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Carnap, Reichenbach, Freyer.

Noncognitivist Ethics and Politics in the Spirit of the German Youth Movement

This paper¹ argues that the noncognitivist philosophies of two key figures of left-wing Logical Empiricism, namely, Rudolf Carnap and Hans Reichenbach, and the ideologue of a “revolution from the right,” namely, Hans Freyer, were intended as political concepts regarding how society ought to contend with values and norms. This political character of noncognitivism and the tension between its different varieties—from the liberal left to the far right—becomes fully visible only if we return to the origin of these views in the German Youth Movement of the second decade of the twentieth century.

1. Introduction. The Mature Meta-Ethical Views of Carnap and Reichenbach

I begin with a brief examination of Carnap and Reichenbach’s late 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 (1963) and the chapter “The nature of ethics” in Reichenbach’s *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy* (1951).²

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² See (Schilpp 1963, pp. 999-1013; Reichenbach 1951, pp. 276-302). Regarding Reichenbach’s philosophy of values, see (Kamlah 2013; Dahms 1994; Kamlah 1977) and Flavia Padovani’s contribution to this volume. Regarding Carnap’s philosophy of values, see (Mormann 2007; Uebel 2010; Siegetsleitner 2014, pp. 89-162; Reisch 2005, pp. 47-53, 382-384; Richardson 2007; Carus 2017, 2021) as well as (Zeisel 1993) and André Carus’s contribution to this volume. See also the texts by Carnap and Reichenbach in the appendix and the respective introductions. This paper is the first of two on the development of Carnap’s noncognitivism and its political

In his reply to Kaplan, Carnap first highlights several respects 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,” then “statements on means–end relationships,” and subsequently “statements on the utility of a possible event” (Schilpp 1963, 999). On the analytic side, he mentions statements that are logically related to factual statements (as previously noted), statements that analyse the semantics of the latter, and “statements giving an explication of relevant concepts connected with values or valuations, or consequences of such explications” (Schilpp 1963, 999). All other aspects of value statements identify them as being “nongnitive.” Thus, Carnap’s “thesis of nongnitivity” reads as follows: “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” (Schilpp 1963, 999).

According to Carnap, this thesis of nongnitivity “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” (Schilpp 1963, 1000). None of the aforementioned varieties of factual and analytic value statement *justify* values. Thus, there is no justification for value statements. If we remove all analytic and factual content from a value statement, what remains is a statement that has the form of what Carnap terms a “pure optative.” Such a statement always has the form ‘person *P* utters *a* at time *t*’.³

This view implies, on the one hand, that Carnap must reject several meta-ethical views. He first must reject all varieties of Platonism or *realism* because value statements are not factual. He must also reject *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 (both of whom Carnap regarded as naturalists),

nature. The discussion presented here continues in (Damböck forthcoming a), which focuses on the period between 1928 and 1970. For a slightly different perspective on the early development of Carnap’s meta-ethical views, see (Damböck forthcoming b).

³ See Schilpp 1963, 1000.

Carnap formulates the following claim that rules out realism, rationalism *and* naturalism: “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). Carnap also rejects what he terms “emotivism,” which is the theory that value statements only “refer to momentary emotions” (Schilpp, 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” (Schilpp, 1009).

Noncognitivism is a meta-ethical stance that is significantly *incomplete* compared with competing conceptions. If we adopt realism, naturalism, or rationalism, we obtain clear strategies for the foundation and justification of values. The naturalist must consider the historical context, the rationalist the fundamentals of reason, and the realist a metaphysical method. By contrast, the noncognitivist can only acknowledge that such a foundationalist strategy does not exist. However, the absence of a foundationalist strategy does not in itself imply any *positive* verdict about the adoption of values. How shall we qualify different contexts of utterance? Are they all equally acceptable? We require a strategy here.

