

Clash of Cultures? German Philosophers of Science and the Great War (1914-1918)

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Abstract

Not all German scholars served in the armed forces in the Great War; many of them fought through their writings and speeches. Among philosophers, too, we find a fair number of war propagandists. This paper deals with the nascent subdiscipline of the philosophy of science, drawing on correspondence and diaries. The most important young philosophers of science (the oldest was 33) either reacted with naïve enthusiasm (Rudolf Carnap, at least initially), or opposed the war (Moritz Schlick, Otto Neurath, Hans Reichenbach), or were completely apolitical and preoccupied with themselves (Hugo Dingler). The only war propagandist was Heinrich Scholz. During the war, however, Scholz was still a theologian, who switched to the philosophy of science only after the war – after reading the *Principia Mathematica* of the pacifist-inclined Bertrand Russell. Among the German scholars of the time, we find a feeling of being collectively humiliated by the rest of the world. This presumed humiliation they took as justification for war. I see alarming parallels to sentiments with scholars in present day Russia and in large parts of the Islamic World.

Keywords: World War One, German philosophers of Science, collective humiliation, Islam, Russia.

1. Introduction

In Plato's ideal city-state philosophers should be kings, or kings should at least «genuinely and adequately» (γνησίως τε καὶ ἰκανῶς) philosophize (Plato, *Republic*, 473d). Fortunately, Plato's request has remained unheard, as there has been most of the rest of Plato's political philosophy¹.

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¹ Still the best critique of Plato's (before the word) totalitarian political conception

On the other hand, even explicit political anti-philosophy, i.e. excluding from politics the argumentative analysis of the possibilities and limits of knowledge, of our morally relevant acting and of our value judgments, is just another form of philosophy². “Argumentative analyses” mean analyses that *should* be based on premises and arguments that could and should be shared by everybody. Modern philosophy calls them *universalizable* arguments. Here is, in fact, room for philosophers and intellectuals in general. One speaks of public intellectuals. Unfortunately, suppositions of universalizability, i.e. assumptions about what should be *ideally* acceptable for everybody, may easily fail.

A particularly disastrous example of not even thinking about the universality of their arguments we find in writings and talks about World War One of German philosophers and German university professors in general: emotions replace facts, prejudices instead of balanced judgments, associations instead of arguments. Similar to almost the entire educated bourgeois society, also German philosophers see themselves at war. The Great War was in their perspective not only a war between states, but also a war of cultures, a «holy war» (cf. Scholz, 1915a, p. 24 and Scholz, 1915c, p. 19): on the one hand the idealistic, unselfish, education-oriented German culture of conscientiousness, on the other hand the hedonistic *civilisation* of the French and the British “cousins”, worshipping mammon and being addicted to phantasies of world domination.

Philosophers were always among the initiators and signatories of public appeals and proclamations. The neo-Kantian Alois Riehl (1844-1924), for example, was one of the four authors of the notorious “Manifesto of the Ninety-Three” of October 4, 1914, entitled *To the Civilized World (An die Kulturwelt)*³. This “Manifesto” was written in a high-flown moral tone and was signed by 58 university professors, among them philosophical celebrities like Rudolf Eucken (1846-1926), Wilhelm Windelband (1848-1915) and Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920). The authors naively and self-

is in the first volume of Karl Popper’s *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Popper, 2003).

² I am relating here to Kant’s definition of philosophy in his *Introduction to Logic*: «The field of philosophy [...] may be reduced to the following questions: 1. What can I know? 2. What ought I to do? 3. What may I hope? 4. What is Man?» (Kant, 1800, A25f.; German ed. p. 447f.; English transl. p. 15).

³ Cf. von Ungern-Sternberg, von Ungern-Sternberg (1996) and Brocke (1985). The full text is also in the collection Böhme (2014, pp. 47-9). An English version of the *Manifesto* with the names of the signatories was published in “The North American Review”, Vol. 210, No. 765 (Aug. 1919), pp. 284-7. It is easily available in the English Wikipedia (“Manifesto of the Ninety-Three”) (seen December 2016).

righteously misjudged the reception in the rest of the *Kulturwelt*, and so the “Manifesto” became a communicative disaster (cf. von Ungern-Sternberg, von Ungern-Sternberg, 1996, p. 52). Almost two weeks later, on October 16, 1914 followed an equally high-flown, but shorter “Declaration of University Professors of the German *Reich*”. Its initiator was the classical philologist Ulrich Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1848-1931). More than 3000 university teachers, among them many philosophers, signed it. This does not come as a surprise, since the entire teaching personnel at German universities is estimated at around 4500 (cf. Bruendel, 2003, p. 14). I do not know of even one person that *explicitly* und *publically* refused to sign the declaration.

I am not going to deal with those and other *collective* military actions of German philosophers and scholars. Nor will I try to give an overall analysis of German philosophers and philosophy on the cultural battlefield. Rather, I would like to present “impromptus” in the perspective of the history of mentalities of German philosophers of science. My philosophical interest in doing so is twofold. *First*: from philosophers, following the example of mathematicians and natural scientists, one might most likely expect to present universalizable, for not to say objective arguments together with respect for basic methodological categories as the distinction between individual and collective or between facts and norms. My first question, thus, is: do philosophers near to science look in this methodological respect different from «academic culture warriors» («gelehrte Kulturkrieger»: Lübbe, 1963, p. 173) like Eucken, Riehl, Wundt or Max Scheler (1874-1928)?

