Matthias Neuber

9 Herbert Feigl on the Idea of a "Scientific Humanism"

Abstract: Herbert Feigl played a crucial role in the spread of logical empiricism in the United States. Not only did his and Albert E. Blumberg's famous article "Logical Positivism: A New Movement in European Philosophy" (1931) help disseminate the ideas of the Vienna Circle in the American context, but his work also proved influential and lasting at the institutional level. Thus, he founded the Minnesota Center for Philosophy of Science in 1953 and co-founded the journal *Philosophical Studies* in 1949 as well as the series *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* in 1956. Less well known is that he was affiliated to the American Humanist Association in which several of the emigrated logical empiricists found "an ideology that seemed very similar to our basic philosophical attitude" (Feigl 1981, 78 – 79). In the present paper, I will focus on Feigl's plea for a "scientific humanism" as a secularized form of religion and give some information about the context surrounding it.

9.1 Introduction

"Religion is deeper than God" (Dworkin 2013, 1)—this assertion of the late Ronald Dworkin stands paradigmatically, as it were, for the core idea of the view of Herbert Feigl to be discussed in this paper. As is well known, Feigl came to the United States, more precisely to Harvard University, in 1930 financed by a Rockefeller fellowship. In 1931, he published together with Albert E. Blumberg the influential article "Logical Empiricism: A New Movement in European Philosophy." The same year he was hired as a lecturer at the University of Iowa. In 1937, he received the U.S. citizenship. Three years later he became a full professor at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, where he founded the Minnesota Center for Philosophy of Science in 1953. Feigl remained in Minneapolis until his death in 1988.[1]

In the present paper, I wish to examine Feigl's little-researched affiliation with the American Humanist Association, his corresponding plea for a "scientific" humanism, and the historical context surrounding this particular point of view. Feigl's affiliation with the American humanists, in particular Roy Wood Sellars, might help us better understand the reception of logical empiricism in the United States. More concretely, Feigl and Sellars, despite their disagreements about the de-

1 More information about Feigl's life can be found in Neuber (2022, sect. 1).

 https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111335209-011

tails, shared a humanistic outlook that might have proved instructive to bridge some of their cultural and philosophical differences. In other words: humanism was presumably the strongest intellectual link in the emigration episode under review here. I will proceed as follows. In section 9.2, I shall provide some information regarding Feigl's emigration to the United States. In section 9.3, his affiliation with the American Humanist Association will be discussed. Section 9.4 deals with Feigl's particular version of a "scientific" humanism. Section 9.5 uncovers some references to related, historically antecedent, views of Roy Wood Sellars. Section 9.6 concludes the paper with a few comments on Feigl's and Sellars' commitment to an overarching *realistic* point of view.

9.2 Feigl's Emigration to the United States

After a short stay as a student of mathematics, physics, and philosophy at the University of Munich, Feigl transferred to the University of Vienna in 1922. Already during his time in Munich, he was worried by the anti-Semitic atmosphere. Thus, in one place he retrospectively reports: "My social and political interests were most dramatically aroused by my experiences (1921–1922) at the University of Munich. Twelve years before Hitler's rise to power, the anti-Semitism in Germany was already quite noticeable" (Feigl 1981, 5). In Vienna, Feigl became a co-founder, together with Friedrich Waismann, of the famous Vienna Circle around Moritz Schlick, under whose supervision he completed his dissertation on chance and law ("Zufall und Gesetz") in 1927. In 1929, he published his monograph *Theorie und Erfahrung in der Physik*. Still two years later, he realized that his prospects in Austria as well as in Germany tended towards zero. In his own words:

> During the spring of 1931 … it became clear to me that my chances for a teaching position in an Austrian or German University were extremely slim. True, the ever so optimistic and kindly Schlick was convinced that I would obtain a *Privatdozentur* (position as a lecturer) at the University of Vienna. But though I was Austrian by birth, I had become a Czechoslovakian citizen after the revolution in 1918. My home was then in Reichenberg (Liberec), in the Sudetenland, where I was born and grew up, and had attended primary and secondary schools. My parents, though thoroughly "assimilated," were of Jewish decent. More realistic than Schlick, I abandoned the idea of a teaching career in Europe, and began applying in a number of American universities. (Feigl 1981, 73–74)

As already indicated, Feigl was hired at the University of Iowa in 1931. Immediately before his emigration, he had received letters of recommendation from Albert Einstein, Percy W. Bridgman, C. I. Lewis, and Alfred North Whitehead. Lewis, at that time in Harvard, wrote in his letter dated April 14, 1931: "Dr. Feigl is one of the

group—with Carnap, Reichenbach, and Schlick—who represents the newly formulated 'neo-positivism,' which represents what we in America are sure to regard as the most promising of present movements in Continental philosophy" (cited in Limbeck-Lilienau 2010, 102). In fact, it was Lewis in particular who helped Feigl get the job in Iowa. Interestingly, even in this context, Feigl's Jewish ancestry apparently played a role. Again, in his own words:

> Three universities, Rutgers, New York University, and the State University of Iowa, were the only ones that wanted to "look me over", and toward the end of May 1931 I visited all three places. The late Dean George Kay, a prominent geologist of Canadian origin, telephoned Professor Lewis long distance. As Lewis later related to me, Dean Kay asked him in detail about my qualification, character, and personality. At the end of that (about twenty minutes!) telephone conversation, Kay finally asked: "Is he a Jew?" To this, Lewis, the noble New Englander, gave the—to me unforgettable—reply: "I am sure I don't know, but if he is, there is nothing disturbing about it." (Feigl 1981, 74)

Eventually Feigl and his spouse Maria Kasper settled in Iowa City and sometime later received the U.S. citizenship.