In his reply to Kaplan, Carnap provides a long list of factual and analytic conditions a person may add to a pure optative to justify why this pure optative is stable. For example, the agent may consider all the available empirical evidence, or the agent may consider the causal consequences of a value claim to determine whether he or she would be willing to accept those consequences. What Carnap emphasises is that the entire list of factual and analytic aspects of value statements he provides at the beginning of his essay is relevant for our development of values because only those value statements that are supported 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 and less reasonable. That is, the stability that we gain from supporting value statements in scientific discourse is the sine qua non of Carnap's ethics.⁴

Moving to Reichenbach, against this background, we first perceive another important aspect of Carnap's idea of the "satisfaction in the long run" of moral utterances. According to Reichenbach, to adjust our moral utterances, we must not only consider the available empirical and logical evidence. In addition, we must establish a strategy that determines how we interact with the moral utterances of others belonging to our social group. Reichenbach distinguishes between "personal directives"—mere questions of individual taste (Reichenbach 1951, 285)—and "moral directives", which reflect "the ethics of certain sociological groups" (Reichenbach 1951, 287). We are "on the receiving side of the moral imperatives" because "these volitions are imposed upon us by the social group to which we belong" (Reichenbach 1951, 285). "Moral directives" or moral social rules are necessary precisely because noncognitivism holds, for in cognitivism the rule would be to accept only those moral utterances that are correct or true. However, in the case of noncognitivism, there are several possibilities. One is what Reichenbach terms "anarchism", i.e., the idea that everybody chooses their moral rules freely. Another possibility would be to require that everyone take note of—and respect—the moral utterances of others. This is what Reichenbach proposes as the moral imperative for every member in the group of democrats. He explains:

[T]he 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 imperative, for instance, the anarchist imperative "everybody has the right to do what he wants". [...] I set up my imperatives as my volitions, and the distinction

⁴ See Schilpp 1963, 1010. That Carnap's plea for rationality is normative and therefore involves a specific moral attitude, or *Weltanschauung*, was always taken for granted by Carnap. See his famous statement in the preface to the *Aufbau* (Carnap 1967, p. xvii): "We too have 'emotional needs' in philosophy, but they are filled by clarity of concepts, precision of methods, responsible theses, achievement through cooperation in which each individual plays his part" (Carnap 1967, xvii).

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 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 (Reichenbach 1951, 294-295).

This principle is both a moral imperative of Reichenbach as a member of the group of democratically minded individuals *and* an imperative that affirms noncognitivism. We could attempt to connect these two aspects of his principle by suggesting that democrats *are* the group of those individuals who have realised that noncognitivism holds. However, Reichenbach's anarchists also seem to have realised this fact. It follows that Reichenbach, as part of his empiricist world view, proposes a highly specific interpretation of noncognitivism, 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 is adjusted in the context of a discursive process:

This [i.e., the democratic principle, C.D.] 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 (Reichenbach 1951, 300).

If we accept noncognitivism *and* belong to a democratic society, no overarching moral imperatives require formulation. Such questions, which in the past were answered by the closed moral systems of totalitarian (religious, aristocratic) societies, are no longer the moral directives of our group. Rather, all such questions belong to what Reichenbach refers to as “personal directives.” However, according to Reichenbach, there is at least one directive that we all must share: the democratic principle of having strong opinions and being willing to listen to the group and mutually adjust values. We will return to this point.

2. The Meta-Ethical View of the Meißner Generation

The immediate background for the development of Carnap and Reichenbach’s ethical views was the German Youth Movement of the so-called Meißner generation. However, it was mainly Reichenbach who first formulated a distinct view on values, one that was inspired by several key figures of the German Youth Movement, most importantly Gustav Wyneken.⁵ Therefore, we continue with a sketch of several influential ideas from the period.

In the programmatic essay *Schule und Jugendkultur* (1913), Gustav Wyneken⁶ claimed that the period of youth should be used for the development of new values rather than merely the adoption of traditional value systems.