Let me just state: there was no publically declared opponent of war among German university philosophers, at least in the first two or three years of the war. Among German university scholars of all disciplines there were perhaps only three: the physicist Albert Einstein (1879-1955), the physiologist Georg Friedrich Nicolai (1874-1964), and the astronomer Wilhelm Foerster (1832-1921). Only these three have signed Nicolai’s “Appeal to the Europeans” (*Aufruf an die Europäer*). This proclamation was intended as a critical reaction to “To the Civilized World”. However, since only three university scholars had the insight and courage to sign it, it remained unpublished. Nonetheless, some philosophy also enters into the *Aufruf*. There was, in addition to the three natural scientists, a fourth philosophical player, the private scholar and journalist Otto Buek (1873-1966), a university friend of Nicolai⁴.

⁴ Ironically, a few days before, the astronomer Foerster had also signed “To the Civilized World”, obviously unaware of its content. According to von Ungern-Sternberg, von Ungern-Sternberg (1996, p. 26), most signatories did not know the text of “To the

My *second* philosophical interest is a self-critical one. It consists in the counterfactual question, how *we ourselves* would have behaved under the then existing boundary conditions. At the same time we have to bear in mind that we have to supply sufficient methodological caution and prudence, when we ourselves try to give interpretations and meaning to contemporary events and developments.

The attitude of university philosophers towards the Great War does not seem to have been very different in other European countries involved. To the best of my knowledge, there were only two confessing pacifists: the French Louis Couturat (1868-1914) and the Englishman Bertrand Russell (1872-1970). Both were logicians and they are among the fathers of modern philosophy of science. It is a tragic irony that Couturat was among the first civilian victims of war. The French *Wikipedia* notes: «sa voiture fut en effet heurtée par la voiture portant les ordres de mobilisation de l'armée française» (seen January 2017). Russell, at the time lecturer at Trinity College, Cambridge, went to jail for his fight against the introduction of compulsory military service in Britain (on Russell's position see Hoeres, 2004, pp. 179-90 and *passim*). It was Russell, who already in 1915 expressed the deepest truth about the Great War: «This war is trivial for all its vastness. No great principle is at stake, no great human purpose is involved on either side» (cf. *ivi*, p. 185). Briefly, Russell saw a war of social elites, fueled by political and emotional trivialities.

Modern philosophy of science, so far the last great European Enlightenment project, began with Logical Empiricism, a movement that initiated at the beginning of the 1920s in Vienna ("Vienna Circle") around the Berlin-born philosophy chair holder Moritz Schlick (1882-1936), who had been a student of the great physicist Max Planck³. The founders of Logical Empiricism I am going to talk about, were in their twenties and early thirties, when the Great War broke out in 1914. Schlick and Otto Neurath (1882-1945), the tireless organizer of the Circle, were both 32. Rudolf Carnap (1891-1970), arguably its sharpest mind, was only 23, as was Hans Reichenbach (1891-1953). One has to remember that the unconventional and original philosopher of science Hugo Dingler (1881-1954), who was already 33 in 1914, was not a Logical Empiricist.

In addition, I would like to consider another philosopher, Heinrich Scholz, who in 1914 was a 30 year old *Privatdozent* (a sort of adjunct

Civilized World". Only one refusal to sign is "completely secured", that of the great Göttingen mathematician David Hilbert (1862-1943).

³ The so-called "Berlin Circle" of Logical Empiricism around Hans Reichenbach was smaller and less influential.

professor) of theology and philosophy of religion⁶. In 1917 Scholz received a theological chair at Breslau (now Wrocław, Poland) and in 1919 a philosophy chair at Kiel. In 1921, Scholz had read the *Principia Mathematica*, a fundamental work of modern logic, written between 1910 and 1913 – ironically – by the pacifist Bertrand Russell and by Alfred N. Whitehead (1861-1947). This book motivated the philosophy chair holder to pursue a full study of mathematics and theoretical physics. In 1928 he went to Münster, where his chair got the first teaching assignment for “mathematical logic and basic research” (*Mathematische Logik und Grundlagenforschung*) in 1936.

2. Moritz Schlick

Moritz Schlick, the *spiritus rector* of the Vienna Circle, had received a doctorate in physics with Max Planck in 1904, and was teaching as a philosophy *Privatdozent* at the University of Rostock. In the medical examination for compulsory military service, in both 1906 and 1907, Schlick was declared «permanently unfit for service in the army and the navy» (Iven, 2008, p. 62). Nonetheless, the young *Privatdozent* seems to have experienced a feeling of togetherness, which had particularly overcome bourgeois Germany in the first days of August 1914⁷. The young philosopher, unfit for military service, believed to have national duties. On August 3, 1914 he wrote to his father, a Berlin entrepreneur, that he wanted to make himself «useful for the fatherland», preferably with the meteorological service (*ibid.*). However, he made it only to a training as stretcher-bearer and soon returned to university. In October 1915, his state of health was upgraded and he was judged «fit for service at the garrison» (*garnisonsdienstfähig*). Visibly relieved about the not too dangerous upgrading he could write to his American wife: «So we have

⁶ *Privatdozenten* are a rather peculiar university institution, especially in German-speaking countries. After successfully passing a special examination (*Habilitation*), one becomes a *Privatdozent* and is then obliged to teach and examine one course per semester or per year (usually without payment). For the rest he or she is waiting for an appointment as a professor. In Italy, the system seems to be similar after the Riforma Gelmini, that introduced the “abilitazione” as a prerequisite for applying for a professorship.