It is interesting to note that Feigl himself supported emigrant scholars from Europe to find employment or at least financial funding in the United States. For example, already based in Minneapolis, he engaged in assisting Rose Rand, a former member of the Vienna Circle, to obtain a grant from the Bollingen Foundation in New York City. After Feigl received a letter requesting his help from Else Staudinger,[2] the Executive Director of the American Committee for Emigré scholars (March 7, 1955, HFP, 04–122–127), he immediately sent a strong letter of recommendation to the director of the Foundation, ensuring him that there was "no question in [his] mind that Dr. Rand is very well equipped for research in her chosen field and that she holds high promise for a successful completion of her work" (Feigl to Ernest Brooks, March 10, 1995, HFP, 04–122–129).[3] Five years later, Feigl wrote a similar letter of recommendation for Maria Reichenbach, the widow of his fellow logical empiricist Hans Reichenbach (see HFP, 04–122–131). By and large, then, the logical empiricists' network was maintained as far as possible in American exile, as also evidenced by Frank's involvement in the case of Rose Rand's support.

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2 For biographical information about Else Staudinger, see the 1966 obituary in the New York Times: https://www.nytimes.com/1966/03/13/archives/dr-else-staudinger-dies-at-76-helped-thousands-of-refugees.html (accessed July 5, 2024).

3 Quoted with friendly permission of the Philosophical Archive (Philosophisches Archiv) of the University of Konstanz. The signature in brackets is the Archive's signature (like the following ones too). Many thanks to Dr. Daniel Wilhelm from the Konstanz Archive for the support in the localization of the relevant material.

Feigl himself was, it seems, very grateful for his personal emigration fate. In one place he points out:

> As I reflect on my motivations in connection with the Minnesota Center for Philosophy of Science, it seems fairly clear to me that my formative experiences in the Vienna Circle ... have encouraged me to endeavor collaborative teamwork in philosophical research. In this regard, I have found the intellectual atmosphere in American philosophy and science even more favorable than that of the Continent in the twenties and early thirties. On the whole, I have found that American scholars are remarkably open-minded, willing to accept criticism as much as to proffer it. (Feigl 1981, 89–90)

In short, Feigl identified himself and his Center with the American style of doing philosophy. Without his emigration, things would surely have developed worse for him. Due to his emigration, American philosophy gained an important promoter.[4]

9.3 Feigl and the American Humanist Association

The American Humanist Association (AHA) was founded in 1941, emerging from the Humanist Fellowship, which was established in 1927. The AHA's overarching credo—in its current form—is that "humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, without theism or other supernatural beliefs, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good" (AHA n.d.). According to Feigl,

> our [the logical empiricists'] attitude toward theology and religion was that of the naturalist or scientific humanists. Indeed, several of us found in the general position of the American Humanist Association an ideology that seemed very similar to our basic philosophical attitude. If, as most humanists prefer, 'religion' is not connected with any theology whatever, then a deep commitment to such human values as basic and equal rights, the civil liberties, the ideal of a peaceful and harmonious world community, may well be said to be the religion of the humanists—and of the positivists. (Feigl 1981, 78–79)

Among the "positivists" or, better, logical empiricists it was Philipp Frank who, along with Feigl, engaged most forcefully in the American humanist movement (see especially Frank 2021 which, according to its editors, was finished around 1960). Yet, in the case of Feigl, this involvement started already in the late 1930s. In 1939, for example, he gave a talk at a meeting of one of the AHA's regional predecessor organizations, the Humanist Society of Iowa. Moreover, Feigl became in-

4 Further information about Feigl's emigration to the United States can be found in Neuber (2018).

volved with the First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis, whose principles were quite similar to those of the humanists. Eventually, in 1944, Feigl was appointed an assistant secretary of the (then already established) AHA.