The specific content of this age [i.e., the age of youth, C.D.] should therefore also not be a mere adoption and practical repetition of what the adolescent learned at the second stage of life [i.e., the age

⁵ To be sure, early Carnap also has interesting views on values. See André Carus’ contribution to this volume as well as the appendices and (Carus 2021). I do not discuss early Carnap’s views on values here simply because they are less obviously connected with noncognitivism than Reichenbach’s, and therefore, the picture would become significantly more complicated if it also had to account for Carnap’s thinking prior to the *Aufbau*. However, see also Damböck (forthcoming b), where a connection between Carnap’s views and the Herbartian philosophy of his grandfather Friedrich Wilhelm Dörpfeld is suggested (a connection closely related to a recently unpublished account by Michael Heidelberger).

⁶ Regarding Wyneken, see (Dudek 2017). Regarding the relationship between Wyneken and Reichenbach, see Dudek 2017[?], 148-151, Flavia Padovani’s contribution to this volume, and the appendix.

of childhood, C.D.] but the enhancement of that objective mental possession (*Geistesbesitz*); because there is something new that becomes learned and socially acquired, a new generation becomes necessary. These creations of new mental possessions (*Geistesbesitze*) first enable and justify the creation of a new generation. (Wyneken 1913, 12)⁷

This doctrine involves a significant modification to Kant's categorical imperative. According to Wyneken, Kant's imperative, i.e., "act in such a way that the principle of your action might become the principle of common action", is "not purely formal, as Kant believes" (Wyneken 1913, 11). Rather, "the principle of all human action should be: subserve spirit [i.e., diene dem Geist, C.D.]" (ibid). This view implies "to act, as if present man is overcome – in this sense, self-conquest is the essence of morals" (ibid). That is, Wyneken finds it is the duty of youth to develop new moral imperatives while overcoming old ones. Interpreting Wyneken, one might modify a famous dictum by Goethe: "What you inherited from your parents, overcome it, in order to possess it." This *doctrine of innovation* is focused on moral rules (rather than other creations of the human mind, such as art or scientific innovation). Youth are obliged to *expand* their objective mental possession by creating and adopting new moral values.

This view should not be understood as a moral *individualism* or anarchism because the social side of the matter played a key role for Wyneken, as it did for other representatives of the German Youth Movement. In addition to being created, the new values must be "*socially acquired*" [*sozial angeeignet*] (Wyneken 1913, 12). A new system of values is capable of *expanding spirit* only if it becomes shared by all members of a group.

⁷ "Der spezifische Inhalt dieses Alters [der Jugend, C.D.] soll also nicht etwa die Anwendung, d.h. praktische Wiederholung dessen sein, was er [der Jugendliche, C.D.] auf der zweiten Stufe [in der Kindheit, C.D.] 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."

The idea of a socially cooperative creation of new values, which Wyneken regards as adequate for the spirit of a new generation, also played a key role in the famous Meißner formula although this formula also significantly diverges from Wyneken's views. It is a compromise, if viewed in light of deep and insoluble disagreements concerning more concrete ethical questions.⁸ The Meißner formula does not require moral consensus among the members of the group of Free Germans. 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" (quoted from Mittelstraß 1919, 2).⁹

The formula highlights (a) "own initiative" and "own responsibility" at the same time as (b) the need for "united action" in the defence of this inner freedom – "under any and all circumstances." Youth is united here only in that everyone chooses only those values that match their innermost emotional convictions. This result is *mainly* a negative one, to be sure. Wyneken's ideal of "social acquisition" of values was overruled and replaced by a significantly more modest aim, namely, the aim to wholeheartedly agree to disagree, so to speak.

3. Reichenbach's Early Noncognitivism

The meta-ethical stance of the German Youth Movement is compatible with noncognitivism. That is, not every advocate of the Meißner formula was a noncognitivist. However, there *were* several philosophers who understood the Meißner formula in a noncognitive way. Most importantly, Hans Reichenbach formulated a critical assessment and alternative approach to Felix Behrend's earlier manifesto of the Free Student Movement.¹⁰ In his 1913 article "The free students idea. Its content as unity," Reichenbach, seemingly anticipating the Meißner meeting, arrived at a more unequivocally

⁸ Regarding the Meißner meeting, see the extensive collection of essays and historical documents gathered by (Mogge and Reulecke 1988), particularly 50-54.

