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

This paper1 argues that the non-cognitivist philosophies of two key figures of left wing Logical Empiricism, Rudolf Carnap and Hans Reichenbach, and the ideologue of a “revolution from the right”, Hans Freyer, were all intended as political conceptions that frame a certain way how society may deal with values and norms. This political character of non-cognitivism as well as the tension between different possible varieties – from liberal left to the far-right – 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 and uncover the roots of the mature view of these thinkers.

1. Introduction. The mature meta-ethical views of Carnap and Reichenbach

I start with a brief re-examination of Carnap’s and Reichenbach’s mature views on the philosophy of values. There are two classical texts to be considered here. Carnap’s reply to Abraham Kaplan in the so-called Schilpp-volume and the chapter “The nature of ethics” in Reichenbach’s The Rise of Scientific Philosophy.2

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2 See (Schilpp 1963, pp. 999-1013; Reichenbach 1951, pp. 276-302). On Reichenbach’s philosophy of values see (Kamlah 2013; Dahms 1994; Kamlah 1977) and Flavia Padovani’s contribution to this volume. On Carnap’s philosophy of values see (Mormann 2007; Uebel 2010; Siegetsleitner 2014, pp. 89-162; Reisch 2005, pp. 47-53, 382-384;
In his reply to Kaplan, Carnap firstly highlights several aspects in which value statements are either “factual” or “analytic”. On the factual side, he mentions “psychological, sociological, and historical statements on the valuational reactions (or dispositions to such reactions) by a person or group”, “statements on means-end relationships” as well as “statements on the utility of a possible event”. On the analytic side he mentions statements being logically related to factual statements as mentioned above or analyze the semantics of the latter as well as “statements giving an explication of relevant concepts connected with values or valuations, or consequences of such explications” (p. 999). All other aspects of value statements identify them as being “non-cognitive”. Thus:

**Thesis of non-cognitivism.** If a statement on values or valuations is interpreted neither as factual nor as analytic (or contradictory), then it is non-cognitive; that is to say, it is devoid of cognitive meaning, and therefore the distinction between truth and falsity is not applicable to it. (ibid)

The point of Carnap’s argumentation is the following. The “thesis of non-cognitivism” “is simply a special case of the general thesis of logical empiricism – that there is no ‘third kind’ of knowledge besides empirical and logical knowledge” (p. 1000). None of the aforementioned varieties of factual and analytic value statements justify values. This implies that there is no justification for value statements at all. If we remove all analytic and factual content from a value statement, what remains is a statement that has the form of what Carnap calls a “pure optative” (ibid). Such a statement always has the form ‘person P utters a at time t’.

This picture implies on the one hand that Carnap must reject several meta-ethical options. He firstly must reject all varieties of **Platonism** or **realism**, for value statements are not factual. He must also reject varieties of **naturalism** (viz. the idea that moral statements are justified by a certain historical context) and **rationalism** (viz. the idea that moral statements are somewhat rationally or logically justified). In the context of critical remarks on Kaplan and John Dewey (who are both taken to be naturalists by Carnap) he formulates the following claim that rules out realism, rationalism and naturalism. Thus:

Richardson 2007; Carus 2017, 2019) as well as (Zeisel 1993) and André Carus’ contribution to this volume. See also the texts by Carnap and Reichenbach in the appendix to this volume and the respective introductions.
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)

However, Carnap also rejects what he calls “emotivism”,3 viz. the theory that value statement only “refer to momentary emotions” (p. 1000); rather, for Carnap, “a value statement expresses more than merely a momentary feeling of desire, liking, being satisfied or the like, namely satisfaction in the long run” (p. 1009).

