

Carnap's Non-Cognitivism as an Alternative to Both Value- Absolutism and Value-Relativism

Christian Damböck

Institute Vienna Circle

christian.damboeck@univie.ac.at

Carnap's Non-Cognitivism as a Better Account of Value-Relativism

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Carnap's writings on philosophy of values

- Carnap, R. (1928). *Der Logische Aufbau der Welt*. Berlin: Weltkreis-Verlag, §§ 59, 152.
- Carnap, R. (1934). Theoretische Fragen und praktische Entscheidungen. *Natur und Geist*, 2, 257-260.
- Carnap, R. (1935). *Philosophy and Logical Syntax*. London: Kegan Paul, ch. 4
- Carnap, R. (1937). Logic. *Edgar Douglas et al. (eds.): Factors Determining Human Behavior*. Cambridge (Ma): Harvard University Press, 107-118.
- Carnap, R. (1944). Note on Values. *Ray Lepley: Verifiability of Value*. New York: Columbia University Press, 137-138.
- Schilpp, P. A. (Ed.). (1963). *The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap*. Chicago: Open Court, 81-84, 999-1013.
- Carnap, R. (2015). Value Concepts (1958). *retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/12817340/Value_Concepts_1958 on 06/16/2015.*

Cf. also:

- Reichenbach, H. (1951), *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy*, University of California Press, 276-302.

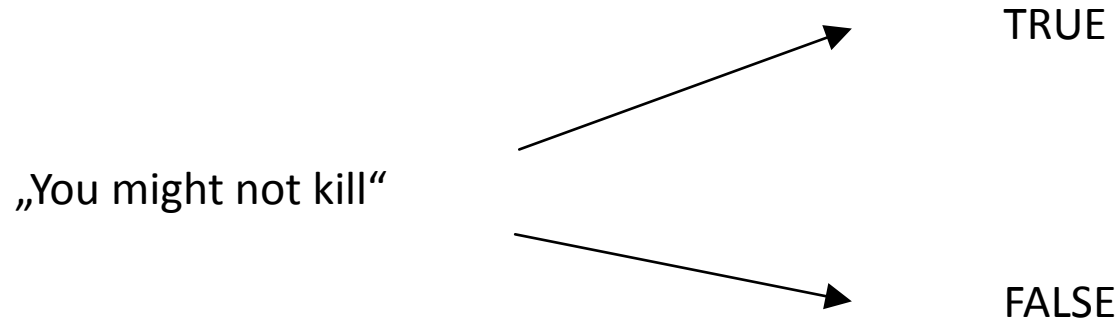
Carnap on Kraus on Carnap on values

„[In one of his seminars in Prague around 1935] Oskar Kraus, the leading representative of the philosophy of Franz Brentano [...] characterized my thesis of the nature of value statements so dangerous for the morality of youth that he had seriously pondered the question whether it was not his duty to call on the state authorities to put me in jail. But, he said, he finally came to the conclusion that this would not be the right thing to do because, though my doctrine was very wrong, I was not actually a wicked man.“ (Schilpp 1963, 82)

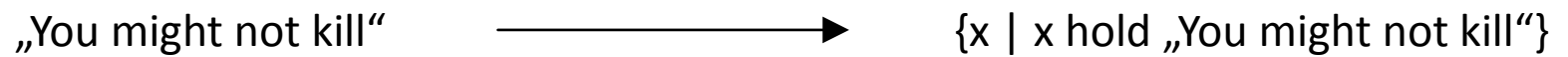
Carnap's non-cognitivism₁ (the formal account)

- Statements such as „You might not kill“ are non-cognitive
- They express emotions or attitudes of certain persons or groups but not sentences that receive a truth value
- Formally speaking, values are *attributes* (properties) of persons or groups (rather than sentences)
- Thus, a value V has to be formalized as a predicate that ranges over the set of all persons and groups

Cognitivism₁



Non-Cognitivism₁



But this is not the whole story!

- The philosophical gimmick just mentioned is nice and interesting ...
- ... but it does not tell us too much about Carnap's philosophy of values
- Thus, we are not interested here in non-cognitivism₁ but rather in a different, much stronger conception non-cognitivism₂ that also can be found in Carnap's philosophy of values

Carnap's non-cognitivism₂ (the anti-foundationalist account)

- For Carnap the crucial motive for non-cognitivism (viz. non-cognitivism₂) is to **rule out any attempt to sift out the true (real, right, correct) values by means of any method (of science or philosophy or religion or myth or commonsense or subjectivity etc.)**
- This establishes a profoundly anti-foundationalist (anti-scientistic, anti-metaphysical, anti-religious, anti-commonsensical, anti-subjectivist) understanding of values
- There is no justification of values
- Rather, values are a product of our culture, our personal taste or character, i.e., we have to follow our intuitions here, but there is no authority that justifies them (even and in particular not intuition in itself)

Non-cognitivism₂ is stronger than non-cognitivism₁



- If you adopt non-cognitivism₂ you might also have to adopt non-cognitivism₁. But not vice-versa.
- As we will see later, there are cases of philosophers who adopt non-cognitivism₁ but reject non-cognitivism₂ (and adopt cognitivism₂, instead)

Values and science:

Perfectly rational value functions

- To reject any and even scientific forms of justification of values does not imply that science becomes irrelevant for value discussions!
- For Carnap, science is crucial for value theoretic decisions, but it can only **support** our decisions, rather than **justifying** them
- There might be a huge amount of scientific criteria that allow us to establish the notion of a “perfectly rational value function” (Carnap/Carus, 2015)
- Non-cognitivism₂ recommends to reject any value function that does not fulfill these criteria
- Insofar, **non-cognitivism₂ is based on science**