⁹ A translation of the Meißner formula can be found in (Becker 1946, p. 100).

¹⁰ See (Behrend 1907) and the discussion in (Wipf 2004, pp. 101-107).

noncognitive conception of values.¹¹ 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, C.D.]," to uncover "the single idea that is the basis for all these ideals" (Reichenbach 1978, 108). In particular, Reichenbach criticises Behrend's manifesto:

[T]his 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 (Reichenbach 1978, 108f.).

Behrend defended the "objective interest" of the Free Students as something that is objective because it is intersubjectively shared by all. Thus, Reichenbach first criticises Behrend's failure to offer a proper strategy that would enable one *to find* this "objective interest" because he, Behrend, ignores the fact that an interest can become objective only after being created as a subjective goal. If we accept Behrend's view, Reichenbach concludes, we must seriously scale down our expectations regarding intersubjectively shared values because the subjective interests do not cease when the individual 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

¹¹ Fortunately, there are English translations of most of Reichenbach's early writings from the Youth Movement period. In the following, I quote exclusively from the English translations by Elizabeth Hughes Schneewind published in (Reichenbach 1978). See also the reprint of crucial passages of the German original of this essay in the appendix to this volume and my introduction to the latter, which notes the relevant secondary literature. See in particular (Linse 1974, pp. 13-23; Wipf 1994).

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. [N]o matter what interests the Free Students represent, they are invariably the interests of a particular group of people; only the free volitional decision of the individual can determine membership in this group (Reichenbach 1978, 109).

Reichenbach realises that a moral narrative becomes valuable and effective as a cultural asset only if *all members of the respective group* share that narrative. This realisation requires him to limit the scope of the moral narrative to be adopted. The narrative *is* an ethics that is defended by the Free Student Movement in Reichenbach's sense, viz. something that "unifies" the "content" of the movement's "idea." However, this ethics is no longer an entire value system but only a meta-ethical stance. The desired aim of the Free Students can be summarised 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" (Reichenbach 1978, 109). This view is certainly noncognitivist. However, it is a highly specific variety of noncognitivism because it suggests a certain approach to social interaction.

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 (Reichenbach 1978, 110).

This ideal is formal in that it is noncognitivist. However, Reichenbach's formal ideal also recommends a specific strategy for 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 (Reichenbach 1978, 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 noncognitive 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 (Reichenbach 1978, 110).

This view converges to a certain extent with what Reichenbach later terms the “democratic principle.” However, whereas in 1951, the “democratic” character of noncognitivism is dictated by the democratic society to which Reichenbach belongs, in 1913, the society of Free Students supported a different principle. In both cases, Reichenbach establishes a moral directive that is imposed by a group: in 1951, it is the group of democratically minded individuals, while in 1913, it is the Free Students. Moreover, in both cases, the moral directive is formulated as *an instance* of noncognitivism. However, the 1913 formulation does not include the key principle of the “mutual adjustment” of moral directives of the 1951 formulation. Whereas the “democratic principle” of 1951 requires that the individual “set[s] up his own moral imperatives and [...] demand[s] that everyone follow these imperatives” (Reichenbach 1951, 295), in 1913, Reichenbach *only* expects that everybody “[determines] his own values freely and independently of others” and “[demands] this autonomy for all members and of all members” (Reichenbach 1978, 109). This position is dangerously close to what Reichenbach later terms

“anarchism” although it is not identical with the latter because anarchism generally does not involve a commitment to the Free Students/Meißner formula ideal of “own responsibility.” Thus, the 1913 view represents a particular variety of anarchism. The Free Students’ ideal is to establish a group in which everybody chooses their 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 ideal social environment was one of unrestricted moral pluralism. This view is not exactly a democratic principle, of course, because 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 that exhibits a certain tendency towards democracy although democracy is not yet fully established; it might therefore be termed *semidemocratic*.¹²