There is more about this notion of “satisfaction in the long run” than merely a question of uttering and repeating something, say, for years rather than just for seconds. Non-cognitivism is a meta-ethical stance being significantly incomplete, in comparison with its competing conceptions. If one adopts naturalism, rationalism, or Platonism/realism, then she obtains a clear strategy for the foundation and justification of values. The naturalist must look at the historical context, the rationalist at the fundamentals of reason, the Platonist/realist at a certain metaphysical method. The non-cognitivist, by contrast, firstly only can realize that there is no such foundationalist strategy for values at all. However, the lack of a foundationalist strategy does not in itself involve any positive verdict about the adoption of values. How shall we qualify different contexts of utterance? Are they all equally good? We must add a strategy here.

On p. 1010 of his reply to Kaplan, Carnap provides a long list of factual and analytic conditions a person may add to a pure optative, in order to justify why this pure optative is stable for her. For example, the agent may take into account the entire empirical evidence available to her; she may consider the causal consequences of a value claim, in order to make sure whether she would be willing to accept them. In general, what Carnap seems to hold is that the entire list of factual and analytic aspects of value statements as provided at the beginning of his essay is relevant for our development of values, because only those value statements being backed up by comprehensive study of the factual and analytic aspects of values are considered “satisfactory in the long run”. Without such stability, Carnap seems to consider moral utterances less trustworthy, less reasonable;

3 We henceforth use the term “emotivism” exclusively in the way in which it is introduced by Carnap here, ignoring any other possible usage. It seems plausible though that Carnap in fact rejects the entire group of views being called emotivism even today, for none of these views seem to involve any normative commitment toward “satisfaction in the long run”. For an overview see (Satris 1987).
in other words, that kind of stability which we gain from backing up value statements in scientific
discourse is something that Carnap’s ethics proposes as an unconditional demand; it is an ethical
rule of some kind, although a very special one because no concrete ethical rule directly follows
from it.4

Moving to Reichenbach, against this background, we firstly obtain another important aspect
of Carnap’s notion of “satisfaction in the long run” of moral utterances. We not only need to con-
sider the available empirical and logical evidence, to adjust our moral utterances. In addition to
this, for Reichenbach, we also need to set up a strategy that determines how to interact with other
moral utterances of other human beings that belong to our group. Reichenbach distinguishes be-
tween “personal directives”, – where we “usually feel not obliged to decide for this aim”, nor do
we “wish that all others have the same aim” (p. 285) – and “moral directives” which reflect “the
ethics of certain sociological groups” (p. 287); we are “on the receiving side of the moral impera-
tives” because “these volitions are imposed upon us by the social group to which we belong” (p.
285). “Moral directives” or moral social rules are necessary, exactly because non-cognitivism
holds, for in cognitivism the only rule would be to accept only those moral utterances being correct
or true. In the case of non-cognitivism there are several possibilities though. One possibility would
be what Reichenbach calls “anarchism” – the idea that everybody might choose her moral rules
freely; another possibility would be to require that everybody might also take notice of – and re-
spect – the moral utterances of others: this is what Reichenbach proposes, namely, as the moral
imperative that becomes necessary for a member of the group of democrats so to speak.

[…]

the volitional interpretation of moral utterances does not lead to the consequence that the speaker should
allow everybody the right to follow his own decision; that is, it does not lead to anarchism. If I set up certain volitional
aims and demand that they be followed by all persons, you can counter my argument only by setting up another impera-
tive, for instance, the anarchist imperative “everybody has the right to do what he wants”. […] I set up my impera-
tives as my volitions, and the distinction between personal and moral directives is also my volition. Directives for the
latter kind, you remember, are those which I regard as necessary for the group and which I demand everybody to

4 That Carnap’s plea for rationality is normative and therefore involves a specific moral attitude or Weltans-
chauung was always taken for granted by Carnap himself. Cf. his famous statement in the preface to the Aufbau
(Carnap 1967, p. xvii): “We too have ‘emotional need’ in philosophy, but they are filled by clarity of concepts, preci-
sion of methods, responsible theses, achievement through cooperation in which each individual plays his part.”
comply with. […] We are products of the same society, you and I. So we were imbued with the essence of democracy from the day of our birth. 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 which I oppose to your anarchist principle:

