

HEINRICH RICKERT'S PHILOSOPHY OF CULTURE
AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

FILOZOFIJA KULTURE HAJNRIHA RIKERTA
I NJEN ZNAČAJ

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BETWEEN HISTORY AND SYSTEM. HEINRICH RICKERT'S CONCEPT OF CULTURE¹

ABSTRACT

The paper reconstructs the concept of culture that emerges from Heinrich Rickert's neo-Kantianism, uncovering its major historical-problematic, methodological, and philosophical implications. The central theme of the first section is the idea that modern culture is uniquely characterized by "fragmentation". It also unpacks the programme of Rickert's philosophy of culture, which pursues the task of reconstructing the lost unity of culture. The second section explains the methodological implications of the problematic relationship between value and reality established in cultural goods and evaluations. Finally, the third section reconstructs the Rickertian system of values, with its peculiar effort to reconcile historicity and value absoluteness. The last part develops a critical discussion of the Rickertian project.

KEYWORDS

culture, philosophy of culture, neo-Kantianism, philosophy of values

1. Kant as a Philosopher of Modern Culture

At an early stage Baden Neo-Kantianism took on the features of a philosophy of culture. Already in some of Windelband's essays of the late 1870s we may in fact clearly recognize a cultural philosophical intent, driven by the precise identification of modernity as an age of dispersion and incompleteness.² Rickert, in turn, adopted the culture philosophical interpretation of Kantianism proposed by Windelband and proceeded to include it in the systemic framework of an exhaustive philosophy of values. In a volume published on the bicentenary of Kant's birth, *contra* to the rising irrationalistic and life philosophical

1 English translation by Dr. Matteo F. Olivieri.

2 I refer here to Windelband 1878. On the issue see Morrone 2017b. On the culture philosophical value of the Neo-Kantian movement see Tenbruck 1994, Ferrari 1998. Also see the contributions collated in Krijnen - Ferrari - Fiorato (2014). Cf. Flach 2007; Krijnen 2015.

(*lebensphilosophisch*) cultural context, Rickert chose to reaffirm the current importance of criticism and its efficacy in expressing the conscience of the modern age (Rickert 1924). Rickert believes – closely following suit to his teacher³ – that only through Kantian philosophy we can achieve a philosophical reflection on modern culture and the clear recognition of its structural complexity.⁴

This argumentative goal drives Rickert to laying out a philosophy historical framework aimed at defining the “essence” of modern culture, differentiating it from ancient and medieval culture. Therefore he outlines, rather schematically, the “principles” characterizing the classical Greek, Roman, and Christian civilizations.

The first one of these cultures marks the rise of the theoretical man and – in them – the awareness of the value of truth accomplished in science. The Greek theoretical man bears forth a specific form of *intellectualism* that will prove to be decisive in shaping western thought. Classical Greek culture, in fact, understood reality as a logical cosmos and believed the *logos* to be essence of the world; therefore the material reality of the senses was demoted to mere appearance, an unauthentic being of a lesser degree. Logic ultimately converged into ontology. Knowledge was intended as picturing (*Abbildung*) a given objective structure and the object was identified in the intelligible, i.e. in that which conforms to the intellect. Any aspect of reality that did not conform to the laws of thinking was rejected to the domain of appearance and un-authenticity. Rickert believed such intellectualism to have had decisive effects even in the sphere of ethics, determining the primacy of theoretical values and thus establishing knowledge as man’s ultimate *destination*. Knowledge and theoretical contemplation enjoyed therefore the highest rank in the classical Greek system of virtues.⁵

The second principle, consequent to the classical Roman civilization, marks the pre-eminence of the instance of the will and its disciplining within political life by means of law. According to Rickert, only in the classical Roman civilization did it become possible to develop an adequate reflection on practical life in its communitarian aspect (Rickert 1924: 64).

The third principle finally, which coincides with Christianity, marks the advent of a religious sentiment of oriental origin that re-evaluates entirely the individual dimension of existence, through the personal relationship with god. Yet, by recognizing value to the irrational aspects of human life, this principle inaugurates an irreparable conflict with the rationalism of the first two. It is a structural conflict which the cultural synthesis operated by the Church in the Middle Ages was able to resolve merely ostensibly, by virtue of a principle of authority, one that is unifying but not harmonizing (Rickert 1924: 109 f.).

3 On this issue see Windelband 1881. In this *lecture* in commemoration of the centennial of the publication of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Windelband argues that the meaning of Kantian philosophy consists in having provided an adequate expression and conclusive awareness to the cultural situation of the present (ibid.: 121).

4 Rickert 1924: V.

5 On Greek intellectualism cf. ibid.: 53 ff.

To understand the Rickertian approach to a philosophy of culture, we need not to scrutinize further this simplistic outline of the philosophy of history, but we must understand how it contributes to determining the character of modern culture in its form – rather than its content. According to Rickert, modernity is born of the dissolution of the ostensible synthesis of Greek, Roman, and Christian civilizations established in the Middle Ages. Thus modernity is the age of fragmentation: „*Die moderne Kultur*“, Rickert writes, „*ist von Kräften beherrscht, die einander widerstreben, und das moderne Kulturbewußtsein trägt daher, um mit Hegel zu reden, den Charakter der ‚Zerrissenheit‘*“ (Rickert 1924: 121). Modern culture is a fragmented culture, not merely nor principally because, in its criticism of the principle of authority, it refuses the exterior compromises by which medieval man had been apparently pacified. Modernity reckons its character of fragmentation not simply because of the contextual consequences of historical processes. The dissolution of the medieval synthesis brings to light that “the lack of unity is in the essence of the thing”.⁶ The process of culture is one of growing differentiation among cultural spheres, which increasingly tend to autonomy and reciprocal independence, rejecting any subordination or reduction to principles external to their immanent legality.