⁷ Then and later there was often invoked a war-crazed «August experience» (*Augusterlebnis*) or «Spirit of 1914» (*Geist von 1914*), respectively, that were believed to have forged national unity. They were, however, not as widespread, as was claimed until a few decades ago. It is, rather, a conservative-bourgeois myth, «a narrative of a bygone event that had its objective clearly in the present: overcoming the class division of German society» (cf. Verhey, 2000, pp. 17ff., quotation p. 22). I would like to add the guess that also the *religious* division should have been overcome: the Prussian Wilhelminian, protestant camp tried to integrate the Catholic population into the national united front.

a good breathing space and won't worry about the future» (*ibid.*). This is anything but war enthusiasm. Barely a year later, Schlick had to undergo another physical examination. This time it was about the ability to join the militia (*Landsturm*). He worried about being declared fit, even if he still hoped (in a letter to his father, August 5, 1916) «to once again slip through, since during the last examination [...] besides my little cardiac insufficiency a chronic catarrh of the apex of the lung was diagnosed». However, it turned out once again well and only from March 1917 until the end of the war, Schlick was drafted as the head of a physical laboratory at the airport Adlershof, near Berlin. Overall, Schlick's correspondence during the war shows a considerable lack of war enthusiasm⁸.

Nonetheless, the Rostock *Privatdozent* is one of the signatories of the "Declaration of University Professors of the German *Reich*" of October 16, 1914 (mentioned in section I), which emphasizes the unity of the German people and the German military (cf. Iven, 2013; see also his introduction to Schlick, 2013, p. 29f.). Unfortunately, I do not know of any documents about the details of Schlick's signing the "Declaration". Certainly, one cannot exclude a certain group pressure, for a month earlier Schlick had published a statement that points into a different direction from the "Declaration". On September 5, 1914 the local *Rostocker Anzeiger* published a letter to the editor under the heading «Dear Fatherland!»⁹. In this letter, Schlick presents an extremely sharp reaction to a previous letter to the editor by an unnamed woman. It shows among other things that political correctness was not yet an issue in those days¹⁰:

With indignation we read phrases that we would expect from the mouth of a wild suffragette. We are not used to hearing them in public in a civilized German town. [...] Not German, not feminine is that emotional gush. It is tasteless and indecent to talk witlessly in the sublime presence of the great war about the "potbelly" of Edward VII or the flabby cheeks of Queen Victoria; and it is foolish phrase mongering to say «Every German street sweeper is too good for tipping an English gentleman with his foot». For, also Charles Darwin and John Ruskin, Lord Lister and Lord Avebury were English gentlemen. [...] Who lets himself carry away to excessive rant, renders a disservice to the fatherland, since he stirs up low sentiments and disparages our reputation abroad. Who would deny that there are noble and able people in all foreign nations, whose opinion is in our interest? [...] It is worthy of us to beat the enemy by our deeds; it is unworthy to vilify him by mere words. We should remember this and should also maintain –

⁸ I can relate here only to the excerpts, published in Iven (2008).

⁹ The German «Lieb Vaterland!» is the beginning of the refrain of a patriotic anthem that served in the 19th century as a sort of unofficial national anthem.

¹⁰ I am grateful to Mathias Iven of the *Moritz Schlick Forschungsstelle* in Rostock that is in charge of the *Gesamtausgabe* for providing me with a copy of the article.

spoken and written – the high level of German education and civilization that we are defending in this great battle.

This letter shows Schlick's early, somewhat ambivalent position: the Great War is a war of cultures, but vilification of the enemy should not be used as a weapon. In other words, already during the bourgeois euphoria about winning during the first weeks of the Great War Schlick calls for objectivity or at least decency.

In accordance with this public statement, there are notes for a course of lectures on Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) that Schlick had planned for the winter semester 1914, but could only be given because of the war in the summer semester 1916. In these notes of the beginning of the war, Schlick criticizes above all French and English scholars, who claimed a connection between Nietzsche's philosophy and German militarism and war:

War and warfare cannot be explained by claiming that single nations had filled their mind with some philosophy; one could at most blame the absence of philosophy. All wars, generally all conflict arise from much lower but much more powerful instincts than is the philosophical urge. [...] Genuine philosophy always brings peace; the philosophical spirit goes hand in hand with the spirit of peace (Schlick, 2013, p. 85f.).

Firstly, Schlick draws attention to the fact that «our political and military leaders [...] have not at all very eagerly dealt with this [i.e. Nietzsche's] philosophy» and «as far as they knew it at all [...] were by no means enthusiastic followers». Secondly, the «claimed connection between the belligerent volition of the people and the ideas of Nietzsche is by no means possible. Whoever interprets the brilliant ideas of our philosopher-poet that way [...] has not at all understood him» (ivi, p. 79f.). Schlick notes further: «Nietzsche, this is enthusiasm, the enemy of beer coziness, for which it needed a war to startle us out. We can learn from Nietzsche to be enthusiastic also without war and for higher issues that even the fate of the people» (ivi, p. 343).

At the same time, Schlick opposes the defamation of the enemies, this time with regard to their *philosophy*.

One has, for example, pointed out that French thinkers deal peculiarly little with *moral philosophy*. But this does not mean that the French were immoral or that they were too bellicose. [...] One accuses the English habitually of petty mercantilism and believes to show this also in their philosophy. But you will look in vain with the greatest English philosophers, like Berkeley and Hume, for traits that might confirm this view (ivi, p. 84).

German wise guys, who intend to derive the English petty mercantilism from “utilitarianism” as standard conception of English moral philosophy, receive linguistic instruction:

Good is in English utilitarianism what creates as much as possible happiness for as many people as possible. This conception is sensible and fair; one cannot identify in it any sort of petty utility.

We do not know, whether Schlick presented this introduction of 1914, when, in summer 1916, he finally gave his course. Therefore, we also do not know how students might have reacted. It is clear, however, that he always called for fairness, notwithstanding an early sense of patriotic duty. Nonetheless, one notes a certain inconsistency. On the one hand, in his letter to the editor *Lieb Vaterland!* of September 1914 Schlick talks about a war of cultures – allegedly «German education and civilization» are defended. On the other hand, he lucidly identifies «low instincts» as the cause for this first great slaughtering of the XX century. Schlick, the philosopher of science, right from the beginning regards the war with a certain reservation, calls for the universalization of arguments and for decency and was happy, when the war was finally over.