_Everybody is entitled to set up his own moral imperatives and to demand that everyone follow these imperatives._ (pp. 294-5)

This is tricky, because it is both a very specific moral imperative of Reichenbach as a member of the group of democratically minded human beings and an imperative that affirms non-cognitivism. A first idea of the connection between these two aspects might be to suggest that democrats are the group of those who realized non-cognitivism to hold. However, it is all not that simple, for Reichenbach’s anarchists also seem to have realized this. This is to say, in turn, that Reichenbach clearly proposes a very specific interpretation of non-cognitivism here, one that widely converges with Carnap’s imperative of “satisfaction in the long run” of value utterances. What Reichenbach adds is the social aspect of “satisfaction in the long run”, which (in a democratic environment) becomes possible only if an imperative becomes adjusted in some way, in the context of a discursive process. Thus:

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)

If we accept non-cognitivism and if we belong to a democratic society, then no big moral imperatives are to be formulated any longer. Most of these questions that were answered by the closed moral systems of old totalitarian (religious, aristocratic) societies are no longer to be called moral directives of our group (rather all these questions belong to what Reichenbach calls “personal directives”). However, there is at least one directive which we all must share, according to Reichenbach, namely, the democratic principle of having strong opinions and being willing to listen to the group and mutually adjust values. We will come back to this later.
2. The meta-ethical view of the Meißner generation

The immediate background for the development of the ethical views of Carnap and Reichenbach was the German Youth Movement of the so-called Meißner generation. However, it was mainly Reichenbach who firstly formulated a distinct view on values,\(^5\) which in turn was influenced and inspired by several key figures of the German Youth Movement, most importantly Gustav Wyneken. Therefore, we now start with a sketch of some of these alleged influences.

In the programmatic essay *Schule und Jugendkultur*, Gustav Wyneken\(^6\) claimed that the period of youth 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.\(^7\)

This doctrine, according to Wyneken, involves a significant modification to Kant’s notion of a “categorical imperative”. The latter notion – “act in such a way that the principle of your action

\(^5\) Early Carnap also had interesting views on values to offer, to be sure. See André Carus’ contribution to this volume as well as the appendices and (Carus 2019). The reason why I do not discuss early Carnap’s views on values here is simply that they are less obviously connected with non-cognitivism than Reichenbach’s and therefore the picture would become significantly more complicated, if it might have to contain also Carnap’s views up to the Aufbau.

\(^6\) On Wyneken see (Dudek 2017). On the relationship between Wyneken and Reichenbach see pp. 148-151 of Dudek’s biography, Flavia Padovani’s contribution to this volume as well as the appendix.

\(^7\) (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 Bereich jenes objektiven Geistesbesitzes rechtfertigt sich direkt die Erzeugung einer neuen Generation.“
might become principle of common action” –, according to Wyneken, is “not purely formal, as Kant believes”. Rather, “the principle of all human acting should be: subserve spirit [dienen dem Geist]”. This implies “to act, as if present man is overcome – in this sense, self conquest is the essence of morals”. (p. 11) In other words, Wyneken states that it is the duty of youth to develop new moral imperatives and to overcome the old ones. Interpreting Wyneken, one might modify a famous dictum by Goethe here: ‘What you inherited from your parents, overcome it, in order to possess it’. This doctrine of innovation 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.

However, this doctrine is by no means to be understood as a moral individualism or anarchism, 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 angenommen]”. A new system of values is capable of extending spirit, for Wyneken, only if it becomes shared by all members of a group.