Rickert explicitly recalls the Weberian analyses, remarking on the conflictive nature of modern culture and the irreducible plurality of its components, which results in a reiteration in the present of the ancient polytheism of values and in an irreconcilable conflict of world-views and diverse appraisals (Weber 1989). Yet Rickert’s reference to Weber is coupled with a remark that is essential to understand the general meaning of his argument. Weber – Rickert argues – understands the fragmentation of modern culture as a “long-lasting and essentially inevitable” condition and not as the assumption that justifies and elicits the unifying mission of a philosophy of culture (Rickert 1924: 123). In this sense, philosophy of culture indeed presupposes the full acknowledgement of modernity’s fragmentation – i.e. the differential and conflicting nature of the diverse cultural spheres and contexts of value – in order for it to completely develop as a theoretical reflection aimed at elaborating a “new synthesis” and thus aimed at healing the fragmentation of the present era.

This is indeed the unique meaning that Rickert attributes to Kantian philosophy: for the first time, we come to complete philosophical awareness of the process of differentiation and autonomization of cultural spheres, characteristic of the modern age since its beginning, that had remained essentially incomprehensible to pre-Kantian systems. Modern philosophy prior to Kant constantly oscillated between the need to reiterate Greek intellectualism and a form of anti-intellectual sensualism. In the former tendency we reckon the re-emergence of the ancient pretension of subordinating to the value of truth and to science the totality of the spheres of value of culture, ultimately rejecting the pluralistic essence of modern culture and the dignity of its a-theoretical spheres. In the latter tendency, the diverse strands of modern sensualism

6 Rickert 1924. All translations of German texts are mine. GM.

and even anti-intellectual enlightenment – according to Rickert – were never capable of developing a theoretical foundation adequate for a philosophical understanding of a-theoretical values and therefore never reached a scientific evaluation of culture in its entirety. Indeed Kant was able to overcome the opposing unilateralities of the systems of the modern age, and was the first to successfully develop a philosophy of modern culture with scientific basis.

We should look more closely at how Rickert describes the structure of Kant's *culture philosophical* accomplishment. It consists of two distinct moments bound within a logical and historical-problematical connection. The first moment occurs when the “spell of intellectualism” is definitively broken by the Copernican turn in the theory of knowledge (Rickert 1924: 160). The object of theoretical knowledge no longer constitutes, for Kant, the essence of the world; rather it limitedly concerns a specific region within the sphere of values (Rickert 1924: 158). The logical moment no longer incorporates in itself the whole of reality, indeed the latter is presupposed as the irrational domain within which the former may unfold. Still an unsurpassable chasm remains between the enlightening mission of the logical form and the obscurity of the a-logical material.

This fundamental anti-intellectualistic turn in the theory of knowledge, this reckoning of the irrationality of reality and its preservation from any emanative inclusion, is what allows Kant to achieve adequate understanding of the complex of modern culture and thus also of the a-theoretical values, such as ethical, religious, and aesthetic ones. In this sense, Rickert argues that the “liberation” from intellectualism is a condition of possibility for the “appreciation (*Würdigung*)” of the a-theoretical domains of culture (Rickert 1924: 146). Critical thought acts in limiting the possibilities of the intellect, but at the same time in recognizing the irrational values of culture and their autonomy. The irrational no longer needs to be driven out of the domain of validity, as was the case in systems of intellectualism, and can now therefore be fully valorised.

This opening of Kantian philosophy to the plurality and autonomy of cultural values is not limited nor fulfilled by its awareness of fragmentation.⁷ Rickert insists that Kantianism does not mean to be the philosophy of fragmentation, i.e. it does not resolve in a mere ratification of the divided conscience of modernity. For Kantianism the conscience of fragmentation is the necessary assumption to pose “the problem of ultimate unity” of culture in a way that is adequate to the modern age (Rickert 1924: 191). Precisely this is the goal of Kantian philosophy: to develop a new kind of critical synthesis, capable of adequately accounting for the irreducible diversity of the spheres of value that must be unified (Rickert 1924: 204).

Kant showed the way to such new synthesis but wasn't always capable of pursuing it with adequate coherence and determination. Yet the path to carrying out the new synthesis is clear to Rickert: we must recognize the primacy of practical reason over the theoretical one and thus focus on the common value

⁷ Rickert 1924: 202: “*von einer endgültigen Sanktionierung der modernen Zerrissenheit durch den Kritizismus darf keine Rede sein*”. Cf. also *ibid.*: 208.

foundation that binds the theoretical and the practical to every other sphere of value. At the basis of any theoretical evaluation there is a supra-theoretical moment (“*ein Ueberlogisches im Logos*”), a will to power (“*Wille zur Wahrheit*”), that refers to the dimension of non-being, i.e. validity. We must therefore access this sphere of validity and reconstruct its formal structure. Only by this process we may recollect cultural goods from modern dispersion; only by reference to a system of formal values we may recompose the unity of modern culture.

2. Culture, Cultural Goods, Value

This introduction to Rickert's philosophy of culture from the perspective of the philosophy of history has allowed to clarify its historical-problematic context – the conscience of fragmentation of modernity – and its theoretical goal – the determination of the unity of culture by the definition of a system of formal values. Now the issue at hand is to reconstruct with greater detail the theoretical outline of this philosophical program.

Rickert identifies the object of philosophy as the world in its totality (“*Weltganze*”) (Rickert 1910: 1) and not as the aggregate of the parts that compose it. The single components of the *Weltganze*, instead, constitute the objects of the special sciences (*Einzelwissenschaften*), which proceed to a specialized dissection of reality and remain necessarily bound to the partial perspectives within which they operate. The problem of the whole remains constitutively precluded to them.