Based on these observations, a view that was formulated by Andreas Kamlah in 1977 and widely shared until recently—namely, that “Reichenbach’s non-cognitivist ethics can be traced back to his student days in the Youth Movement” (Kamlah 1977, 480)¹³—must be re-evaluated. Although it is true that Reichenbach’s views of 1913 and 1951 both involve moral noncognitivism, they diverge at the level of the more specific (political) commitment that must accompany the noncognitivist stance. In 1951, Reichenbach clearly dedicated himself to the “moral directives” of a group of democratically minded individuals, whereas in 1913, he defended an instance of a pre- or semidemocratic variety of anarchism. Thus, Reichenbach in 1951 obviously criticises the 1913 version of his views when he argues against anarchism and proposes the democratic principle as an antidote.

4. Carnap and Reichenbach on “Objective Values” in 1918

As I have just highlighted, Reichenbach was a noncognitivist who denied the existence of natural or objective values in both 1913 and 1951. However, the political ideas connected with his noncognitivism changed between 1913 and 1951. Interestingly, in a document from 1918, *Die Sozialisierung der*

¹² See also the illuminating discussion in (Linse 1974, pp. 19-20).

¹³ See also (Kamlah 2013) and section 5 of Flavia Padovani’s contribution in this volume.

Hochschule (Socialising the University), Reichenbach seemingly adopts a cognitive view. Although even here he grants the existence of diverging values that cannot be overcome by “the economic leveling of human beings” (Reichenbach 1978, 140), he also formulates a position that he may not have been willing to hold 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 (Reichenbach 1978, 139f.).

Whereas in 1913 (and 1951) his assessment was that there is “no such thing as an objective interest” (Reichenbach 1978, 109), in 1918, Reichenbach took for granted that “there is one superior system” of values and that “man’s supreme duty is to pursue it” (Reichenbach 1978, 139f). This statement sounds much more like value absolutism or objectivism. It seems that Reichenbach temporarily changed his mind here in a way that led to an almost entirely different understanding 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 did. Whereas Reichenbach’s statement appears in a rather isolated manner and therefore is nearly impossible to interpret in context, Carnap’s observations provide more information on his political background. Unlike Reichenbach, Carnap became a pacifist only towards the end of the Great War.¹⁴ It was not until 1917 that Carnap finally became more critical of the “meaning of war.” As a consequence of his conversion to pacifism, he generated a number of political circulars (*Politische Rundbriefe*) that he sent to certain of his friends from the German Youth Movement in spring 1918.¹⁵

¹⁴ See the contributions by Gereon Wolters, Hans-Joachim Dahms, and Meike G. Werner in this volume.

¹⁵ See (Werner 2015) and (Damböck 2017, pp. 191-199).

The aim of these letters was to determine a new joint attitude towards the war, or, as he put it in an unpublished paper from fall 1918 entitled “Germany’s defeat – Meaningless Fate or Guilt”:¹⁶

To me at least it seems as if we not only share belief in the objective validity even of the political value judgements 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 (Carnap 1918, 5, n1).¹⁷

In the first of his Political Circulars, from 20 February 1918, 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, which 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 into the life of a higher level, in the realm of legal and communal life (RC 081-14-07).¹⁸

The “recent events” to which Carnap refers belong to an international process whereby a “politics of violence” is overcome and the “forces of rapprochement forge ahead” (ibid). Carnap is bemoaning the fact that several of his closest friends, in particular the pedagogue Wilhelm Flitner, whom he explicitly mentions in his first circular, fail to perceive these “recent events.” Thus, the main aim of the Political

¹⁶ See (Mormann 2010a) and the edition of this text published in the appendix to this volume.

¹⁷ "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 hinzuarbeiten“

¹⁸ "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 Völkersoziologie 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“.

