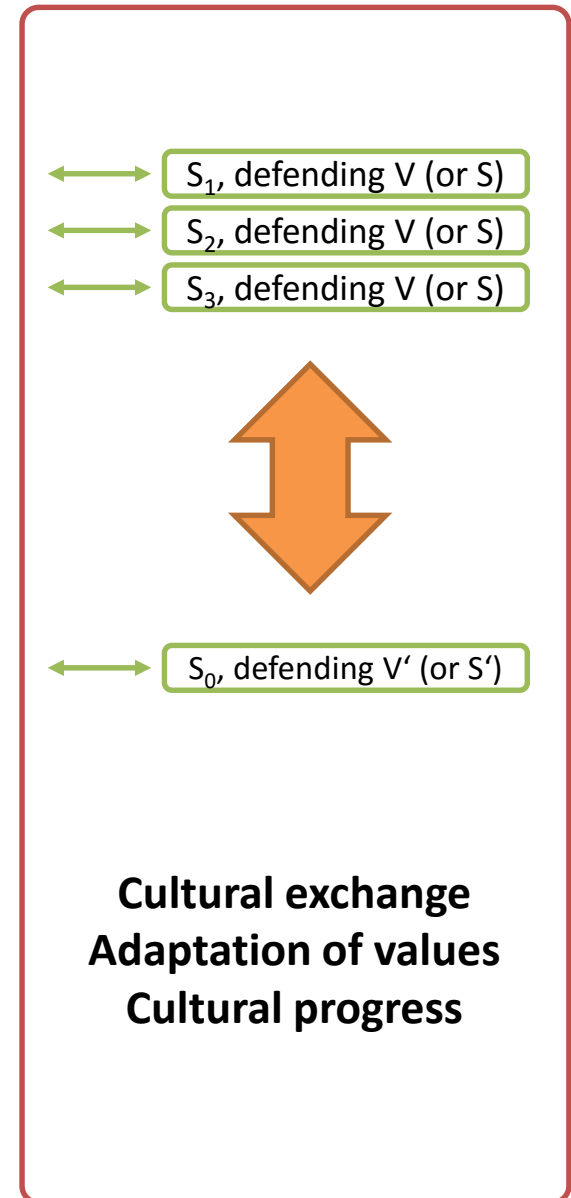
Disestablish the Freyerian state and establish a Carnapian one

A large orange arrow points downwards from the 'Bad citizens' section to the text below.

Macrostructure



Microstructure



Conclusions

- There are two different notions of cultural progress and prosperity
- A violence based conception: struggle between cultures and value systems triggers cultural progress
- A peaceful conception: cultural progress is triggered by means of cultural exchange (both at the macro- and the micro-level)
- Violence and struggle becomes necessary only in cases where cultural exchange is hampered
- As non-cognitivists we cannot prove or refute any of these two options but we are free to reject one of them and to adopt the other one