After the war, Schlick proved himself as an impeccable democrat, who always distinguished between philosophy and politics. In 1936, a mentally disturbed former student shot him dead on the stairs of Vienna University. Rightwing catholic groups of the anti-democratic-authoritarian Austrian Corporative State were delighted¹¹.

3. Heinrich Scholz

When the war began, the thirty-year-old Heinrich Scholz had already served for four years as a *Privatdozent* for philosophy of religion and systematic theology at the University of Berlin. Scholz was quite different from Schlick. He could pass as a pure romantic and an opponent of enlightenment. For Scholz, «the German attitude towards life does not consist in thinking as a product of reason [...], but rather in “meaning” (*Sinn*), “heart” (*Herz*) and “soul” (*Gemüt*)»¹². The Great War had hardly begun, when Scholz despite his young age entered the lectern as war philosopher and interpreter of meaningfulness. As the son of a «respected Berlin minister, powerful Church politician and influential teacher» of

¹¹ Stadler (1997, pp. 920-61) gives an informative documentation of the case.

¹² Scholz (1917, p. 54). Consequently he states «Even though the romantic ideals became established in Germany through the world-historical movement of the enlightenment, German idealism has overcome enlightenment» (ivi, p. 74).

the pietistic Moravian Church (*Herrenbuter Brüdergemeinde*) Scholz was certainly more qualified for this job than Schlick with his entrepreneurial family background (cf. Molendijk, 2005, p. 18). In 1915 alone, Scholz published three war pamphlets. The first is *Idealism as the Bearer of War Philosophy* (*Der Idealismus als Träger des Kriegsgedankens*). Here the war results from a postulate of “critical idealism”, a position invented by Scholz. The second, *Politics and Morals* (*Politik und Moral*), establishes the ethical obligation of the Germans to wage the Great War, while the third, *The War and Christianity* (*Der Krieg und das Christentum*) increases the dose by claiming that the Great War is not only compatible with Christianity but a kind of divine command. After this first philosophical-theological drumfire there followed in early 1917 *The Essence of the German Spirit* (*Das Wesen des deutschen Geistes*), intended as a fundamental work. All Scholzian war pamphlets are, as he states in the first one «more than sympathetic inspection of the war. They do not intend to idealize war, but would like to elucidate the ideal motives that in and of itself are involved in war. This consideration is intended to be still valid also after the war and was written both for the sake of idealism and the sake of war» (Scholz, 1915a, p. Vf.; cf. Scholz, 1915c, p. 33).

Basically, Scholz’ philosophical-theological analyses of war were nothing else but short-lived war propaganda for the educated classes, particularly of their Prussian-Protestant variety. Despite the already existing methodological pretensions of the author, those analyses do not even comply with modest methodological standards. At best, Scholz delivers two considerations for a duty to war that show a certain similarity to arguments: 1) Social Darwinism; 2) the “national sense of honor” of the Germans.

The first consideration is based on a Malthusian conception of Social Darwinism. Human beings are no pure spiritual or rational entities. They, rather, are psychophysical beings. This uncontested basic anthropological fact requires, according to Scholz, «a masculine idealism, that subjugates all forms of life to the idea, without destroying them» (Scholz, 1915a, p. 6). The result of masculine idealism, in turn, is «animated life» (*ibid.*)¹³ with its fundamental determination of an «immodesty, which orders individuals and entire populations, to become more and more what they are» (Scholz, 1915a, p. 8). But, watch out! «Immodesty» that is so desirable might degenerate into «impudence» (*Unverschämtheit*) and «insatiability» (*Unersättlichkeit*), «that lays claim to everything for itself, not because it is in need of it, but simply because it is there and because it is disturbing to see somebody else or others owning it» (*ibid.*). Scholz recommends a

¹³ Scholz’ concept of life remains remarkably vague, given its central systematic position.

surprising source for the correct calibration of immodesty. It is that «noble form of the consciousness of power [...], which makes Mohammed saying in the Quran: Lord, open me space in my narrow chest!» (*ibid.*).

It is more than methodologically dubious that Scholz without a moment of further reflection transfers the uncontested psychophysical constitution of *individual* human beings to *collectives*, i.e. «peoples» (*Völker*), and that he adds Social Darwinist imperatives. Just as the psychophysical nature of the individual is necessarily situated in space, so are collectives of people⁴⁴:

And a people? It needs even more soil, if it wants to act out its subjectivity and to spread its roots, in order to benefit of the necessary saps. [...] If a people succeeds in getting the soil peacefully, the better for the idealist. If not, the sword and not renunciation is the proper weapon of idealism. [...] An unconditional guarantee for preserving peace is given only when a people renounces new soil, new property and new acquisition. [...] This means a restriction in the struggle for life (*ivi*, p. 19f.).

In brief, «The best should dominate the earth» (*ivi*, p. 14). Moreover: «Psychophysical self-assertion, insofar it conduces to moral self-preservation, is always a morally justified end» (*ivi*, p. 27; cf. Scholz, 1915c, p. 20f.).

In addition to the methodologically questionable category mistake of transferring the psychological constitution of individuals to collectives and the argument-free transition from the factual to the normative in connection with the Social Darwinist conception of a struggle for *Lebensraum* (“A people without Space”, *Volk ohne Raum*) I would like to criticize the *lack of a universalistic perspective*. The psychophysical condition that Scholz attributes to the German people, should it not ought to hold for other peoples as well? If so, would it not relativize German demands? In a similar way the social Darwinist claim would be relativized.

Let us now turn to Scholz’ second “argument”: “national pride” as a duty to war.