Remarkably, Feigl repeatedly received requests from representatives of Christian organizations to give talks. For example, on November 3, 1961, C. Theodore Molen, Chairman of the Passavant Lecture Committee of the Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminar, wrote to Feigl:

> Dear Professor Feigl:
> I trust that Mr. Oscar Schmiege has been in touch with you following his recent conversation with Dean Donald Heiges of Chicago Lutheran Seminary. As Chairman of the Passavant Lecture Committee I am writing to confirm our desire to have you lecture on the campus on March 22 und 23, 1962. ...
>
> The topic of the lecture series this year is "The Post-Christian Era." ...
>
> The other speaker in this series of dialogical lectures will be Professor Julian N. Hartt of Yale University [Department of Religious Studies; M. N.]. ...
>
> Since we are in the midst of preparing for quarter examinations, more information will be forthcoming later in the month.
>
> Sincerely,
> C. Theodore Molen, Jr. ... (HFP, 04 – 119 – 93)

Feigl agreed in principle to give a lecture but expressed reluctance to do so. Thus, in his reply to Molen, he explained:

> When Mr. Schmiege spoke to me first, he did not mention the title of your series "The Post-Christian Era" (what does this mean?) nor that my engagement would involve discussions with Professor Julian Hartt. While this is quite acceptable to me, I regret I shall not have the time for reading any of his publications; – nor am I at all competent to speak on any of the internal issues of modern theology. As you probably know, my own outlook is that of scientific humanism,—clarified, I hope, by some logical analysis. If, what I have just told you, speaks from your point of view against my lecture engagement, I shall not at all be disappointed if you cared to invite someone else in my stead. May I recommend (in this case) that you think of Abraham Kaplan (UCLA); Sidney Hook (New York University); Walter Kaufmann (Princeton); Charles Frankel (Columbia University); M. S. Everett (Oklahoma A. & M. College, Stillwater, Oklahoma). Each of these scholars knows much more about religion than I do; and each of them is at least close to a humanist outlook. (HFP, 04 – 119 – 94)

In 1963, Feigl received a similar request from the Young Men's Christian Association at Davidson College in Davidson, North Carolina. In his response, as in the previous case, he agreed in principle but added by way of explanation:

> I should also say that I possess no thorough, scholarly knowledge of either Judaism or Christianity and therefore do not like to engage in public discussion about religion or theology. It is true I am an outspoken humanist and scientific empiricist, and would be glad to present that

> point of view—not as a "substitute" for religion, but in its philosophical distinction from, and relation to, religion and/or theology. (HFP, 04–119–111)

All in all, then, it appears that Feigl purposefully used, or 'instrumentalized,' the invitations of Christian organizations to propagate his scientific-humanist position. But what exactly did this position entail? It is this question to which we turn next.[5]

9.4 Feigl on "Scientific" Humanism

Regarding Feigl's main contributions to the issue of a scientific humanism, the following three papers are worth mentioning: "Naturalism *and* Humanism" from 1949; "Is Science Relevant to Theology?" from 1966; and "Ethics, Religion, and Scientific Humanism" from 1969 (all reprinted in Feigl 1981). In what follows, I will review these three papers and attempt to draw out Feigl's central claims and arguments. In doing so, I hope to make clear that Feigl's scientific humanism includes a *moderate ethical non-cognitivism.*

Let us begin with "Naturalism *and* Humanism." As the title already indicates, Feigl sees no contradiction between these two stances. The subtitle is also revealing: "An Essay on Some Issues of General Education and a Critique of Current Misconceptions Regarding Scientific Method and the Scientific Outlook in Philosophy." The reference to the issue of education makes it clear that, according to Feigl, modern—naturalistic, science-oriented—humanism and classical humanism in the vein of Erasmus of Rotterdam stand in continuity with each other. However, Feigl also notes close connections between modern humanism and "the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century" (Feigl 1981, 367). What is more, he identifies representative groups of modern humanism, namely American pragmatism, logical empiricism, and American ("liberal") Unitarianism. On the other hand, he identifies as competing—anti-naturalistic—groups positions such as neo-Thomism, literary humanism, and dialectical materialism, all of which, in his view, are characterized by "reliance on theological or metaphysical presuppositions" (Feigl 1981, 367).

Based on these preliminary clarifications, Feigl specifies his particular understanding of *religion.* He points out:

> If by religion one refers to an explanation of the universe and a derivation of moral norms from theological premises, then indeed there is logical incompatibility with the results, meth-

5 Let it be noted that, in 1980, Feigl (like other philosophers such as Willard van Orman Quine, A. J. Ayer, and Sidney Hook) signed the "Secular Humanist Declaration" of the Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism (see Kurtz 1980).

> ods, and general outlook of science. But if religion means an attitude of sincere devotion to human values, such as justice, peace, relief from suffering, there is not only no conflict between religion and science but rather a need for mutual supplementation. (Feigl 1981, 374)

This aligns well with the AHA's core message about religion, which is to focus on ethics, values, and living without theistic constraints. The distinctive feature of Feigl's fusion of religion and humanism lies in its emphasis on *science.* Feigl writes:

> [A] mature humanism requires no longer a theological or metaphysical frame .... Human nature and human history become progressively understood in the light of advancing science. It is therefore no longer justifiable to speak of science *versus* the humanities. Naturalism *and* humanism should be our maxim in philosophy and in education. A Scientific Humanism emerges as a philosophy holding considerable promise for mankind—*if* mankind will at all succeed in growing up. (Feigl 1981, 377)

Thus, naturalism and the program of a scientific philosophy are seen as the saviors in the dawning age of a modern humanism after the immediately preceding horrors of the Nazi era. "Scientific Humanism" stands for this particular perspective which, it should be noted, contrasts most clearly with Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* from 1947, the view of which—especially regarding science—is far less optimistic.[6]