The idea of a socially cooperative creation of new values, being adequate for the spirit of a new generation, also played a key role in the famous Meißner formula, though this formula also significantly diverges from Wyneken’s views. It is a compromise, in the light of experience of deep and insoluble disagreement with regard to more concrete ethical questions.8 The Meißner formula no longer requires any moral consensus among the members of the group of Free Germans at all. Rather, it states:

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.9

The formula highlights (a) “own initiative” and “own responsibility” and (b) the attempt to take “united action” “under any and all circumstances”. However, youth is united here only in its

8 On the Meißner meeting see the extensive collection of essays and historical documents (Mogge and Reulecke 1988), in particular, pp. 50-54.

9 (Mittelstraß 1919, p. 12), translation from (Becker 1946, p. 100).
consensus that everybody may choose only these values that fit into her own innermost emotional setting. This is mainly a negative result, to be sure. Wyneken’s ideal of “social acquisition” of values was overcome and replaced by a significantly more modest aim, namely, only to wholeheartedly agree to disagree, so to speak.

3. Reichenbach’s early non-cognitivism

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. At any rate, there were several philosophers who understood the Meißner-formula in a non-cognitivist way. Most importantly, Hans Reichenbach in 1913 formulated a critical assessment and alternative approach to Felix Behrend’s earlier manifesto of the Free Students Movement. In this article, entitled “The free students idea. Its content as unity” Reichenbach, somewhat anticipating the Meißner meeting, arrived at a more unequivocally non-cognitivist conception of values.

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 criticizes Behrend’s manifesto thus:

[…] 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)

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10 See (Behrend 1907) and the discussion in (Wipf 2004, pp. 101-107).
11 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). See also the reprint of the crucial passages of the German original of this essay in the appendix to this volume and my introduction to the latter. The relevant secondary literature is mentioned in this introduction. See, in particular, (Linse 1974, pp. 13-23; Wipf 1994).
Note that Behrend defended the “objective interest” of the Free Students as something that is objective because it is intersubjectively shared by all its members. Thus, the point of criticism of Reichenbach is firstly that Behrend fails to offer any proper strategy that may allow us to find this “objective interest”, because he, Behrend, ignores that an interest might become objective only after being firstly created as a subjective goal. However, if we accept this, Reichenbach concludes, then we must seriously scale down our expectations with regard to intersubjectively shared values, for the subjective interests do not cease as soon as the subjective starts to interact in a social environment.

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 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)

Reichenbach realizes that a moral narrative becomes valuable and effective as a cultural asset only if all members of the respective group share that narrative. This requires him to somewhat minimize the scope of the moral narrative to be adopted. It is an ethics that is defended by the Free Students Movement, in the sense of Reichenbach, viz. something that “units” the “content” of its “idea”. However, this ethics is no longer an entire system of values, but a meta-ethical stance only:

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)

This is certainly non-cognitivism. However, it is no less certainly a very specific variety of non-cognitivism, because it involves a specific social advice. Therefore, one has to read the following passage quite cautiously:
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)

How “formal” is this ideal in fact? It is formal, because it is non-cognitivist. However, it is also much more than the mere diagnosis of the non-cognitive status of moral claims. In addition to the latter, Reichenbach’s formal ideal recommends a very specific strategy how to (a) deal with one’s own values and (b) use them, during interactions with the group to which one belongs. Part (a) is described in the following passage:

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)

Part (b) then is something that necessarily accompanies (a), according to Reichenbach, because (a) cannot be accepted without (b), “individualism” and “socialism” are two aspects of one and the same (non-cognitive) ideal:

If, in the formulation of our ideals, we put forth a second point of view, concerning society, that is not to be regarded as contradicting the principle of autonomy just presented. It is incorrect to speak of a contradiction between individualism and socialism, and it is also incorrect to view the ideal that has just been sketched out as a synthesis of the two, as a sort of compromise joining two mutually antagonistic positions. 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)
This converges to some extent with what Reichenbach later calls the “democratic principle”. However, whereas in 1951 the “democratic” character of non-cognitivism is determined by the democratic society to which Reichenbach belongs and which dictates this principle, in 1913 the society of Free Students dictates a principle which is somewhat different. In both cases, however, Reichenbach sets up a moral directive that is imposed by a group (in 1951 the group of democratically minded human beings; in 1913 the Free Students). Moreover, in both cases the moral directive is formulated as an instance of non-cognitivism. However, the 1913 formulation does not offer the key idea of “mutual adjustment” of moral directives of the 1951 formulation; whereas the “democratic principle” of 1951 demands that everybody may “set up his own moral imperatives and […] demand that everyone follow these imperatives” in 1913 Reichenbach only demands that everybody may “[determine] his own values freely and independently of others” and may “[demand] this autonomy for all members and of all members”. This is dangerously close to what Reichenbach later calls “anarchism”, though it is not identical with the latter, for anarchism generally does not involve any commitment to the Free Students/Meißner formula’s ideal of “own responsibility”. Thus, the 1913 view is a specific variety of anarchism. The Free Students ideal is to set up a group where everybody may choose her values freely and entirely unaffected by the moral utterances of others; there is no strategy whatsoever for the resolution of conflict and disagreement, for the Free Students seemed to think that the best place on earth is an environment of unrestricted moral pluralism. This is not exactly a democratic principle, of course, for democracy is based on the idea of compromise and “mutual adjustment” of values. Rather, the Free Students/Meißner formula’s ideal is one of a pre-democratic society which shows a certain tendency toward democracy, though democracy is not yet fully established; it might therefore be called semi-democratic.12

Based on these observations, a view that was formulated by Andreas Kamlah in 1978 and was widely shared until recently, namely, that “Reichenbach’s non-cognitivist ethics can be traced back to his student days in the Youth Movement”13 must be reevaluated. Though it is true that Reichenbach’s views of 1913 and 1951 both involve moral non-cognitivism, they diverge at the level of the more specific (political) commitments that must accompany the non-cognitivist stance. Whereas Reichenbach, in 1951, clearly commits himself to the “moral directives” of the group of

12 Cf. also the illuminating discussion in (Linse 1974, pp. 19-20).
13 (Kamlah 1977, p. 480). Cf. (Kamlah 2013) and section 5 of Flavia Padovani’s contribution to this volume.
democratically minded human beings, in 1913 he rather rephrases an instance of a pre- or semi-democratic variety of anarchism. Thus, it is obviously Reichenbach 1913 who is criticized by Reichenbach 1951 when he argues against anarchism and proposes the democratic principle as an antidote.

4. Carnap and Reichenbach on “objective values” in 1918

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

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 fulfillment of human tasks is possible only through this achievement. (p. 139f)

Whereas in 1913 (as well as 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 or objectivism, indeed. Thus, it seems that Reichenbach temporarily changed his mind here, in a way that lead to an almost entirely different conception of values.

To shed light on this seeming discontinuity, it is important to note that, interestingly, Rudolf Carnap also said similar things about “objective values” in the very same year as Reichenbach. Whereas Reichenbach’s statement pops up in a rather isolated manner and therefore is almost
impossible to be directly interpreted, Carnap’s observations provide more information. Unlike Reichenbach, Carnap became a pacifist only toward the end of the Great War. It was not until 1917 that Carnap finally became more critical of the “meaning of war”. As a consequence of his conversion towards pacifism he initiated a number of Political Circular Letters that he sent to some of his friends from the German Youth Movement in spring 1918. 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”.

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)

In the first of his Political Circular Letters Carnap described the political aim of these letters 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.
Those “recent events” that Carnap observes 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 on clippings from international newspapers.19

Carnap talks about “objective values” in 1918 because he thinks that there must be one all-embracing international consensus that unites all Völker, 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; in 1918 it became formulated, by Carnap, against the background of the idea of the League of Nations and Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points that clearly can be seen as forerunners of the 1948 declaration.20 Objectivity as a universal consensus of mankind, in order to avoid war and crime against humanity. This has nothing to do with objectivity of values in the sense of Rickert.21 In particular, it by no means involves any naturalist or even realist commitment, for “objectivity” only means a universal consensus that must be established by politics (in order to prevent war) and has nothing to do with mere meta-ethical considerations at all.