The domain of the empirical sciences articulates in two fundamental directions. Windelband had distinguished nomothetic sciences, oriented towards the knowledge of the general as expressed by laws, from idiographic sciences, oriented towards the knowledge of the value-connoted individual (Windelband 1894). In his book *Grenzen* Rickert had developed and clarified the assumptions of his teacher, re-articulating the methodological dualism into a distinction between generalizing natural sciences and individualizing cultural historical sciences.⁸ Indeed the latter engage in those aspects of reality embedded with value and thus they take into consideration *goods* and *evaluations*, but they do so always and ever with the purpose of reconstructing their empirical origin and determining the causal links within which they are embedded.

In spite of being empirical disciplines, which hold real elements connoted by values as their object, the historical cultural sciences (*historische Kulturwissenschaften*) constitute an essential precondition to philosophical reflection. Windelband had argued that “history is the organ of philosophy” (Windelband 1910: 284) and Rickert follows suit by stating that “the route to the supra-historical (*Ueberhistorische*) can pass only by the historical (*Historische*)”.⁹ This

8 Cf. Rickert 1902. This work was revised and republished many times. The latest edition, the fifth one, was published in 1929.

9 Rickert 1910: 18. „Nur durch das Historische hindurch kann der Weg zum Ueberhistorischen führen“.

means that access to and conceptual determination of the sphere of validity, which philosophy aspires to, is possible only through the critical consideration of the contexts of reality in which values take place and are realized. There is no other way by which we can bring value forth to philosophical reflection if not by recognizing its “realization” in the goods and in the evaluations and thus accepting their coming-to-being in history. Value-philosophical reflection assumes that it is somehow “provided” with values within the historical-cultural reality and only on account of this ambiguous “givenness”, only tracing the mysterious adherence (“*haften*”) that binds goods and evaluations to the values, it is capable of achieving the subject matter of its reflection.¹⁰

The close instrumental bond that ties historical sciences of culture to the philosophical reflection on values implies, on the other hand, a substantial distinction between their ultimate knowledge goals which we must not ignore.

The cultural sciences are not meant to define the articulation of the system of values, nor can they provide answers to the problem of worldview (*Weltanschauung*), which remains the exclusive responsibility of philosophical reflection. Their scope is limited to the causal knowledge of objective realities endowed with value. On the other hand, the method of the *cultural sciences* is capable of achieving full “critical objectivity” – which goes beyond mere “empirical objectivity” – only in reference to value philosophical foundation of those general cultural values that constitute the heuristic principles of selection and methodological elaboration of their material.¹¹ Only if the perspectives from which we select the segments of value-attributed reality destined to be involved in causal analysis can be traced back to a system of values objectively – and not merely empirically – valid, we may then attribute complete objectivity to the outcomes of the *cultural sciences*. Therefore, though on one hand history is the organ of philosophy, on the other hand philosophy, in as much as it is a doctrine of values, is the only kind of knowledge capable of securing a complete foundation to the empirical sciences of culture.

Philosophy cannot be limited to examining the single parts of the whole of values (*Wertganze*), nor can it delude itself to be able to understand it by inquiring the full extent of the intensive and extensive multiplicity of its parts. Philosophy aspires to know the whole as a whole (Rickert 1921a: 16), a whole

10 Cf. Rickert 1910: 17. “Culture is the concept of a good and can be understood only as such. In cultural goods the multiplicity of values is precipitated practically in the course of historical development. Philosophy must therefore direct its gaze to cultural goods, to find in them the multiplicity of values. To this purpose it must call unto science, which treats culture as an objective reality, disseminating its richness and multiplicity in a individualizing way. This is the task of history. Not thus subjects, but objective realities, are what philosophy, in as much as it consists of a doctrine of values, must examine, in reference to the values that adhere to them. From these cultural objects it must separate the values, attempting to examine which values make cultural goods of cultural objects. Then it will know such values in their pure state as values, and it will understand them” (ibidem).

11 On the concepts of empirical and *critical objectivity* see chapter V of *Grenzen*.

conceived as the “complete totality of the world” [*voll-endlichen Totalität der Welt*]” (Rickert 1921a: 20). Philosophy will never reach such finiteness of the whole; it will constantly be *en route* striving towards an ideal goal of knowing and inquiring. Yet that goal can be nothing but the complete totality and philosophy can be nothing but “philosophy of the complete totality (*Voll-Endung*)” (Rickert 1921a: 21).

Rickert includes the question of *Weltanschauung* within the domain of philosophy. The totality of the world cannot be understood only in an objective sense, as an object (“*Weltobjekt*”), but it must be examined also in the subjective sense and it must include the analysis of the “position of man towards the world”, of man’s strive to provide meaning to his existence (Rickert 1921a: 25). “The question of the world is, thus, in the relationship between the Self and the world” (Rickert 1910: 2). But, according to Rickert, this relationship cannot be resolved in the antithesis between subjectivism and objectivism that underlies the whole of western metaphysics; an antithesis that Rickert considers utterly inadequate to tackle the problem of worldview.¹² This incapacity of both objectivism and subjectivism to adequately answer the problem of the meaning of human existence depends, according to Rickert, on the fact that they are based upon a concept of world that is too narrow and basically limited to the reality. What has been left precluded to pre-Kantian philosophy is the dimension of non-being, that is to say, validity. Validity extends beyond the real; it represents the foundation of its every possible reality. The world must thus be understood in terms of the irreducible dualism between value and reality.