Circulars is to make these developments visible to his friends. For that purpose, Carnap collects and comments on clippings from international newspapers.¹⁹

Carnap refers to “objective values” in 1918 because he thinks that there must be a single all-embracing international consensus that *unites* all peoples (*Völker*), with the result that war and “politics of violence” become obsolete. The “objectivity” of these political values and demands means that they are shared by the whole of mankind. “Objectivity” is a necessary condition because only if everyone shares these values and demands can war be avoided. This objectivity is of the same type as that which in 1948 became the basis of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations. In 1918, it was formulated by Carnap against the background of the idea of the League of Nations and Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points, which can be viewed as forerunners of the 1948 declaration.²⁰ Objectivity is understood here as a universal consensus of mankind that enables us to avoid war and crimes against humanity. This objectivity has nothing to do with an objectivity of values in the sense of Rickert.²¹ More specifically, it by no means involves any naturalist or even realist commitment, for “objectivity” only means a *universal consensus* that must be established by politics (to prevent war) and has nothing to do with meta-ethical considerations.

Nevertheless, 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 shifted from the view that culture may *incorporate* deep and insoluble moral disagreements because they realised that such a culture is unable to prevent war. This view is no longer compatible with Reichenbach’s early anarchism because we *must* find a minimal consensus of some type to establish a culture of peaceful

¹⁹ See (Werner 2015, p. 476) and Meike G. Werner’s contribution to this volume. Carnap could use these international newspapers only because as an officer he had access to the *Nachrichten der Auslandpresse* that were edited by the German War Press Office (*Kriegspressesamt*).

²⁰ See the introduction to *Deutschlands Niederlage* in the appendix.

²¹ I disagree with (Mormann 2010b) here. Although my argument overlaps with (Uebel 2010) and (Carus 2007, pp. 105-108), my rejection of a Rickertian interpretation of the passage quoted from “Germany’s defeat” is located at a different level from the argument of Uebel and Carus because my specific argument is that “objectivity”—at least in Carnap’s 1918 account—means universal acceptability.

and democratic coexistence. This “objectivity,” this “superior system of values,” as Reichenbach terms it, is *not* objective or superior for any deep metaphysical reason or at a meta-ethical level but only in the context of a certain *political aim*, namely, the prevention of war, which forces us to develop a moral consensus on matters of international politics.

5. The Noncognitivism of Freyer and Carnap in the 1920s and 1930s

Carnap rarely discussed (meta-)ethical issues with Reichenbach until the 1930s.²² However, there was another proponent of the German Youth Movement with whom Carnap discussed philosophical topics for some time in the early 1920s: sociologist Hans Freyer.²³ Freyer was important for the development of Carnap’s *Aufbau* between 1920 and 1923.²⁴ The two men had known one another since their time in the Jena Sera Circle prior to the First World War. What makes their relationship interesting is its characteristic mixture of convergences and divergences. The two thinkers *share* an overall noncognitive attitude towards values, but they *disagree* at the political level and therefore also defend quite different varieties of noncognitivism. This mixture of convergences and divergences became even stronger in 1926, when Freyer published his crude and unambiguous manifesto on a fascist *Führerstaat*. I illustrate my point by comparing the meta-ethical 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 that only belong to the subjective disposition of an individual.²⁵ Freyer, in turn, in his important *Kant-Studien* essay “Ethical norms and politics” from 1930, highlighted the freedom of the “moral subject”, who is the “final authority” (Freyer 1930, 112) with respect to determining which values to adopt. There is nothing *beyond* these subjective and irrational values that the “final authority,” the

²² Astonishingly, Carnap and Reichenbach did not cross paths until 1922, and the correspondence of the first years of their friendship does not address ethical issues.

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

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

²⁵ See (Carnap 1967, §§ 59, 152); RC 110-07-49; (Damböck 2017, pp. 199-203; 2018).

“moral subject,” stipulates for itself. However, this adoption of noncognitivism in both Freyer and Carnap is followed by the adoption of quite different and mutually incompatible varieties of that meta-ethical stance. Carnap, although he always remained rather defensive regarding his own political and moral commitment, rejected the idea of cognitive values for similar reasons as Reichenbach did: he wanted to support an intellectual climate of peaceful coexistence, of what he in the 1960s termed “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” (Carnap 1993, 147).²⁶

This attitude fits well with a noncognitivist standpoint because—as highlighted by Reichenbach—it agrees with a democratic stance and the idea of mutual adjustment and cooperation at both the political and moral level.