In "Is Science Relevant to Theology?" Feigl's central question revolves around the idea of a *demythologized* theology. Specifically, the paper addresses the issue of transempirical faith in the sense of the modernists in contemporary theology, that is, thinkers such as Paul Tillich, Rudolf Bultmann, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.[7] Feigl's central thesis is clear. It reads: "Partly demythologized theology is a questionable halfway house, unclear in content, intent, or truth-claim. Theology completely demythologized is no longer a theology at all" (Feigl 1981, 406). In this con-

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6 For example, in one place of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Horkheimer and Adorno categorically declare: "[E]nlightenment is totalitarian as only a system can be. Its untruth does not lie in the analytical method, the reduction to elements, the decomposition through reflection, as its Romantic enemies had maintained from the first, but in its assumption that the trial is prejudged. When in mathematics the unknown becomes the unknown quantity in any equation, it is made into something long familiar before any value has been assigned. Nature, before and after quantum theory, is what can be registered mathematically; even what cannot be assimilated, the insoluble and irrational, is fenced in by mathematical theorems .... Thought is reified as an autonomous, automatic process, so that it can finally be replaced by the machine" (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002, 18–19). It is further worth mentioning that Horkheimer explicitly attacked the logical empiricists' focus on logic and the exact (mathematized) sciences as early as 1937 in his article "Der neueste Angriff auf die Metaphysik." For details, see Dahms (1994, 97–143).

7 The term 'transempirical faith' is Feigl's and not that of the modernist theologians'. It is meant to refer to the belief in orthodox theological dogmas.

text, it should be seen that Bultmann's view in particular was quite close to Feigl's own conception of a scientific humanism. For example, in his 1941 *New Testament and Mythology*, Bultmann writes:

> Can the Christian proclamation today expect men and women to acknowledge the mythical world picture as true? To do so would be both pointless and impossible. It would be pointless because there is nothing specifically Christian about the mythical world picture, which is simply the world picture of a time now past which was not yet formed by scientific thinking. It would be impossible because no one can appropriate a world picture by sheer resolve, since it is already given with one's historical situation. (Bultmann 1984, 3)

In short, modern man is incapable to understand the thought and language forms of the antique, pre-scientific past. Bultmann therefore argues for the uncovering of the non-mythical core of the faith of Christianity through what he calls an existential interpretation.[8] This should make it possible to understand the New Testament, written from the mythical worldview, in a form appropriate to modern man in the context of today's prevailing scientific worldview. Accordingly, in another passage, Bultmann claims: "We cannot use electric lights and radios and, in the event of illness, avail ourselves of modern medical and clinical means and at the same time believe in the spirit and wonder world of the New Testament" (Bultmann 1984, 14). For Feigl, passages like these amount to an *ethicization* of theology (just as in Kant). He points out:

> If we go to the extreme of demythologization (and must we not, in all consistency, do just that?), what else is left but the *moral message* of religion? ... Jesus, along with Moses, the Prophets, and Mohammed, is then viewed as an—indeed exceptional—but still entirely human and highly progressive teacher of morality. (Feigl 1981, 404)

In short, theology without myth is no longer theology. Rather, it becomes a secularized religion being compatible with both a worldly morality and a corresponding scientific attitude.

Feigl's "Ethics, Religion, and Scientific Humanism" is no doubt the most interesting piece in the given context. In this paper, Feigl sets out to defend scientific humanism as an "ethical outlook" (Feigl 1981, 408). Proceeding from the assumption that there are different kinds of belief, he raises two questions, namely:

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8 It should be noted that Bultmann's notion of an existential interpretation is quite complex both in terms of its origins and in terms of its critique. Suffice it to mention that this notion has its philosophical roots in certain conceptions to be found in the works of Wilhelm Dilthey and especially Martin Heidegger, and that it was vehemently criticized by catholic theologians in particular. For further details, see Hübner (2003) and Jaspert (2014).

a) "What do you mean?" and b) "How do you know?" (see Feigl 1981, 409). As Feigl is eager to emphasize, these two questions lie *beyond* the "so-called warfare between science and theology" (Feigl 1981, 409) invoked by the late nineteenth-century historian, diplomat, and Cornell University co-founder Andrew D. White (see White 1896). Nor is it about a *rapprochement* between theology and science. Feigl states:

> We are no longer primarily concerned with discrepancies between the modernists and theologians, nor to revise theological doctrines in such a fashion as to make them compatible with science.... Rather, the question, 'What do you mean?' really is the central issue; namely, the meaning of the word 'belief' or of any cognate terms. (Feigl 1981, 409)

Equipped with this analytic methodological strategy, Feigl goes on to distinguish between three different meanings of the word 'belief' (see Feigl 1981, 410 – 414). This first meaning is *empirical* and illustrated by sentences such as 'I believe that there might be a rainstorm tonight.' Such sentences are capable of observational test (which, in turn, gets optimized in the context of science). The second meaning of the word 'belief' is *transempirical* and illustrated by sentences such as 'I believe in resurrection.' Such sentences are a matter of faith and as such belong to the realm of theology. The third meaning of 'belief' is associated with what Feigl programmatically calls *commitment* and illustrated by sentences such as 'I believe in human equality.' Such sentences involve "taking a firm attitude" (Feigl 1981, 413); but, according to Feigl, they do *not* express a knowledge claim.