Such dualism – foundational to Neokantian perspective – elicits numerous problems. They are problems similar to those that western metaphysics had to tackle when faced with pre-critical formulations of the doctrine of two worlds (“*Zweiweltenlehre*”). The obstacles to such dualism concern the possibility and mode of relationship between the two spheres of the world, between the two realms of value and reality. An appropriate conception of world must be capable of keeping together the two realms of reality and value and capable of expounding their bonds, yet at the same time preserving their structural separation.¹³

Rickert believes he can tackle the difficult problem of the bond between value and reality on account of two categories of real objects in which such bond is *de facto* realized. The first category of objects is the one of *cultural goods* (*Güter*). They are objective realities with value or – as Rickert often writes – to which a value “adheres” (*haften*). In them, and by them, a certain value is “realized”; it has shaped a certain section of reality to itself. Yet there is an essential ambiguity in the expression “*Wertrealisierung*”; it seems to refer to the “becoming real” of the value and therefore to a substantial identification of the

¹² On the specific details – which it is unnecessary herein to expound – of Rickert’s argument see Rickert 1910: 1–11.

¹³ Cf. Rickert 1910: 11 ff. The second paragraph of the essay is titled “*Wert und Wirklichkeit*”, i.e. value and reality.

value with the good within which it is realized.¹⁴ Yet here lies – according to Rickert – a fatal misunderstanding. The good, in as much as it is a real object with value, cannot be confused with the non-being validity unique to values. In the case of the good, the value merely enters into a relationship with or adheres to a certain real object (Rickert 1910: 12). Within what Rickert considers as the error of historicism, there is the pretension to confuse the good – in its historical-objective constitution – with the sphere of non-being validity and therefore to believe that history can configure the domain of the origin of values (Rickert 1910: 16). To clarify this concept, Rickert makes use of the work of art as an example: in it the real elements that compose it (in the case of a painting the canvass, pigments, and varnish) by no means constitute its aesthetic value, which must instead be sought elsewhere and, at any rate, in the sphere of the non-real (Rickert 1910: 12). Therefore the bond between the real good and the un-real value does not configure their identification. Even in such bond, they remain separate, and according to Rickert such separateness is a structural element of the world.

The second category of real objects in which a bond between value and reality is realized is that of *evaluations* (*Wertungen*). They are real actions that can be comprised within a psychological consideration of reality, similarly to how goods are comprised within a historical consideration. Indeed, and at a closer examination, evaluations are but a perspective *a parte subjecti* on the good. In fact the value is always “bound to a subject, who evaluates certain objects” and even the work of art is such only when there is a subject who attributes value to it (Rickert 1910: 12). Nonetheless this doesn’t mean that the value is identified with the evaluation, or that the evaluation subjectively determines the origin of the value, its becoming in reality on account of the value-activity of consciousness. Rickert strongly refuses this kind of psychological incomprehension of the sphere of validity. The evaluation is not the value, but it corresponds to the institution of a bond between an evaluating subject and the value that is evaluated.

Rickert admits the difficulties in adequately thinking about the nature of the bond between value and reality that is realized in the goods or in the evaluations. The obscurity of the *adhering* of value to real objects runs the risk of leaving in utter misunderstanding the relationship between the two domains that constitute the totality of the world, casting over them an un-relatedness that elicits lethal consequences for the *issue of worldview*.

The problem takes on a certain degree of importance even in the methodological field. Culture, in as much as it is the totality of historically realized goods, remains exposed to the harmful effects of an evanescent relationship with the sphere of validity. On the other hand, the insistence of empirical sciences on the *effectuality* of their objects, and even the definition of history as

14 It is an ambiguity that Rickert’s student, Emil Lask, attempted to probe in all its speculative possibilities by the concept of *Wertindividualität*. Cf. Lask 1902. On the issue see Morrone 2017a.

a “science of reality” (*Wirklichkeitswissenschaft*), lead to the ambiguous effect of reifying culture and its goods, thus making their evaluation problematic.¹⁵ The world would thus appear split between a reality bereft of value and an un-real validity.

This problematic issue in the doctrine of values drives Rickert to further expanding the concept of philosophy and its scope. Philosophy must be able to think of a dimension that integrates value and reality and yet that does not endanger their structural separateness, therefore capable of preserving the constitutive dualism of the world (Rickert 1910: 22). The subject matter is, in other words, to identify an “intermediate domain (*Zwischenreich*)”, which may link the two spheres of value and reality preserving their “duality and particularity” (*ibid.*). To this purpose, Rickert believes we must invest special attention in analysing the structure of the *Wertung*: on the one hand, we must avoid reducing it to a mere object of empirical knowledge, or to a simple psychic reality, and, on the other hand, we must look beyond the immediate lived experience of the act of evaluation (Rickert 1910: 24). In this perspective it becomes clear that the evaluation is “taking a position towards values (*Stellungnahme zu Werte*)” (Rickert 1910: 25) and it consists in the institution of a relationship between the spheres of reality and value, still taking on its meaning autonomous from the two terms it relates. Thus an intermediate realm occurs between the one of value and reality. A realm which Rickert identifies in the sphere of sense:

The sense of the action or of the evaluation (*Wertung*) is not its being, its psychic existence, nor the value; rather it is the meaning of the action *for* the value, thus constituting the bond between the two realms. We shall call this third realm the one of the *sense*, to set it aside from all forms of existence.¹⁶

By this reasoning we fulfil the domain of a philosophy of values and, by the interpretation of the sense, rediscover a means of accessing reality and thus the historical “fullness of life” (Rickert 1910: 29). Philosophy must determine the system of values, but it must also define the sense that the multiplicity of cultural goods takes on with reference to such system. Only by this reasoning will it be possible to reconstruct the unity of culture and heal it from the fragmentation of the modern age.

Determining the concept of sense moreover contributes to clarifying the concept of culture and to resolving (at least in the intentions of Rickert) the ambiguous convergence between the real element and the value that characterizes it. In the 1921 edition of *Grenzen*, Rickert argues that culture does not

15 Historical sciences – Rickert argues in the *Grenzen* – “represent reality not in reference to the *general*, but only in reference to the *particular* [*das Besondere*], because only the particular is what really happens” (Rickert 1902: 251). In contrast to the natural sciences, which, “tend to shift from particular to the general, from the real to what is valid”, they address only to the real. As such, historical sciences are “the true *science of reality* (*Wirklichkeitswissenschaft*)” (*ibid.*: 255).