Freyer, by contrast, in his previously quoted 1930 essay, explicitly combines noncognitivism with a political worldview that he adopts from Carl Schmitt and presents in his essay in a philosophically elaborated form.²⁷ According to Freyer, politics has the historic duty to establish a “closed value system” (“geschlossene Wertgestalt”), which is “predefined at a certain place on earth for a *Volk*” (Freyer 1930, 112). Thus, Freyer combines a noncognitivism with respect to values depending on *the moral subject* with a very strong cognitive naturalism with respect to values depending on *a Volk*. Whereas the single person—the citizen of a *Volk*—must choose values with absolute freedom only following his or her own “moral conscience,” the political authorities representing a *Volk* must implement a value system that is “predefined” – there is no freedom at all here. How can these two

²⁶ “[...] 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“.

²⁷ See (Freyer 1930, 105).

antinomic instances of value philosophy fit together? Why does Freyer think that these “fundamentally different structures of thought” are “both necessary parts of the structure of the mental world” (Freyer 1930, 113)?

On the one hand, Freyer requires the idea of a “closed value system” to arrive at an idea of the political which, like Schmitt’s, is based on the concepts of “friend and foe”.²⁸ For both Freyer and Schmitt, political progress is only possible if there are different states (or *Völker*) implementing different “closed value systems.” Political progress occurs when the more powerful *Volk* (which, in the social Darwinist views of Freyer and Schmitt automatically also defends/represents the “better” value system) compels other *Völker* to accept its “closed value system.” This view raises the question of how we can identify the 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. Nonetheless, since the publication of his manifesto *Der Staat* in 1926, Freyer had a very clear answer at hand. In the manifesto, he sets the stage for a future politics in a section entitled “The *Führer* and his *Volk*.” Only a *Führer* can dissolve the antinomy because he would be in a position to set the political agenda (by implementing a “closed system of values”) and to unite the *Volk* (or at least a significant portion of it) under the umbrella of this agenda. Only a *Führer* can constitute a *Volk* and a state, and there can be no *Volk* or 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*” (Freyer 1926, 111). That is, it is the *Führer* who forms the closed value system, and the entire system functions because of the superior political status of the *Führer*.

Within the concept of a *Führerstaat*, noncognitivism in fact plays a crucial role. In a democracy, the noncognitive nature of morals, according to Freyer, may only bring about a descent of the state

²⁸ See (Schmitt 2009). Schmitt was highly important for Freyer, whose “revolution from the right” was entirely based on Schmitt’s understanding of politics as the tension between “friend” and “foe.” See (Freyer 1930, p. 105) (Muller 1987, pp. 208-215).

into the chaos of “compromise” and the “lie” of “pluralism.”²⁹ A new *Führer*, by contrast, uses one potential of the noncognitive conception, namely, the potential to create a new state following entirely new values, only by means of the power of the human will. This noncognitive conception involves *irrationalism* of a specific type. The *Führer* can establish his closed value system only if the values as proposed by him are accepted by the *Volk* regardless of all initial incompatibilities between his values and those of the citizens. This requires what Freyer, following Plato, refers to as a “noble fraud” (“edlen Betrug”) that makes the *Volk* accept even those values that are at odds with its initial world views.³⁰ *Führer* and *Volk* are required “not to give free rein either to their whims or humanity,” and “[t]he ultimate probation of the *Volk* 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” (Freyer 1926, 120). The *Führer* makes the *Volk* “able and worthy for the state” and “draws on every means that is necessary” (ibid). It is a main principle of Freyer’s totalitarianism to accept values even and especially if they contradict previous values and present emotions. The citizen of a *Führer* state is ready to follow the *Führer* through thick and thin, even along paths that are emotionally repulsive.