Now, in a next step, Feigl confronts us with two theses. *Thesis One:* "you don't get any place with ethical justification unless you start with certain commitments" (Feigl 1981, 416). Feigl is drawing here on Kant's distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives and proposes to make the same distinction "in plainer language" by dividing "conditional" from "unconditional" imperatives (see Feigl 1981, 416), equating the latter with the belief type of commitment. *Thesis Two:* "there are ethical ideals that seem fairly basic in human concerns" (Feigl 1981, 417). Feigl is thinking here, as an example, of the ideals of the Jewish prophets, according to which the principles of goodness, fairness and equality are crucial to morality.

All of this fits well with humanism. But what about the naturalist component of Feigl's stance? Matters can be clarified if we consider the following passage from Feigl's 1969 approach:

> There is a golden mean that combines the valid element of monism—i. e., that ethical principles are universally applicable—with the empiricism of relativism which teaches that human values are related to human nature. If you want a label for this call it 'scientific humanism.' (Feigl 1981, 418)

Thus, the scientific-humanist approach entails a naturalized conception of universally valid ethical principles. However, Feigl's naturalist approach is *not* an eliminative one, as can be seen from the following passage:

> There are certain activities and abilities of the human animal that are essential for his survival. But when civilization takes over, something else supervenes in addition to what was a purely biological function in the first place.... The original functions ... do not fade out but are supervened by the further functions that represent our higher cultural activities.... Sexuality may become love. I don't recommend that sexuality fade out, but love is something more than mere sexuality. (Feigl 1981, 418–419)

Passages like this have led Wulf Kellerwessel to assign Feigl's stance to *ethical cognitivism* and thus to distinguish it from Rudolf Carnap's corresponding views (see Kellerwessel 2010, 178–179). I dare say that this is not correct. In point of fact, Feigl, just as Carnap, defends a *moderate ethical non-cognitivism* (for Carnap's particular approach, see Damböck 2022). Remember that, according to Feigl, commitments are not knowledge claims. If they were, then his position would indeed belong to the cognitivist crowd in ethics. However, just as with Carnap, Feigl maintains that a distinction should be made between 'internal' and 'external' questions regarding the choice of a relevant 'framework.' Thus, in his 1952 "Validation and Vindication: An Analysis of the Nature and the Limits of Ethical Arguments," Feigl refers the reader to Carnap's 1950 "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology" and emphasizes that Carnap's paper contains an "extremely important and clarifying discussion of the distinction between questions within a presupposed frame and questions concerning the frame itself" (Feigl 1981, 391, fn. 3).[9] Already in his essay "Existential Hypotheses: Realistic versus Phenomenalistic Interpretations" from 1950, Feigl had taken up this distinction from Carnap, albeit in the context of establishing a certain form of scientific realism (for details, see Neuber 2011). In "Validation and Vindication," Feigl applies the distinction to ethics, intending to suggest a moderate non-cognitivist approach.

So, what is this approach all about? The following passage from "Validation and Vindication" will help answer this question:

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9 The corresponding passage in Carnap's original paper reads as follows: "And now we must distinguish two kinds of questions of existence: first, questions of the existence of certain entities of the new kind *within the framework*; we call *internal questions*, and second, questions concerning the existence or reality *of the system of entities as a whole*, called *external questions*" (Carnap 1950, 21–22). As can be easily seen, Carnap is talking about ontological and not ethical issues in his 1950 paper.

> [T]he supreme norms of a given ethical system provide the ultimate ground for the validation of moral judgments. No matter how long or short the chain of validating inferences, the final court of appeal will consist in one or the other type of justifying principles. Rational argument presupposes reference to a set of such principles at least implicitly agreed upon. Disagreement with respect to basic principles can thus only be removed if the very frame of validation is changed. This can occur either through the disclosure and explication of a hitherto unrecognized common set of standards, i. e., still more fundamental validating principles to which implicit appeal is made in argument, or it can be achieved through the pragmatic justification of the adoption of an alternative frame, or finally, through sheer persuasion by means of emotive appeals. (Feigl 1981, 386)

Accordingly, it is important for Feigl to distinguish between the supreme norms or basic principles of an ethical system on the one hand—that would be the *commitments* from before—, and moral judgments on the other. While moral judgments are *validated* by basic principles, the basic principles themselves receive their justification through what Feigl calls *vindication.* In the context of vindication, knowledge claims are out of place. Rather, it is (in the last analysis) the emotive appeals that guide us in justifying our commitments. However, Feigl argues, "[t]here is a great deal of validation in ethical arguments which is only too easily lost sight of, if attention is primarily fixed upon persuasion or vindication" (Feigl 1981, 388). Therefore, his non-cognitivism is a *moderate* one: Although our fundamental commitments can only be vindicated by pragmatic means, moral statements are capable of validation and thus cognitively relevant. Feigl explains:

> In analogy to the analysis of justification in the cognitive domain I suggest that moral judgments are to be reconstructed as knowledge-claims and as subject of validation (or invalidation) by virtue of their accordance (or non-accordance) with the supreme norms of a given ethical system. In order to carry out this reconstruction, judgments of right and wrong, and likewise statements of obligation and of rights, must be construed as empirical propositions. (Feigl 1981, 388)

Whereas the radical non-cognitivist would regard fundamental commitments (basic principles) and moral statements as equivalent and, consequently, both as purely emotional, Feigl is concerned to 'rescue' moral statements as knowledge claims. For this reason, he considers his own approach "in more than one way closer to the Kantian" (Feigl 1981, 390) than to the emotivist view as advocated by Charles L. Stevenson (cf. Stevenson 1944). On the other hand, with respect to fundamental commitments, he explicitly admits that "the relativism implicit in the emotivist analyses (of Stevenson, for example) may prove insuperable" (Feigl 1981, 388).

On the whole, then, Feigl's scientific humanism, being based on fundamental commitments such as 'I believe in human equality,' can only be justified pragmati-

cally and this (in the last analysis) by emotive appeals. The moral statements *contained* in this particular frame, e. g. 'Being racist is wrong' or 'Behaving fair is good,' have the status of empirical propositions, just as the answers to internal questions in Carnap's sense (see Carnap 1950, 22).[10] To be more concrete, in the given context, moral statements like these are part of a liberal (undogmatic) form of *education.* In Feigl' own words:

> I think that all we can do in human society is to avoid the preaching of morality. Instead we should educate by example, and especially in regard to our children. … If I had any reason to believe that orthodox religions would promote peace and justice in this world I wouldn't criticize them at all. The empirical evidence seems to speak against them. … The flame and sword of Islam is one example, the Crusades another. (Feigl 1981, 420)

In light of this empirical evidence against theistic religion, one might plausibly conclude that scientific humanism needs to take over. Or so it is argued.

9.5 Feigl's Humanist Approach in Relation to Sellars'

Regarding the idea of a scientific humanism, Roy Wood Sellars can be considered an important precursor of Feigl. His main contributions to the humanism issue include *The Next Step in Religion* from 1918 and *Religion Coming of Age* from 1928.[11] Moreover, Sellars co-authored the famous "Humanist Manifesto" from 1933. However, although Sellars' approach is quite close to Feigl's in its plea for the replacement of the theistic with the humanistic point of view, his interpretation of the sta-

10 As a reviewer of this paper has plausibly suggested, there is some relation here to Moritz Schlick's quite similar account of moral statements in his *Problems of Ethics* from 1930. However, it has been argued by others (for example Siegetsleitner 2014, 313 – 317) that Schlick actually *rejected* the non-cognitivist approach to ethics. At any rate, Schlick's method in ethics was explicitly psychological and thus implied the *subordination* of a supposedly autonomous ethics to empirical psychology (see Schlick 1939, ch. I, sect. 12). This in turn, I submit, is a strong motive for a non-cognitivist interpretation, even if I cannot elaborate on this point here (for reasons of space).

11 Interestingly, in his retrospective *Reflections on American Philosophy from Within*, Sellars claims that it was he himself who, with his *The Next Step in Religion*, "introduced humanism in a systematic way to the English-speaking world. This was before John Dewey, Sir Julian Huxley and others became spokesman for a similar outlook" (Sellars 1969, 153). Indeed, Huxley's seminal *Religion without Revelation* did not appear until 1927 and Dewey's "What Humanism Means to Me" as late as 1930.

tus of *moral values* differs significantly from Feigl's non-cognitivist approach. It is this point on which I shall briefly focus in the following.

To begin with, Sellars starts his *The Next Step in Religion* with the thesis that "the deepest spiritual life has always concerned itself with the appreciation and maintenance of values. He who acknowledges, and wishes to further, human values cannot be said to be irreligious or unspiritual" (Sellars 1918, Foreword). Nonetheless, Sellars argues, being not irreligious does not entail being a theist. He points out:

> Such attitudes and expectations as prayer, ritual, worship, immortality, providence, are expressions of the pre-scientific view of the world. But as man partly outgrows, partly learns to reject the primitive thought of the world, this perspective and these elements will drop from religion. (Sellars 1918, 6)

From here it is only a small step to the following re-definition of religion: "*Religion is loyalty to the values of life*" (Sellars 1918, 7; emphasis in the original).