16 Rickert 1910: 26. In *System der Philosophie*, Rickert mentions the “immanent sense” (Rickert 1921: 261) distinct from transcendent sense (*ibid.*: 271).

refer to “mere realities as such, but to real processes that have a ‘meaning’ [*Bedeutung*] or a “sense” [*Sinn*] that goes beyond their real being” (Rickert 1921b: 406). Therefore, by “culture” we may intend two different things. Firstly it may be understood as “the real historical life inhered with a sense which makes it culture”; secondly it may be understood as the “unreal “content” *per se*, thinkable as the sense of such life, enfranchised from any real being and interpretable in reference to cultural values” (ibid.). In the same way as we distinguish the “real psychic act of judging” from “the unreal logic content”, likewise we distinguish “culture as the reality inhered by a sense” from “the unreal sense, conceptually separate from it” (Rickert 1921b: 407).

This solution also adequately clarifies the relationship between *culture* and *life*. In criticizing the philosophy of life, Rickert reaffirms that it is impossible to gain stances of value from mere life (*bloßes Leben*). In fact, life is the “necessary condition” of any culture and thus does not have a value of its own; it is rather the instrumental substrate for the realization of the values of culture (Rickert 1911-12: 153). But, beyond this conditionality and taken in itself, life is devoid sense.¹⁷ Rickert sometimes explains this lack of sense and value that characterizing life as an actual anti-culturality (*Kulturfeindlichkeit*). In fact, cultural goods are not the mere objectification of life, but rather – in a certain sense – they represent a kind of suppression of life: “to achieve goods endowed with their own value we must (...), to a certain degree, ‘kill’ life” (Rickert 1911-12: 154). To suppress life means separating from the mere flow of life the “non-vital or unreal” element, which constitutes the content of value of the cultural good, isolating it from the insignificant dross, affirming it, taking on a stance towards it by an action that shapes reality. Through life, something extraneous to life is realized, i.e. ‘its’ value. Such intrinsic value (“*Eigenwert*”) belongs to the cultural good only improperly; in fact it transcends the cultural good and reconnects it to the unreal sphere of validity (*Geltung*). The cultural good is the evidence of an act of resistance to life, an act which strives to redeem life’s meaninglessness.

This relationship can be reckoned in every cultural context. The separation between life and culture is most evidently manifest in the theoretical domain, in which the value of truth is unequivocally opposed to mere life. Each time knowledge touches unto and conceptually elaborates life, it must kill it, betray it, it must withdraw from it (Rickert 1911-12: 156). But the distance between life and culture is confirmed even in other spheres of value. Even art, according to Rickert, is not the mere expression of life but the realization of the ideal sphere of aesthetic life (Rickert 1911-12: 159). Likewise the ethical-social realm is determined “in direct opposition to mere vitality”, not to kill it, but to “submit it to its ethical aims” (Rickert 1911-12: 161). A structural antagonism therefore rises between life and ethical culture, a disciplining function, to the point of the latter being repressive to the former, determining a constant tension between the two spheres. Finally, religion but confirms the antagonism

17 Rickert 1911-12: 154: „*Wer bloß lebt, lebt sinnlos*“.

between culture and life: its tendency to interpenetrate the whole of life actually incorporates religion's decisive impulse to transcend into an absolute and "supra-vital (*überlebendig*)" life, which – precisely as such – is no longer life but a value formation (Rickert 1911-12: 164).

For as much as Rickert strives to overcome the rupture between value and reality by means of an intermediate realm of sense, it is evident that such rupture cannot be overcome. Sense never emerges within the bosom of life, but it announces itself from an immeasurable distance though the value activity of the subject. The sense of life is not "of life" strictly speaking; it is the precarious relationship that a subject institutes between life devoid of value and the value itself. Such sense does not reach the point of fully giving meaning to life, it adheres to it only from the outside, it does not overcome the distance separating it from the value but leaves life within the irredeemable senselessness.

Rickert acknowledges that an insignificant life is a "condition" for culture. But such conditionality of the vital scope is not confined within the mere instrumental and deserves to be more boldly inquired in its transcendental meaning of *condition of possibility* of every signification. This would disclose the possibility of recognizing the origin of sense within senselessness itself, the realization of reason within irrationality.

3. The System of Values and the Problem of *Weltanschauung*

Having defined the theoretical scope of philosophy, the issue at hand now is to provide a concise reconstruction of the framework of the system of values. To do so we examine here Rickert's 1913 essay *Vom System der Werte*: a case in point of Rickertian classifying genius.¹⁸

Rickert introduces the idea of an "open system" of values, i.e. a system capable of providing, on the one hand, a principle for classifying values and consequently a means for their hierarchical ordering, yet on the other hand, capable of integrating the new goods constantly produced by the historical-cultural development (Rickert 1913: 298). If indeed it is evident that the doctrine of values must receive the value material to be ordered from history and from the cultural historical sciences, all the same it is clear that such material is involved/embedded in a process of constant development and accretion. How can we then reconcile the eternal change, the inexhaustible fecundity of culture's historical life with a unifying principle that can be eternal and featuring universal validity?

Rickert provides an answer fully coherent with the spirit of Kantian philosophy. The historicity of culture determines an incessant development of cultural material – precisely the goods and the evaluations – and yet it presupposes the permanence of forms – the values. The historicity of cultural material admits and indeed entails the idea of the permanence of a formal value structure, which Rickert sets out to reconstruct in its articulations. This means that it is

18 Rickert 1913. Rickert lays out the definitive elaboration of the system of values in Rickert 1921: Cf. chapter VII: 348–412.

possible to think of the historical development only on the grounds of its supra-historical conditions (Rickert 1913: 299).