19 See (Werner 2015, p. 476). Carnap could use these international newspapers only because as an officer he had access to the Nachrichten der Auslandspresse being edited by the German War Press Office [Kriegspresseamt].

20 See the introduction to Deutschlands Niederlage in the appendix of this volume.

21 I disagree with (Mormann 2010b) here. Though my argumentation overlaps with (Uebel 2010) and (Carus 2007, pp. 105-108) my rejection of a Rickertian interpretation of the before-quoted passage from “Germany’s defeat” is located at a different level as the argumentation of Carus and Uebel, because my specific argument is that “objectivity” – at least in Carnap’s 1918 account – means universal acceptability.
Still, there is an obvious change to be noted here, in comparison with the Meißner scenario of 1913. In 1918, facing the disaster of the ongoing war, Carnap and Reichenbach moved away from the view that culture may *incorporate* deep and insoluble cases of moral disagreement because they realized that such a culture is unable to prevent war. This view is no longer compatible with Reichenbach’s early anarchism, for we *must* find a minimal consensus of some kind (as it is today formulated in the Declaration of Human Rights and executed via the Law of Nations and as it was initially suggested by Wilson’s Fourteen Points), in order to establish a culture of peaceful and democratic coexistence. This “objectivity”, this “superior system of values”, as Reichenbach calls it, is *not* objective or superior for any deep metaphysical reason at all, but only in the context of a certain *political aim*, namely, the prevention of war, which can be achieved only against the background of a moral consensus of some kind.

5. The non-cognitivisms of Freyer and Carnap in the 1920s and 1930s

Carnap hardly discussed (meta-)ethical issues with Reichenbach until the 1930s. However, there was another proponent of the German Youth Movement with whom Carnap discussed philosophical topics for some time in the early 1920, namely, the sociologist Hans Freyer. In particular, Freyer had some importance for the development of Carnap’s *Aufbau* between 1920 and 1923. However, 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*. We illustrate these relationships by

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22 Carnap and Reichenbach astonishingly did not come across each other until 1922. The correspondence of the first years of their relationship does not cover ethical issues at all.

23 On Freyer see the excellent intellectual biography (Muller 1987).

24 See Adam Tamas Tuboly’s contribution to this volume as well as (Damböck 2017, pp. 184-190).

25 (Freyer 1926).
means of a comparison of the meta-ethical aspects of writings of Carnap and Freyer from the late 1920s and early 1930s.

In the *Aufbau* and in his Bauhaus lectures from 1929, Carnap defended the “irrational” status of values which belong to the subjective disposition of an individual only. Freyer, in turn, in his important *Kant Studien* essay “Ethical norms and politics” from 1930, highlighted the entire freedom of the “moral subject” – the “final instance” to decide which values to adopt. There is nothing beyond these subjective and irrational values that the “final instance”, the “moral subject” stipulates for herself. However, this general adoption of non-cognitivism in both Freyer and Carnap is accompanied with the adoption of quite different and mutually incompatible instances of that meta-ethical stance. 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 what in America is called “humanism” …

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 both a political and moral level.

Freyer, by contrast, in his previously quoted 1930 essay, explicitly combines non-cognitivism with a political worldview which he adopts from Carl Schmitt (p. 105) and presents in his essay in a philosophically elaborated form. Politics, according to Freyer, is required to historically realize