Now, chapter XVI of *The Next Step in Religion* is entitled "The Humanist's Religion." The context of this chapter is what Sellars calls "the shadow of the Great War" (Sellars 1918, 215), which in 1918 had just ended. Its central thesis is that the "religion of human values" must be the "leader" regarding political and economic affairs and that there is no need for a "rabid anti-theism" (Sellars 1918, 215). Instead, Sellars argues for a fusion of spirituality and reason, implying that "reason by itself is not enough" (Sellars 1918, 218–219). He explicitly demarcates his position from the one defended by August Comte, claiming that the latter "was unable to cut himself loose from his association with organized Christianity" (Sellars 1918, 219).[12] Last but not least, Sellars proposes a "marriage of naturalism and humanism" (Sellars 1918, 219). What is meant by this becomes desirably clear when one consults the 1928 *Religion Coming to Age.* There, Sellars argues for a "new" kind of naturalism which is characterized by the "enlarging" of the conception of the natural (see Sellars 1928, 237–238). Specifically, Sellars believes that a *social* level must be added to the biological level if naturalism is to be truly convincing. At the same time, he assumes that the social level is itself rooted in man's nature, so that humanism remains within a framework accessible by scientific means. In his *The*

12 It was mainly Comte's *followers* who upheld quasi-Christian forms of organization and cult all over the world. One thinks of the Chapelle de l'Humanité in Paris, the Church of Humanity in Liverpool or the Templo da Humanitade in Rio de Janeiro. But also in Comte himself one can find what he called the "New Supreme Great Being" (*Nouveau Grand-Être Suprême*) which he understood as a comprehensive system of faith and ritual, including priesthood, liturgy and sacraments. For further details, see Davies (1997, 28–29).

Philosophy of Physical Realism, published in 1932, Sellars summarizes this point even more pointedly as follows:

> I speak of naturalism's enlarged span. I mean by this that the naturalistic outlook has spread effectively to human life and social affairs. Gone now is the clumsiness in these matters of the older naturalism. Science and philosophy have marched hand in hand into this territory, science gathering facts and building up new concepts, philosophy analyzing these concepts, suggesting modifications and relating them by means of its principles to the categories of antecedent levels. (Sellars 1932, 19)

Through this "spread of the naturalistic outlook to the human fields," Sellars continues, the new naturalism—or, as he alternatively calls it, the "new materialism"—"flowers into humanism" (Sellars 1932, 19).

All this is quite in line with Feigl's corresponding views. But there are also significant differences that have to do with the fact that Sellars' position, unlike Feigl's, points in the direction of an *ethical cognitivism.* Thus, for example, in chapter XVII of *The Philosophy of Physical Realism*, Sellars proclaims: "I shall myself take as objective a view of values as possible" (Sellars 1932, 445). Interestingly, Sellars combines this orientation with a clear commitment to *communism* as an "ideal of social organization" (Sellars 1932, 445). Characterizing himself as a "religious humanist" (Sellars 1932, 448), he explicitly rejects relativism (or subjectivism), since, in his view, relativism entails what he calls *factualism*, i. e., the reliance on "brute facts without possibility of revision through discussion and investigation" (Sellars 1932, 453). Sellars explains:

> [F]actualism is much like external authoritarianism so far as values are concerned. It discounts development, increased insight, creative understanding. It is abrupt, limited in its time-reference, unaware of the proper approach to questions of value, negligent of possibilities. It is for this reason that the word "should" has no meaning for it. (Sellars 1932, 455)

Accordingly, in contrast to Feigl, who in the context of vindication advocates the relativist perspective and its quasi-authoritarian recourse to emotive appeals, Sellars commits himself to the objectivity and thus the cognitive status of basic commitments, i. e., values.[13] What is more, Sellars, again in contrast to Feigl, considers

13 W. Preston Warren, in his commentary on Sellars' philosophy, correctly recaps the latter's central claim in ethics as follows: "The philosopher indeed has the task of standing back to get perspective on morality and its demands and of undertaking to show which ethical claims are most adequate, and hence defensible. His job is not, therefore, just the disclosure of principles but the determination of the *principle* of moral principles: the meaning and function of morality and its categories, and the how of its most effective formulation" (Warren 1975, 92).

valuing an *autonomous form of cognition* rather than a purely pragmatic matter. In his own words:

> What I am trying to do is to make explicit the mechanism of valuing, much as I sought in epistemology to make explicit the mechanism of perceiving. The point is that valuing is a supplementary process which presupposes some measure of cognition and which regards as interpretatively relevant data which are irrelevant to pure cognition. The reason is evident. It is that appraisal is something different from pure knowing. It is a viewing of the object in the light of data which have the capacity to reveal how the object enters the economy of our lives. And it is evident that only subjective data intimately connected with the drama of the self or of the social group … could have the capacity to disclose this power of the object. (Sellars 1932, 467)

Consequently, non-cognitivism is not an option for Sellars, the reason being that appraisal as the one component of valuing always *presupposes* knowledge as the other.[14]

It is important to note, however, that Sellars does *not* embrace value realism in the sense of a thorough (consistent) Platonism, i. e., the view that values exist independently of the valuing subjects. Rather, his perspective focuses on the *process* of valuing and thus on the interplay between the valuing subject and his or her respective object of interest and appraisal. It is against this backdrop that Sellars, in his essay "Can a Reformed Materialism do Justice to Values?" (1944), aims to develop "a *via media* between Platonism, on the one hand, and merely affective subjectivism, on the other" (Sellars 1970, 241). To be sure, the Platonist line in his thought, implies that "axiology cannot be separated from ontology" (Sellars 1970, 240).[15] But the actually important point for him amounts to his "thesis that value judgments—including moral ones—are as genuinely interpretative and referential as cognitional ones" (Sellars 1970, 241) and that "valuation involves a peculiar reflexive story added to the cognitional framework *and having its own kind of*

14 Warren rightly states in this connection: "Comparably, with the non-cognitivists and their view that values are in essence the envincings of feelings, the problem of value [according to Sellars] is one of definition in relationship to knowledge" (Warren 1975, 82–83).