If the case is that, as we have discussed, the articulation of the system of values can exclusively be derived from the field of realising values (*Wertrealisierung*), we must begin from the evaluations and from the goods, setting them apart from unreal values but considering the former in relation to the latter, and thus on the grounds of their value meaning. The formal principle, from which Rickert extracts the articulation of the system of values, derives precisely from such relational sphere that is disclosed in the space between value and reality; i.e. the sphere of realising values. Rickert sets out from an arrangement of the cultural spheres which he considers at all obvious, as the result of the process of differentiation of modern culture. The system of culture is structured in the fields of *logic*, *aesthetics*, *ethics*, and *religion*, which Kant had already identified as autonomous and had made the object of philosophical reflection. These fields altogether make up “the historical scope of culture, from where philosophical problems arise: or at least – Rickert significantly adds – we have not reached anything new until now”.¹⁹ Having acknowledged this plurality of autonomous cultural spheres, the problem of a philosophy of values consists solely in “organizing these major groups according to a certain criterion” (Rickert 1913: 298). The outcome of such organizing will evidently be affected by the historical determinacy in which the cultural material is made available to us and will be – in Hegel’s words an understanding of “our time through concepts” (*ibid.*). We must thus acknowledge this ontic assumption of Rickertian philosophy of values, which files modern culture’s fragmentation and its articulation into autonomous spheres of values, deriving them from cultural goods historically realized. On the grounds of this historical givenness, the philosophy of values carries out the theoretical endeavour of systematization, i.e. of determining the order and reciprocal relationships between single cultural spheres, thus redeeming the fragmentation.

Rickert proposes two apparently distinct arrangements for the classification of values that are, albeit not without ambiguities, in accordance to the perspective and to the course of access to the sphere of validity. The first classification is based on the formal features shared by all cultural goods; the second one is based on the formal modalities of the value relatedness of the subject. This duplicity of access to the system of values – subjective-objective – reflects the two-dimensional nature of Rickert’s philosophical framework (Rickert 1909: 169–228; Krijnen 2001: 546 ff.).

The first classification is based on the formal features shared by all cultural goods. It leads to two groups. The first one includes the *action of personalities*

¹⁹ Rickert writes: “Kant speaks of four categories of values each relative to logic, aesthetics, ethics, religion, and with the division in scientific, artistic, moral and religious or “metaphysical” life, as long as we consider them broadly enough, we may consider the historical field of culture as complete, and from it rise the philosophical problems: at least we have not reached anything new up to now” (*ibid.*: 297). Cf. also Rickert 1921a: 350.

connected into the *social* dimension; it comprises the *practical* sphere and it is *pluralistically* characterised – as it consistently refers to the acting individualities. The second group instead includes the *contemplative* behaviour related solely to *things*²⁰ and therefore remains within a *non-social* dimension; it comprises (yet is not limited to) the *theoretical* sphere and is characterized in a *monistic* sense – as it refers to the contemplative unification of experience.

This formal articulation of cultural goods lacks a hierarchical principle (*Rangordnung*) which can only be derived in the perspective of the subject who evaluates and takes a position towards the value. The second mode of classification, which provides the system with a hierarchical criterion, must therefore be established by taking into consideration the formal modalities in which the *value relatedness of the subject* is determined.²¹ The subject relates to values by the means of a normative structure. In other words, it detects in the value something that *must (soll)* be realized, it recognizes in it a *duty* that *must (soll)* be actuated in historical life. Taking of a position towards a value therefore, amounts to the duty of fully realising the evaluated values in the cultural good. Insofar the subject's action takes the form of a "striving (*Streben*)" addressed to "full completion (*Voll-Endung*)", to the complete realization of values in historical life. The various modes of the *Voll-Endung* determine therefore the formal principle of classification and hierarchical ordering of the system of values.²²

The *Voll-Endung* is a materially affected process, i.e. exposed, on one hand, to the resistance of reality to receiving and letting itself conform by the valid form; and it is conditioned, on the other hand, by the limitedness of the value capacity of the subject faced by the unlimitedness of the matter extraneous to value. Therefore the *Voll-Endung* takes on different meanings in reference to the material that the subject submits to his strive for completion. The material may be considered in its infinite and inexhaustible totality, or in the determined specificity of its parts. In the former case the *Voll-Endung* lays out a never-ending duty for the subject, who will interpret the outcomes of its cultural work as stages of an endless process of development. In this way a unique field of the system of values is determined, which Rickert defines as the sphere of "*incomplete totality (un-endlichen Totalität)*" (Rickert 1913: 302). In the latter case, the subject actually does achieve *Voll-Endung*, but waiving the totality of material and limiting itself to a single part. This determines the sphere of cultural goods characterized by "complete particularity [*voll-endliche Partikularität*]" . Finally, according to Rickert, there is a third possibility and thus a third

20 Even the personality that becomes the object of contemplation turns into a thing.

21 The *Wertung* must here be intended as "*Aktsinn*" and not as a psychological fact. On the clarification of this controversial articulation of the issue, cf. Rickert 1921a: 377. In the following explanation we herein abide to the *System der Philosophie* in which Rickert puts the objective articulation of goods before the subjective one relating to the modes of the *Wertung*.

22 We must note that the principle of completion (*Voll-Endung*) is the foundation of precisely Rickert's idea of philosophy: Cf. Rickert 1921a: 20.

sphere of culture, which is the synthesis of the first two and configures the domain of the “complete totality [*voll-endliche Totalität*]” (Rickert 1913: 302).