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27 (Freyer 1930, p. 112).
28 (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 …“
a “closed value system” (“geschlossene Wertgestalt”) which is “predefined at a certain place on earth for a Volk” (p.112). Thus, Freyer combines 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 – must choose values with absolute freedom, only following her 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”, to arrive at a notion of the political which like Schmitt’s is based on the concepts of “friend and foe”. Political progress is possible, for Freyer and Schmitt, only if there are different states (or Völker) implementing different “closed value systems”. We 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”. This raises the question of how can we choose the very value system that is “predefined” for a certain “Volk”? This question, interestingly, is left open by Freyer in his 1930 article in Kant Studien (possibly, because it was politically too radical for a philosophical journal?), although Freyer had a very clear answer at hand, since the publication of his manifesto Der Staat in 1926. Their 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 (or respectively a significant portion of it) 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 – there can be 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)

29 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).
30 (Freyer 1926).
Here, in the conception of a *Führerstaat*, non-cognitivism obtains a crucial role, indeed. Whereas in democracy, the non-cognitive nature of morals, according to Freyer, may only lead to degeneration of the state into the chaos of “compromise” and the “lie” of “pluralism”;\(^{31}\) a new *Führer* who outwits the people uses one 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. This conception involves *irrationalism* of a very specific and comprehensive form. The *Führer* is able to overwhelm a *Volk*, only if the values as proposed by the *Führer* are accepted by the *Volk*. This requires what Freyer, following Plato, calls a “noble fraud” (“edlen Betrug”);\(^{32}\) that makes the *Volk* accepting even values being at odds with the initial world views of its representatives. *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 main principle of Freyer’s totalitarianism to accept values with a kind of “freedom” which means that these values become accepted even, and in particular, if they are in contradiction with those values one used to accept.

Whereas Freyer blatantly rejected all rational considerations with respect to values, Carnap, from 1929 onward at least;\(^{33}\) took only the very value statement (or commitment) as being later called “pure optative” to be irrational. However, we are always asked, for Carnap, to analyze our value commitments, to find out whether they are consistent with each other and, more importantly, whether we are willing to accept every causal consequence of such a value commitment. Carnap pushes cases to the extremes, in the opposite direction than Freyer. He firstly would ask everybody to choose moral imperatives being in accordance with her moral intuitions, calling it *immoral* to choose a value commitment that is at odds with these intuitions and feelings. He defends “a form of life in which the well-being and the development of the individual is valued most highly, not the

\(^{31}\) (Freyer 1931, pp. 59-61).

\(^{32}\) Cf. (Freyer 1926, p. 110): „Das schlichte Geheimnis aller Führung ist: die andern so zu nehmen, wie sie sein sollen, diesen edlen Betrug aber derart anzustellen, daß sie dadurch so werden.“

\(^{33}\) Cf. RC 110-07-49, (Carnap 1934, 1937) and (Richardson 2007).
power of the state.” This is not straightforwardly identical with the democratic world view as being outlined by Reichenbach in 1951 but it somewhat implies the latter. Carnap also would go further than Reichenbach, however, setting up a whole bunch of further rationality criteria that a value statement should meet, to be acceptable, from the standpoint of the *Scientific World Conception*; these criteria were already present to some extent in Carnap’s proposals of the early 1930s but they became much more sophisticated in the 1950s, when Carnap started to make use of state of the art tools of decision theory, aiming at a situation where the irrational aspect of a “pure optative” and the freedom of the individual becomes granted while at the same time rationality and scientific rigor become pushed to its uttermost limits.

One might speculate now that Carnap’s value philosophy from 1929 onward might have been intended as an antithesis to Freyer’s conception. However, this is by no means a key point of my argument. The point of this paper is rather descriptive. Contrasting Freyer and Carnap/Reichenbach allows us to highlight the (diverging) political nature of both conceptions.

6. Conclusions

Non-cognitivism is a meta-ethical theory, being significantly incomplete. We must add further qualifications to what Carnap called the “thesis of non-cognitivism”, to obtain a complete meta-ethical theory. Reconstructing several options, my account leads to a very rough picture of an almost world historical dimension. Let us now quickly summarize this picture, suggesting a historical development, from totalitarianism, via anarchism, toward democracy.