15 But notice, again, that he explicitly argues against "value reification" (Sellars 1932, 242) in the thorough Platonist sense. The objects of valuing are, in his view, the ordinary everyday objects and persons that surround us. See, in this connection, also the *Fifth Thesis* of the 1933 "Humanist Manifesto," which reads: "Humanism asserts that the nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values. Obviously humanism does not deny the possibility of realities as yet undiscovered, but it does insist that the way to determine the existence and value of any and all realities is by means of intelligent inquiry and by the assessment of their relation to human needs. Religion must formulate its hopes and plans in the light of the scientific spirit and method" (quoted from Sellars 1970, 333).

objective significance" (Sellars 1970, 242; emphasis in the original). From this, his critique of *logical empiricism* seems to follow immediately. Sellars writes:

> [T]he shortcomings of the logical positivists in their theory of values parallel their sensationalism in their theory of knowledge. Since they really have only sensations instead of physical continuants, in the one case, we should expect them to have only feelings and their objective import in the other. (Sellars 1970, 243)

This assessment is undoubtedly distorting since the logical empiricist movement was much more multifaceted than Sellars insinuates here. As we have seen with Feigl, it is *not* only feelings that have "objective import" in the field of ethics. The latter's moderate non-cognitivism does *by all means* allow for cognitively objective moral statements. It is only the fundamental commitments, or what Sellars considers values, that are transferred to the pragmatic or emotive level of choosing an overarching linguistic framework. Indeed, exactly at this point Sellars and Feigl —albeit both defenders of humanism—part ways.

9.6 Feigl, Sellars, and the Vienna Circle in America

Let us return to the context of Feigl's scientific humanism, a context that was undoubtedly determined by Feigl's emigration to the United States. We have already seen that the former members of the Vienna Circle supported each other in the new American context. Moreover, they were supported by American philosophers such as C. I. Lewis, Charles Morris, Ralph Barton Perry, and Willard van Orman Quine. In Feigl's case, it is interesting to see that *his philosophical position in general began to solidify first and foremost in the American context.*[16] Thus, in his retrospective essay "The *Wiener Kreis* in America," published in 1969, he reports at one point: "Among the American philosophers who have left me with a lasting and deep impression are—in the early years—John Dewey, Ralph Barton Perry, C. I. Lewis, C. H. Langford, R. W. Sellars, and Morris Cohen" (Feigl 1981, 90). As is well known, Feigl attempted to establish a *realistic variant* of logical empiricism in the course of the 1940s and early 1950s (for details, see Neuber 2011). Roy Wood Sellars proved to be an important source of inspiration in this connection. Feigl looking back:

16 Notice that he was as young as 29 when he came to America.

> My own emancipation began in the middle thirties and was stabilized in the forties. Studies and teaching in the field of the philosophy of science helped me regain, refine, and buttress my earlier realistic position. I was also greatly encouraged by the scientific realism of Hans Reichenbach and the realistic epistemologies of my steadfast dear friends Roy W. Sellars and Wilfrid Sellars. (Feigl 1981, 39)

Feigl, being a personal friend of Roy Wood Sellars, was also in correspondence with him. As far as I can gather from the available archival material, there was no exchange between the two on the humanism question. However, there is a highly interesting letter from Sellars to Feigl regarding the realism issue. In this letter —dated March 3, 1945—Sellars again reduces logical empiricism to a rather rude variety of sensationalism. He writes:

> Dear Feigl:
> I have been writing a critique of positivism—or what[e]ver alias is preferable—in an endeavor to locate just where the movement is opposed to physical realism and a critical type of materialism. In other words, I am trying to find some definite differentia. … Now I may be wrong about it but it has been my belief that the European positivists knew little about the development of Anglo-American realism at the time they were incubating their position. I gathered as much from a conversation with Franck [sic!]. I gather from your references in your paper [Feigl 1943?] that the movement is very hospitable and inclusive. But I do feel that there must be some principles which are basic. Otherwise it is more like a crowd movement than a philosophy. I hope you will help me to locate the differentia. My suspicion is that you reduce perception to sense-data and do not recognize the factors of denotative reference and symbolism and characterization. In other words, the difference is epistemological. (HFP, 03–221-D)

It is very likely that these lines helped Feigl to sharpen his realistic instincts, especially since what Sellars calls *denotative reference* played a crucial role in Feigl's mature account of (scientific) realism (see Feigl 1950 and Neuber 2011).

Be that as it may, with respect to humanism, Feigl and Sellars represent two different approaches associated with different conceptions of basic values. While Sellars argued in terms of cognitivism, Feigl defended a moderate form of non-cognitivism close to that of Carnap. All in all, the idea of a scientific humanism dominated Feigl's thinking from the late 1930s until the end of his life and it documents that the emigrated logical empiricists had more to offer than merely a logico-theoretical perspective.

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