The honor of the fatherland is certainly a religious symbol, also in a Christian sense. It supersedes everyday feeling and elevates man to the sublime, i.e. the region, where we instinctively seek the divine. [...] The honor of the fatherland, for which one fights, is the ultimate good on earth we know of. [...] We neither fight for money nor to become famous. Rather, we fight for the good name our fathers have passed down to us; we fight for an existence that we may bequeath

⁴⁴ Scholz is, nonetheless, in a position to criticize with others such logically illegitimate transitions, so when he, e.g. in Scholz (1915b, p. 24, cf. p. 35f.) complains with what he calls «humanistic idealism [...] an inadmissible transfer of individual moral principles to the actions of the state».

to our children and grandchildren with the conscience of a good steward. The good steward is a figure that dominates Christianity since the beginnings of our religion. Admittedly, also our enemies could use this way of looking at things. This is an issue between them and God, with which we as Christians do not interfere [...] (Scholz, 1915c, p. 49f.).

Among the enemies, however, the Christian stewardship is heavily marred by «egoism and vanity» (ivi, p. 50). Therefore, there is no moral symmetry between Germany and its enemies. The German «fight for *Heimat* and fatherland is a holy fight, a fight under the protection of Christianity» (ivi, p. 51). In short, Scholz tries to defend the argumentative nullity of his considerations by declaring them in accord with “Christianity” and an allegedly Christian conception of justice:

What we have achieved so far, is not only a success of our weapons, but also a success of our economic and intellectual culture – against the will of the world. In this sense the war should rather be compared to a game of chess, in which no greater gain or loss occurs without a *just* [my emphasis] cause (ivi, p. 60).

After all, the just German cause secures divine assistance (for justice in war cf. ivi, pp. 5ff.)¹⁵.

In view of so much enthusiasm for the war and the moral and religious duty to wage it, the question arises, whether Scholz himself served in the trenches of the Great War. In subtle pastoral dialectics (preaching water and drinking wine) Scholz was aware that a problem might arise:

War [...] remains a huge evil, as all, who have taken part in combat, tell us. Nothing is more outrageous for the soul than that cheap idealism of those, who without serving in the field give speeches *behind* the front and explain how beautiful and sublime it is to see – how others die for us (Scholz, 1915a, p. 28).

Yet, the philosophical-theological war propagandist Heinrich Scholz did not serve in the war because of a stomach problem...

As far as I know, Scholz has never publically renounced his war propaganda. However, as already mentioned, after reading the *Principia Mathematica* he seems to have actually made a turn that reminds us of a religious conversion¹⁶. In a paper of 1934, he defines what he calls men of “intellectual character” by four properties. I quote just two:

¹⁵ As often in Scholz’ war pamphlets, this is an abstract consideration about justice. The context makes it clear, however, that it is exclusively the German cause, which is “just”.

¹⁶ This discontinuity is amply documented in Peckhaus (2005).

1. They assert what they say only, if it survives every possible review procedure. [...]
3. They distinguish in what they say in an exact way between what can be proved and what *cannot be* proved. [...] In other words, they distinguish sharply between what occurs in their assertions as a sort of confession and what is provable in such a way that it deserves the beautiful name “knowledge” (Scholz, 1969, p. 313).

During the Great War Scholz can hardly be regarded as an “intellectual character”. His turn to scientific philosophy has set completely new standards. Different from other romantic war apologists, those standards have possibly saved Scholz from falling victim to the temptations of the national socialist ideology¹⁷. After the moral disaster of World War II and the Holocaust Scholz immediately admitted a German «collective responsibility» (Scholz, 1946, p. 8)¹⁸.

4. Rudolf Carnap

Rudolf Carnap is perhaps the most important philosopher of science of the last century. He was 23, when the war broke out and had been studying mathematics, physics and philosophy for four years. Thus, he was hardly suited for becoming a public interpreter of meaning or a philosophical preacher. Nevertheless, he enthusiastically went to war, and it took him almost four years to realize that it was an «inconceivable catastrophe». We can only agree with him in a very restricted way, when he writes in his memoirs that military service «contradicted his whole attitude» and that he regarded the service «as a necessary duty for protecting the fatherland» (Carnap, 1999, p. 15). With his friends in the “Sera-Circle”, which was part of the German Youth Movement, Carnap shared the belief that Germany waged a defensive war. «In the end, all friends, who were fit for military duty, registered as volunteers in August 1914» (cf. Werner, 2014, pp. 19, 24). The German Youth Movement essentially had a romantic inspiration. There was, however, at the same time, particularly in the “Sera Circle”, a strong anti-bourgeois, rebellious component (cf. Carus, 2007, pp. 3ff., 50ff.).

During wartime, Carnap wrote a considerable number of postcards and letters, particularly to his mother¹⁹. Every sort of critical contemplation

¹⁷ «Scholz’ attitude between 1933 and 1945 needs further clarification. Decisive for my actual judgment is his commitment for Jewish and Polish colleagues. [...] Scholz had to make compromises, in order to continue his work» (Molendijk, 2005, p. 37). Cf. also Peckhaus (1998-99) about the postwar correspondence of Scholz with the Dutch Logician Evert Willem Beth (1908-1964).

¹⁸ This booklet was obviously widely distributed. My quote is from the “2nd unchanged edition, 150th-350th thousand”.

¹⁹ I am very much indebted to Dr. Brigitte Parakenings of “Philosophisches Archiv an der Universität Konstanz” (PAUK) for her great support with archival material.

of the war is absent. Thus, we read on a postcard of November 29, 1914 that shows the cathedral of Metz (France): «We have just arrived from the trenches, will stay overnight here in Metz-Longeville and await our consignment to an unknown destination». Then he goes on with family matters. On a postcard of December 23, 1914 to his sister, he is happy about his assignment to a «snowshoe battalion»:

Then it's getting interesting; and then up there in the mountains, this will be a great New Year's Eve. I hope mother has been sufficiently happy about the private [Carnap, shortly before, had been promoted to private]; she should realize that also with the military she need not be ashamed of her son. The leaf soap is very useful, I wish to get more of it for the New Year (Philosophisches Archiv [= PAUK], Carnap Correspondence).