The totalitarianism of Freyer is not just a characteristic feature of Fascism and National Socialism; it is typical for all varieties of a non-democratic political systems. No matter whether it is a secular *Führer* in the sense of 20th century *Führerstaat*, a more religiously legitimized Prince or a rather impersonally stated totalitarian ideology (e.g., communism); the point is always that a system of values is justified only because it is the system of values of the *Führer* or Prince or state ideology. Therefore, in a non-cognitive setting, all totalitarian systems lead to typically inconsistent

34 (Schilpp 1963, p. 83).
35 See also (Carnap 2017) for a sketch of Carnap’s attempt to use the decision theoretic framework as a tool for reasoning about values. Unfortunately, this attempt remained highly fragmentary until the end of Carnap’s death.
value systems, because every citizen must commit herself to the values of the leader (or leading ideology) as the primary norm and must accept all kinds of conflicts with her own feelings. The results are typically distorted and crippled ideas, full of inner conflict and without any substantial commitment toward the values of rationality and science.

To reject totalitarianism, in turn, firstly implies that everybody becomes granted the ability to choose her values independently and freely. However, this is certainly not the end of the story, as the example of Reichenbach’s 1913 views demonstrates. To overcome totalitarianism, it is neither sufficient nor appropriate to adopt anarchism, for, as the chaos of the Great War had shown, anarchism is no option, if we want to avoid the situation where our society either collapses into chaos and destruction or totalitarianism (or both). We need much more than the mere freedom of finding our own values. What we need is twofold, following the views as formulated by Carnap and Reichenbach in the 1950s. Firstly, we have to adopt the “democratic principle” of Reichenbach which demands (a) that as individuals we need to follow our own feelings rather than the feelings of others, but also (b) to try to convince others and be open to the other’s arguments. Secondly – and this is the aspect that was added to the picture mainly by Carnap – one should try to avoid inconsistencies and to take care to develop several further rationality criteria. Irrational values, in other words, should be backed up by all kinds of possible considerations at the level of objective scientific discourse; irrationality, in a democratic setting, should thusly be limited as far as possible, whereas the totalitarian setting implies that we may in principle accept every possible variety of inconsistency and every conceivable conflict with the objective scientific world view. However, we even must add a third requirement here, which is astonishingly not explicitly highlighted by either Carnap or Reichenbach in their mature conceptions of the 1950s and 1960s though it was already present in their writings from around 1918. This is the establishment of more specific “moral directives” viz. group directives, covering the moral utterances of the group of democratically minded human beings. In addition to the “democratic principle” which is only capable of providing personal advice so to speak, pretty much in the same way as Kant’s categorical imperative (though with a quite different outcome, of course – non-cognitivism here, strict absolutism there) we need to set up more concrete general rules for human interactions, namely, rules in the sense of the Human Rights declaration and the law of nations as its executive instance. These rules are necessary, in order to avoid that the state may collapse into a non-democratic structure and/or became involved in violent conflicts that hamper individual freedom as well. No freedom, no
democracy without rules. Regrettably, Carnap’s and Reichenbach’s mature accounts fail to highlight the convergence of a democratically minded non-cognitivism with the idea of a set of “objective” rules in the sense of the Human Rights declaration, being mandatory for every human being, every state, and every community. Thus, we also would have to add this as a third building block of a democratic variety of non-cognitivism, picking up again the 1918 views of our witnesses.

The political nature of left wing Logical Empiricism in general and non-cognitivism in particular is mostly underexposed or even unexposed in the literature. It firstly must be excavated by the historian, what I tried to demonstrate here for the cases of Carnap and Reichenbach. The next step would be to connect these philosophical views with convergent tendencies in democracy theory properly spoken, as can be found, for example, in the work of Hans Kelsen.36 This is a different story, however, perhaps worthy of a future investigation.


36 See (Kelsen 2006), whose views on values and democracy, widely converge with those of Carnap and Reichenbach.