Whereas Freyer blatantly rejected all rational considerations with respect to values, Carnap, from 1929 onward, regarded only the value statement or commitment itself—what he would later term a “pure optative”—as irrational.³¹ However, Carnap always encourages us to analyse our value commitments to determine whether they are consistent with one another and, more importantly, whether we are willing to accept all their consequences. Where Freyer recommends being as irrational as possible, Carnap recommends maximising rationality. Carnap would first ask everyone to choose moral imperatives that are in accordance with their moral intuitions, viewing it as *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 power of

²⁹ (Freyer 1931, pp. 59-61).

³⁰ “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” (Freyer 1926, 110).

³¹ See RC 110-07-49; (Carnap 1934, 1937) (Richardson 2007).

the state” (Schilpp 1963, 83). This position is not identical with the democratic world view outlined by Reichenbach in 1951. However, it seems to imply the latter. Carnap also went further than Reichenbach by introducing explicit rationality criteria that a value statement must meet to be acceptable. These criteria were already present to an extent in Carnap’s proposals of the early 1930s, but they became more explicit in the 1950s, when he started to make use of decision theory.³² Rather than unthinkingly following a *Führer*, Carnap recommends (a) trusting one’s emotions and (b) taking care that all accepted values are fully rational, such as means-end questions and questions of consistency of a value system.

6. Conclusion

Noncognitivism is a meta-ethical theory that is significantly incomplete. We must add further criteria to what Carnap called the “thesis of noncognitivism” to obtain a complete meta-ethical theory. Reconstructing several options, my account creates a picture with far-reaching historical implications. Let us now quickly summarise this picture that suggests a historical development from totalitarianism via anarchism to democracy.

The totalitarianism of Freyer is not only characteristic of Fascism and National Socialism. It is typical of *all* nondemocratic political systems. Whether such a system involves a secular *Führer* in the sense of a twentieth-century *Führerstaat*, a more religiously legitimised Prince, or an impersonal totalitarian ideology, the point remains that a system of values is justified *only because* it is the system of values of the *Führer*, Prince, or state. Therefore, in a noncognitive setting, all totalitarian systems result in a characteristic tension between state values and the individual values of the citizen because all citizens must commit themselves to the values of the leader (or leading ideology) and must ignore all types of conflict with their personal feelings; the citizen must follow the *Führer* or state ideology

³² See (Carnap 2017) for a sketch of his attempt to use the framework of decision theory as a tool for reasoning about values. Unfortunately, this attempt remained highly fragmentary.

unthinkingly. The results are typically distorted, crippled ideas, full of inner conflict *and* without any substantial commitment to the values of rationality and science.

Rejecting totalitarianism, in turn, implies that everyone is given the ability to choose values independently and freely. This is certainly not the end of the story, though, as the example of Reichenbach's 1913 views demonstrates. The moral that we can draw from these early views of Reichenbach is that to overcome totalitarianism it is neither sufficient nor appropriate to adopt anarchism. As the chaos of the Great War has shown, anarchism is not an option. If we want to avoid a situation in which society either collapses into chaos and destruction or into totalitarianism (or both), we require more than the mere freedom to determine our own values. According to the views articulated by Carnap and Reichenbach in the 1950s, what we require is twofold. First, we must adopt the "democratic principle" of Reichenbach, which demands that as individuals, we must (a) to follow our own feelings rather than the feelings of others but also (b) try to convince others and be open to their arguments. Second—and this aspect that was added to the picture mainly by Carnap—we must also avoid inconsistencies and maintain our values in accordance with rationality and science. To conclude, noncognitivism is compatible with a very wide range of world views, from irrationalism and totalitarianism, through anarchism, to a democratic world view that is entirely rational and scientific. Therefore, a mere commitment to noncognitivism would be useless if it remained neutral regarding the more specifically political aspects involved. Noncognitivism is not politically neutral. In this regard, the *Scientific World Conception* of Left Logical Empiricism³³ is as political as the state theories of Freyer and Schmitt. The difference between these noncognitivist theories lies only in the political position that is added: irrationalism and totalitarianism, in the case of Freyer and Schmitt; democracy and appreciation of science, in the case of Carnap and left Logical Empiricism.

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³³ See (Stadler and Uebel 2012, Uebel 2020).

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