The rest of Carnap's war correspondence is in the same spirit. Not much different are his diaries. Here is one entry that represents a variety of others:

[January] 30, [1915], Saturday. Onwards, unfortunately we do not enter Budapest; across Hungary. [January] 31, Sunday. We are half a day delayed; at lunchtime long break in Debrecin. Many German soldiers have already passed through. Many Hungarian soldiers (songs with clarinet). Rice and canned meat. Bought oranges. Cold night, no sleep, without heating. 3.30 to 5 at night on the locomotive (ivi, RC 025-71-07; war diary).

Military issues are in most cases also noted without commentary, e.g. in the Carpathian Mountains:

March 11, 1915, Friday. The infantry has taken some trenches, many casualties, however. Many have frozen limbs; some taken prisoner, because their fingers frozen stiff were unable to pull the trigger. But there were also Russians taken prisoners. A war volunteer of the infantry said that he would probably be called home for the course: on March 20. I wonder, whether is true also for us artillerymen?! Gorgeous, clear, cold winter weather (*ibid.*).

The longer the war lasts, the more concentrated, sometimes even enthusiastically Carnap takes part. Here a collection of notes:

– «I am very keen on joining a machine gun course» (September 1, 1915; ivi, RC 025-71-08, war diary 1915). His enthusiasm, however, is marred by the fact that he had messed up a course for becoming a lieutenant, and had still to serve as a sort of sergeant (*Oberjäger*):

– «In the evening in the "Brown Stag" again all lieutenants; feel very well among them. I do not grudge them their good fortune; they are nice to me. But I cannot get rid of the secondary thought that I, too, could be where they are» (September 5, 1915; *ibid.*). A few days later:

– «The bad feeling about the other lieutenants has gone, but I feel very dissatisfied. [...] It's high time that I get to the battlefield» (September 12, 1915; *ibid.*).

– In October 1916, we find Carnap in the trenches of Verdun. He is now a lieutenant, decorated with the Iron Cross: «Thursday, October 24, 1916. Got order from the regiment to go to Casemate ravine with four machine-guns. Four groups of privates as convoy and carriers. Decampment at 10.30. The privates overloaded, we are advancing only with difficulties. Several grenades. I am getting the privates forward only with difficulties. Why am I not hit by bomb splinters? 12.30 Brule ravine. We smell gas shelling. Over the crest to Bezonvaux ravine. Getting into gas. Everything dispersed. Put on gas masks 12.40-1.15; sitting up with Tuchmantel. Then, the two of us quietly went over, with masks, baggage. Paused for a breath in a shell-hole» (ivi, RC 025-71-12:14; war diary 1916).

There are only very few passages in Carnap's diaries, where his socio-critical political position becomes tangible. It had been formed by the German Youth Movement. On March 18, 1915, he notes:

In the evening stayed up long with Middeldorf, conversation. We agree that the requirements for intellectual abilities with the active army officers are quite low. [...] Middeldorf and I are quite outspoken. Thilo defends. We agree on certain reproaches on society and that there should be more culture in society. [...] I talk about the Diederich-Circle [Carnap's Jena group of the German Youth Movement]. [...] Thilo, by the way, thinks that he if he were me, who is so convinced of the better idea and the reprehensive present situation, he would do his utmost to improve it. I say, I am not a propagandist (see my abstinence from alcohol); I also believe to serve the public good [...] by doing scientific work according to my abilities and not making propaganda. At 3h lay down (ivi, RC 025-71-07).

Young Carnap was carried away by the Social Darwinist war impulse that we have already seen with Heinrich Scholz, as shows the diary entry in France of September 22, 1916:

Drill south of the village, separated into companies. [...] Nice weather. Tomorrow relocation to Arrancy. [...] but we cannot fly today. Some mathematics. Read Fichte. In the evening in the dark, walk with lieutenant Seidel and Gurleit, along the alley towards Constantine Ferme. Seidel frankly talks about his naïve belief in God; his thoughts: «Thou shalt not kill!» and we must kill now. Isn't it a sin, nonetheless? I refer to ethics of good intentions instead of ethics based on commands. Then his thoughts about the futility of the war. [...] I try to make clear that the purpose of the war does not consist in diminishing the number of human beings, but is an inevitable trial of strength between peoples encroaching on each others' territories. We are, in fact, the growing people, we cannot stand still, but have to grab what we can get (analogy: tree, industrial enterprise).

This fight is still cruel (contrary to the fight of two business competitors). Later perhaps one day a legal situation between states as is now between individuals. Evolutionary stage: United States of Europe; great difficulties, might be overcome by the common threat from East Asia (ivi, RC 025-71-12:14; war diary, 1916).

The idea of a secure legal status between nations, finally, becomes the topic of Carnap's first publication. We find it in the first issue (October 20, 1918) of Karl Bittel's (1892-1969) "Political Newsletters" (*Politische Rundbriefe*) that are explicitly devoted to the engagement of the German Youth Movement in politics. Here Carnap, using the pseudonym "Kernberger" gives the first of two parts of an article *League of Nations – League of States (Völkerbund – Staatenbund)* and urges his friends to enter into a «more than amateurish discussion based on momentary affects» of the institutional details of a league of nations. At that point, Carnap had already been a member of the "Independent Social democratic Party of Germany" (*Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, USPD) for two months. Already in 1915, some Social Democrats, who later became leading figures of the USPD, voted against war loans. It was this anti-war attitude that made the USPD attractive for Carnap.

In summer 1917, I was relocated to Berlin. [...] There I had the opportunity to think about political problems through reading and in conversations with friends. [...] I realized that in various countries the workers' parties were the only large groupings that had retained at least a rest of the aims of internationalism and objections to the war (Carnap, 1999, p. 15).