Example 1: an inconsistent value function

- A person p might affirm a certain historical phenomenon (e.g., Hitler) and reject another phenomenon (e.g., the Holocaust) while the latter is causally related to the former
- Science teaches us that p uses an **inconsistent value function**
- If p sticks to use this inconsistent function we might identify a case of the disease of “illogical reasoning” (and hand over p to a psychiatrist)
- But p might make some corrections and the improved value function might appear to be “perfectly rational”
- Note also, however, that such a value function not necessarily is compatible with your values:

Example 2: insoluble disagreement

- p might use a “perfectly rational” value function that affirms both Hitler and the holocaust
- You might use, in turn, a “perfectly rational” value function that emphatically rejects both Hitler and the holocaust
- You and p might discuss the issue and it might turn out that there is no way to resolve the conflict
- At the end, you might have to decide to imprison p or to commit war against p
- In other words, there might exist value conflicts that at least recently turn out to be unresolvable, even if we accept the non-cognitivist₂ criteria for “perfectly rational” value functions

Example 3: Absolutism and Relativism

- A non-cognitivist₂ very well might be either an absolutist or a relativist, inside of the realm of her non-cognitivist understanding of values
- She might decide to defend her values unconditionally and to reject any deviant value system from scratch (say, because of her stubborn character/cultural background)
- Or she might be willing to consider deviant value systems, to take them seriously and even to adopt certain aspects of them (because of her tolerant character/cultural background)
- Absolutism and relativism become questions of culture here, or even of personal character

Is non-cognitivism₂ a meaningful value-theoretical position after all?

- If non-cognitivists₂ are allowed to be either relativists or absolutists and to defend all kinds of (rational) value functions, doesn't this imply that everyone fulfills the criteria to be a non-cognitivist₂?
- Absolutely not! There is both a positive and a negative criterion that non-cognitivism provides for value-systems:
- **Value systems (1) have to be consistent but there is (2) no consistent value system that can be either justified or ruled out**
- This leads to the question of how to specify cognitivism₂

Cognitivism₂ = \neg non-Cognitivism₂

- A cognitivist₂ conception of meta-ethics, in the sense of a negation of Carnap's conception, must claim that the epistemic status of values (relativism, absolutism, etc.) is something that can be carried out in a scientific or philosophical or religious or commonsensical or intuitive or subjective (...) way, i.e., there is justification of some kind
- The most straightforward scenario for cognitivism₂ is certainly cognitive₂ absolutism
- We consider two possible scenarios for cognitive₂ absolutism:
 - The phenomenological option (Kraus)
 - The analytical option (Boghossian)

Cognitive₂ Absolutism I: Kraus

- In Kraus (1937, 439-441) he **entirely agrees with non-cognitivism₁**, i.e., „the assumption of objective values who belong to some third Reich [...] we proved to be chimeric“
- However, for Kraus only a certain family of **right emotions** [richtige Emotionen] and the resulting values are acceptable (right [richtig])
- Because **the philosopher** is the one who is able to identify right emotions Kraus' account though committed to non-cognitivism₁ is clearly **an example for cognitivism₂** (namely, a metaphysical account of values)

Cognitive₂ Absolutism II: Boghossian

- We might rephrase Boghossian's moral absolutism in the following way (cf. Fear of Knowledge, p.51):

B. „There are absolute moral facts which can confirm absolute moral judgments.“

- Unlike Kraus's account, this is clearly an instance of cognitivism₁, because it affirms the idea of moral facts and moral judgments that can be absolutely true/false.
- Moreover, we assume that what Boghossian wants to have is also (and primarily) cognitivism₂, i.e., an absolutism that allows us to carry out and justify the true values on a scientific (or philosophical, commonsensical, intuitive) basis

Cognitive₂ Relativism I: ¬ Kraus

- There is *no* right emotion whatsoever and, as a consequence of this, an “emotivist” conception has to accept all kinds of emotions and values unconditionally
- (A relativism of that kind would be presumably similar to Ayer’s conception of non-cognitivism in Ayer (1936))
- On the other hand, a relativism of that kind is certainly *not* identical with Carnap’s conception, because Carnap by no means claims that we might have to accept all kinds of moral intuitions (he rather rejects the whole idea that intuition may justify values)
- Carnap (and most other value relativists) wouldn’t like cognitive₂ relativism I

Cognitive₂ Relativism II: ¬ Boghossian

- ¬ B „There are no absolute moral facts which can confirm absolute moral judgments.“
- This position deserves qualification, because a relativist who defends ¬ B will defend a cognitivist₂ variety of relativism (rather than a non-cognitivist₂ variety), only if we add to ¬ B something like:
 - **Science/philosophy allows us to carry out the relativity of all moral systems and as a consequence of this no value can be defended unconditionally**
 - Again, this is a position that is by no means identical with Carnap's account and hardly would be affirmed by any other value relativist

What kind of „relativism“?

- The whole story I told here seems to point to a certain ambiguity in the term „relativism“
- The question is, **what kind of absolutism** a relativist intends to reject
- Is the aim to reject cognitive₂ absolutism and to affirm cognitive₂ relativism?
- Or is the aim rather to reject cognitivism₂ as a whole (as a new form of absolutism) and to affirm non-cognitivism₂ (as a new form of relativism)?
- The Carnapian point of view strongly recommends the second option

An improper account of value- absolutism/relativism

Cognitivist ₂ Absolutism	Cognitivist ₂ Relativism
Non-Cognitivism ₂ (that also allows certain varieties of absolutism/relativism)	

Value-absolutism/relativism, properly defined

Value-Absolutism

Cognitivist₂ Absolutism

Cognitivist₂ Relativism

Non-Cognitivism₂ (that also allows certain
varieties of absolutism/relativism)

Value-Relativism