The articulation of the system of values derived from the different modalities of the *Voll-Endung* allows setting out a corresponding hierarchical ordering of the cultural goods. Such articulation is also liable to be declined in temporal terms, moreover justified on account of the fact that the *actualization of values* is indeed a process that takes place over time. In this way we determine the distinction between “*future goods (Zukunftsgüter)*”, for which the full completion of *totality* is a constant yet to come; “*present goods (Gegenwartsgüter)*”, for which the realization of *complete particularity* is possible in a specific moment; “*eternity goods (Ewigkeitsgüter)*”, in which the complete totality is realized only denying the temporal dimension and transcending the sensible sphere, to which the first two groups of goods remain bound. Finally an articulation may be laid out between good of the *immanent* and *sensible* life, to which the ones of the present and future belong; and good of the *transcendent* and *supra-sensible* life, to which those of eternity belong.

Therefore the comprehensive articulation of the system of values is determined by the application of the hierarchical framework of the degrees of *Voll-Endung*, completion (A: incomplete totality; B: complete particularity; C: complete totality) unto the formal distinction of the cultural goods (I: sphere of the non-social contemplation; II: sphere of the personal and social action). In this way, “six fields of value” are determined, which we shall summarily examine:

AI. *Science*. The first field of value is the one of science, which – according to Rickert – consists in the contemplation of things in a non-social dimension. The inexhaustibility of its material sets out an endless task, whose complete realization can only be considered as the termination of an infinite progress. Its incompleteness is grounded in the logical foundations of knowing, structurally vulnerable to the irredeemable dualism of matter and form, of object and subject. Science therefore is included in the value sphere of the inexhaustible totality and of future goods.

BI. *The arts*. The second field of value comprises the contemplative attitude, non-judging and thus non-knowing, which, in keeping within the intuitive sphere, remains immune to the division subject-object, material-form specific to knowledge. Yet the intuitive roots of this form of contemplation bind it to the intuited particularity. Thus, relinquishing totality, this form of consideration pursues a complete contemplation of the particularity. We are here in the realm of aesthetics, alike to science it is characterized by impersonality (it engages with things and not people) and non-sociality (because, for as important as it may be for society, it does not derive its meaning from it). The validity of works of art does not depend on the future development of arts, but it is fulfilled within the completeness of the present.

CI. *Mystic religion*. The third field of value is one that provides a solution to the limits of the first two (the incompleteness of science and the particularity of the arts), realising itself in the religious contemplation of a god conceived mystically, monistically, and pantheistically as the one-everything. Even

in this field there is no place for personality, which is completely dissolved in the mystic union with the divine, nor for the community of individuals, which is refused together with the world whole.

III. *Sphere of ethical-social values.* The fourth field includes ethical-social values, i.e. values pertinent to the social acting of man, understood as a personality. In this way Rickert proposes a communitarian characterisation of ethical values, which find their 'realization' in a strive for personal freedom and for the autonomous and conscious acceptance of social customs. It is a striving that can never fully achieve its goal. The ethical universe is limitless and therefore is included in the value sphere of the inexhaustible totality and of future goods.

BII. *Sphere of personal values.* The fifth field designates that specific area of "goods of the personal life and of the present life", different from the ethical-social goods of the future. This field seems to redress the constitutive imperfection of the ethical sphere, for it offers the ground to realize a *particular perfection*. These goods emerge as "islands" in the continuing flow of cultural development and, according to Rickert, have often been neglected by philosophical reflection. They are goods such as maternity or friendship for instance; they have often been ascribed to the ethical sphere, but Rickert considers them distinctly: in as much as they do not lean towards the need of a future fulfilment, but rather they are realized in a present perfection (Rickert 1913: 313 f.).

We must moreover notice that Rickert identifies in the love between woman and man a certain sphere that is intermediate between ethical-social values of the future (which the man realizes in his public cultural actions) and personal values of the present (which the woman realizes in the private sphere to which she is substantially relegated). And therefore the erotic sphere is where we realize the unification between the complete totality and the complete particularity, without transcending the limits of individual life²³.

23 The fact that in this section we may reckon an axiological foundation of the difference between the two sexes is of special significance to understand the general sense of the system of values proposed by Rickert. In fact, man tends to realize the social-ethical values by means of his action in the public sphere, while as the woman "works more for the life of the present, in silence and intimacy" (ibid.: 318). This is the equivalent for Rickert of acknowledging the specific value of woman, who contributes to realising, by means of the erotic relationship with man, the fulfilled humanity (Cf. ibid.: 319). Rickert here takes a position in the debate on the question of womanhood which registered quite significant contributions precisely in the period in which he was writing. Specifically I am referring to Georg Simmel, who – in *Weibliche Kultur* (1911) – advanced the thesis according to which the specificity and the value of the female cultural action lie in the fact that they are unrelated to any form of objectification and that they are capable of achieving a condition of subjective completeness. A woman is thus unaffected by the risk of alienation, and correlated forms of social objectification, and realizes her own subjective completion in the private sphere of the "home." Following a partial elaboration in 1902 and published in *Neue Deutsche Rundschau*, Simmel's essay is published in 1911 (Simmel 1911). Marianne Weber provides a critical reply to Simmel in an essay published in the same issue of *Logos* in which Rickert 1913 is published: Cf. Weber Marianne 1913. In 1913 Rickert discusses Simmelian positions, as can be reckoned from his reference to the supposed subjectivity of woman's cultural action: "even in the case of

CII. *Religion of the person-god.* The sixth and last field of value is the one that stretches beyond the incompleteness of the ethical-social life and the particularity of personal values and, on account of the faith in a personal god, achieves a *complete totality*. Such completeness needs not to sacrifice individual personality into the *unio mystica*, but rather it constitutes its realization. The world is not denied, but redeemed in its constitutive plurality and imperfection. In his intra-mundane action and in the relationship with the community of believers, man finds the tools of his salvation. The present is thus joined to the future, time is joined to eternity. We are here in the value field of totality completed by effect of personal action, within which the social goods of the present are realized.