In the early 1920s, Carnap left the USPD, disillusioned by the aftermath of the Russian Revolution and the policies of German communists.

Even if it comes late, Carnap himself seems to support my initial hypothesis of a major distance of philosophers of science to war propaganda. On November 17, 1921, he had sent his doctoral dissertation on space (*Der Raum*) to Bertrand Russell and writes in the accompanying letter:

It is a particular pleasure for me that you are the first Englishman in the scientific field, to whom I may reach out, since you already in wartime had frankly opposed the subjugation of the mind through hatred between nations and had advocated uncorrupted humanist sentiments. If I think of the same spirit of Couturat, who unfortunately died too early, I ask myself, whether it could be a sheer coincidence, that those men, who reached greatest sharpness in the most abstract field of mathematical logic, were the same who in the field of human relations fought lucidly and strongly against the narrowing of the mind by emotions and prejudices (PAUK, RC 102-68-34).

Even if his writings were completely apolitical, Carnap remained strongly engaged for democracy and social justice. In 1936, he emigrated to the US. No wonder that in the early 1950s he ended up on the black list of the most influential communist-hunter, Senator Joseph McCarthy (1908-1957).

5. Hans Reichenbach and Otto Neurath

We may summarily treat these two philosophers, because their publications give us good information about their attitude toward the Great War.

While Carnap in 1916 still gave a social Darwinist explanation and most probably justification of the war, Hans Reichenbach (of the same age as Carnap) in two articles *already before* the war severely opposed German militarism (Reichenbach, 1913 and 1914)²⁰. The articles were written from the viewpoint of the German Youth Movement and the “Free Students” (*Freistudentenschaft*). The Free students regarded themselves as determined opponents to the conservative nationalistic members of students’ corps and as democratic representatives of all students, who were not members of the corps. «Reichenbach belonged to the left wing of the Free Students, one could even say he was one of their ideologists, and [...] a leading mind of this student movement» (Gerner, 1997, p. 13). Various writings regarding youth and students testify to this. Two of them strike me as remarkable. In July 1913 and in March 1914 he attacked the militarization of the Youth Movement and the cultivation of «national consciousness». Here is a sample:

Is it then surprising that the young move into a world of ideas, where the war against the numerous “enemies” of Germany is regarded as the topmost ideal. What people with a healthy attitude puts off when it comes to the effects of this educational system, is the inner untruthfulness, which is nursed in young people, the dishonest judgment concerning problems of modern politics and social life, the self-conceit of true national spirit that does not consist in cheering and in glorifying militarism. National spirit, rather, tries to express itself by exploring and finding deeper understanding of the culture of one’s own people. [...] Poor youth! They sacrifice the most beautiful right of young people, to be human, for the sake of playing soldiers (Reichenbach, 1914, p. 1237f.).

At the beginning of the war, Reichenbach, surprisingly, volunteered with the navy. Apparently, he was sure to be rejected as «petite, fattish and short-sighted» (Gerner, 1997, p. 19).

²⁰ I rely for the following on Gerner (1997). For Reichenbach as a *Freistudent* see also Wipf (1994).

In 1933, Reichenbach was dismissed from his position as an associate professor of Berlin University, because he was considered as a «Marxist and half-Jewish». He went to the University of Istanbul, and from there, in 1938, to the University of California (ivi, p. 131).

In 1914, Otto Neurath, the 32-year-old Austrian economist, was a teacher at the Vienna “New Business School” (*Neue Handelsakademie*)²¹. Neurath was the only of the scholars presented here, who had done (in 1906-07) his obligatory one-year military service. For health reasons he had hoped in 1914, «to be declared as unfit for service» (Sandner, 2014, p. 60). He was, nonetheless, lucky: after an «eight-week training with the *k.u.k* fortress artillery regiment “*Kaiser*” No. 1» he could stay in Vienna. There he served as «a military provisions reserve official» (*Militärverpflegungsbeamter in der Reserve*), which fitted his educational background. In addition, he could attend university seminars in economics (ivi, p. 61). Neurath did not show any enthusiasm for the military. In a letter to the Kiel sociology professor Ferdinand Tönnies (1855-1936) he wrote about the regular military exercises, he had to take part in: «This time as well an economic brain area had to be sacrificed to militarism» (ivi, p. 62).

Neurath is one of the most colorful and versatile figures of recent history of philosophy. Curiously enough, notwithstanding his low enthusiasm for the military, he is the only one among the thinkers presented here, who dealt *scientifically* with the topic of war, i.e. war economy. War economy for Neurath is embedded into philosophical conceptions of “the good life”. Field studies during the Balkan Wars had convinced him that a planned economy as in times of war was superior to an uncontrolled capitalist economy. In 1919, his enthusiasm for a planned economy made him a suitable candidate for the presidency of the Central Economic Office that he had proposed to the Munich soviet republic. After the early failure of that soviet republic, Neurath ended up in jail for aiding and abetting high treason. The rest of his biography is equally exciting. In 1934, he had to leave the Austrian corporative state for the Netherlands. From there, Neurath, who was Jewish, succeeded in escaping to England, when the Germans invaded the Netherlands.

6. Hugo Dingler

In 1914, Hugo Dingler had no time to bother about politics. His habilitation thesis had encountered great difficulties. He was the more afflicted, because he fancied himself as one of the great thinkers in the history of philosophy, playing in the same league as Kant or Leibniz (for

²¹ In the following, I rely on the excellent biography Sandner (2014).

the following, cf. Wolters, 1992). In his diaries prior to the outbreak of the war, Dingler was exclusively preoccupied with himself and his university environment.

In September 1914, he fought as a soldier on the front in Belgium and France. However, his nerves could not cope with the military operations in the battlefield. For the rest of the war he was employed in Bavarian garrisons. His collapse in the field preyed on his mind. On October 4, 1916, he confides to his diary:

Today, finally, the bombshell exploded. [...] The brigade adjutant was stupid enough to request the opinion of the field forces before my promotion to captain. They described me as not suited for neither captain nor company commander. My promotion was then declined. But I am too excitable in my heart, to do such things again out there in the field. Both my soul and my stomach would probably give up²².

There are no further considerations about the war. On February 6, 1917, he notes:

Three days from now there is the general physical examination. I believe that I will be declared fit for military service. This is Germany's struggle for existence, and when Germany is lost, we, too, are lost. God, into Thy hands I commend my life. You will lead it well and right according to your justice. Amen.

In this quote becomes tangible again the assessment of the Great War in large parts of the German bourgeoisie: it is a fight for the existence of the German people, which was imposed by their enemies. On October 10, 1917, the diary signals a surprising turn.

Peace is in the air and an indescribable mood within me. In any case, the war was successful for us, since the Americans succeeded in bringing us freedom, and besides we have succeeded in defending our country, which remained undamaged against 3/4 of the world. Therefore, we can easily pay reparations.

Dingler's publications between 1914 and 1918 do not relate to the war. There is no trace of war propaganda. During the Weimar Republic he was in a similar way politically abstinent and completely concentrated on his work. Hitler's seizure of power in 1933 came as a total surprise to him. In 1934, he was forced to retire as a professor at the Technical University of Darmstadt, because the Teachers Training Institute at Mainz, where Dingler had done most of his teaching was closed for economic reasons. Dingler's smarmy approaches to get a new professorship were so clear

²² Dingler's diaries are in the *Hofbibliothek Aschaffenburg* (Bavaria), a copy is in PAUK.

even for the Nazis that he could become a party member only in 1940, i.e. at a time, when smarter political minds were already considering their withdrawal. In 1945, Dingler had succeeded in compromising himself thus far that also in postwar Germany he remained without a chance.

7. Final Considerations

In my inquiry, I have presented all German-speaking philosophers of science, who were old enough to be involved in the Great War. Among them, no war propagandist is to be found. This distinguishes them from other German philosophers. One cannot, however, claim that it was strict conformity with the methodological principles of philosophy of science, which immunized them against hatred and propaganda. For such a claim, our sample is too small and not representative enough, because the oldest in the group was only 33, when the war broke out. They all were at the beginning of their career, while the last exegetical word on world affairs is a privilege enjoyed by higher ranks in academia. The novices usually do not have much of a say in such matters. It honors, nonetheless, our five philosophers of science that they did not end up as war propagandists.

The “scholarly chauvinism” of German intellectuals has a remarkable double face. On the one hand, they were absolutely convinced that the German spirit intellectually and morally was clearly superior to the rest of the world. On the other hand, they felt that the rest of the world saw matters differently. Bourgeois Germany regarded this discrepancy between their own pretensions and the international reality as a *collective cultural humiliation* and as a justification of war²³. The key term “collective cultural humiliation” points to two striking parallels between 1914 and today. A century later “Russian Values” are most popular in Vladimir Putin’s (*1952) Russia. On May 16, 2014, in the pro-government paper “Rossijskaja Gazeta” the Russian government had published a “project” under the title “Foundations of Governmental Cultural Politics” as a basis for legislation. Its author is Vladimir Tolstoy (*1962), great-great-grandson of Lew Tolstoy (1828-1910). This paper insists on a special status of excellence of Russian culture (<https://rg.ru/2014/05/15/osnovi-dok.html>; seen, January, 2017) that – *mutatis mutandis* – we also discovered in the writings about the “German Spirit”. Russian friends assured me that the “Foundations” are representative of the views of large parts of the Russian *intelligentsija*.

²³ Cf. Heinrich Scholz before his scientific “conversion” as just one of many examples I did not mention here.

The second parallel we find in many parts of the Islamic world. There, elites propagate the conviction of being morally and intellectually superior to the “infidel” rest of the world. The Islamic feeling of superiority obviously becomes the stronger and the more aggressive, the more it clashes with facts. A telling example for this is the “Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam” of August 5, 1990. It is aimed at cutting back on the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” of the United Nations of 1948, using, nonetheless, the attractive label “Human Rights” (for a discussion, cf. Wolters, 2015, pp. 29ff.). It was signed by 45 out of 57 member states of the “Organisation of the Islamic Conference”²⁴.

Reaffirming the civilizing and historical role of the Islamic Ummah which God made the best nation²⁵ that has given mankind a universal and well-balanced civilization in which harmony is established between this life and the hereafter and knowledge is combined with faith; and the role that this Ummah should play to guide a humanity confused by competing trends and ideologies and to prove solutions to the chronic problems of this materialistic civilization. [...] Etc., etc.

I see depressing parallels to the self-image of German elites in 1914, and unfortunately, there is much evidence that the Cairo Declaration of 1990 expresses also the *current* self-perception of Islamic elites. Outside the *Umma* this hyperbolic self-assessment, completely out of touch with reality, is hardly shared by anybody. It corresponds to the social and political reality even less than its German counterpart did a century ago. I am afraid that it is one of the causes of many international problems of our days such as wars, terrorism, and migration flows²⁶.

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²⁴ There are no indications that those 12 states that did not sign did so in support of the “Universal Declaration”.

²⁵ “best nation” is a quote from the Quran (3,110).

²⁶ This paper results from the joint project “European Academies during the First World War. 1914-1924” of the German National Academy “Leopoldina”, the Académie des sciences and the Royal Society. A first German version (*Wissenschaftsphilosophen im Krieg – Impromptus*) was published in “Acta Historica Leopoldina“, 68 (2016), pp. 147-61.

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