The system thus determined in its formality should be able to grant – in Rickert’s intentions – the necessary openness to receiving the historical becoming of new value material. Nevertheless, precisely because of such formality, the system still appears to be incapable of providing an adequate answer to the question of worldview, i.e. to the question about the meaning of life. The systematic order and formal hierarchy of values are still not enough to guide us in establishing relationships of priority between values, capable of orienting human life amid the conflict of value fields entwined across modern culture. Simply put, the system of values doesn’t tell us what we ought to do.²⁴

We are here faced with the emergence of a fact that can be indeed deduced from the formal articulation of values: a structural incompatibility persisting between the value field of science and the one of worldview. The pretension to provide an answer to the meaning of life, in fact, implies the complete furnishing of content of the formal system of values and inevitably thus its closure, in the sense of its completion (Rickert 1913: 323). Such completion is in conflict with the formal structure of incomplete totality proper of the value field of science, it contradicts the constitutive provisionality and progressiveness of the results. The problem of systematically collocating philosophy as worldview cannot be resolved – according to Rickert – by shifting it into the field of complete particularity of the aesthetic value (Rickert 1913: 324), but rather broadening the scope of the theoretical beyond the field of incomplete totality. In fact, philosophy takes part in the theoretical domain even though it aspires to a degree of completeness beyond that of the special sciences. Philosophy cannot settle for

personal behaviour in the present, it is a matter of performances, activities, indeed of ‘objective cultural work’” (Rickert 1913: 318). Rickert refuses the Simmelian dialectic of objectivity and subjectivity, but the outcomes of his position on gender differences are at all effects the same as the ones of Simmel. The supposed acknowledgement of the value of woman from a man’s perspective entails her exclusion from public life, relegating her to the private sphere, in which the light of the future penetrates only on account of man’s love for her. Ultimately acknowledging the value of gender differences leads to a reactionary outcome.

24 Rickert 1913: 322. In *Wissenschaft als Beruf* (1917) Max Weber strongly argues that science is no longer capable of telling us “what we ought to do” and “how we ought to live”: Weber 1992: 93.

trusting in the progress of scientific knowledge, but it must “achieve an *end*, even at the cost of the possibility that it is only a particular *end*” (Rickert 1913: 324).

The philosophical completion consists in seeking a “focal point in the eternal evolutionary flow”, it is a stopping “to acknowledge what it has achieved, with respect to the meaning of life” (Rickert 1913: 325). Therefore philosophy is, on the one hand, rooted in the historical-temporal particularity within which the system achieves its closure; yet, on the other hand, it is included, as a single episode, within the overall flow of the history of philosophy, in which the series of systems composes an infinite progress towards the incomplete totality. Its historical fulfilment belongs therefore to the flow of incomplete totality and, ultimately, it is rooted within it (Rickert 1913: 326). Thus philosophy earns an intermediate collocation “between incomplete totality and complete particularity, between future goods and present goods”, taking a position symmetrical to the erotic sphere.²⁵ In Rickert’s view, philosophy reproduces on the contemplative plane the erotic relationship, i.e. a love for knowledge “that joins completeness in the present with the prospect of the future.”²⁶

4. Some Critical Observations

I have often herein drawn the attention to the fact that Rickert’s system of values is consistently derived from the formalities immanent to the historical-real goods and to evaluations. Rickert consistently reaffirms that this “methodological” premise of philosophical inquiry and its “ontic” origin should not eclipse the autonomy of values from goods and their evaluations. In spite of accepting the assumption of value transcendence, we are still left to deal with the problem of identifying a means of accessing it. If – as Rickert argues – we can achieve values only through goods and their evaluations, if we can reach the field of pure validity only by the means of taking into consideration a section inevitably finite of the infinity of historical value material, then inevitably the system resulting from such reconnaissance will be limited to expressing a reflexive synthesis appropriate to a specific historical moment within the historical course of culture, it will be an understanding of “our time through concepts”.

If value is given unto us only in the realization of values, then our knowledge of it will necessarily be affected by the limits and historical conditions of such realization. The pretension that the formality of the system can guarantee its a-temporal validity and, at the same time, its historical openness to future is an illusion. The form that is accessible to us is, in fact, one derived by an abstraction (“what is shared by all goods and all evaluations”) of value material

25 Erotic and philosophy are the two immanent syntheses that stand apart from the transcendental syntheses of mystic and ascetic religiosity.

26 Rickert 1913: 326. “The philosophical eros, intended as yearning (*Sehnsucht*) for fulfilment, does not forgo satisfaction. It does not want to be satisfied with the incomplete (*Un-endliche*), in spite of the fact that it is aware that its discourse on the complete (*Voll-endliche*) will be nothing but a babbling”.

limited to our particular point of observation. Truthfully, simply by broadening the scope of such point of observation beyond the narrow boundaries of the bourgeois, vaguely Philistine, culture that distinguished early-twentieth century German *Bildungsbürgertum*, we can acknowledge that not only the cultural material, but moreover the forms of cultural life are subject to historical development. We can acknowledge, for instance, that the value of womanhood intended as particular completeness relegated to the private sphere is nothing but a projection into the axiological dimension of a value givenness determined and connoted in historical-sociological terms, that it does not account for neither possible future developments of historical life, nor – at a closer look – female values of the past.

An analogous consideration can be addressed to the aesthetic sphere. Also in this case, the idea of a completeness in the particular, realized within a non-social and contemplative dimension is certainly incapable of accounting for aesthetic phenomena of the current era, in which technically reproducible art has become a product of the cultural industry and therefore is included within socio-economic phenomena, both relatively to its production as well as to its fruition. Indeed Rickert's formal consideration of the aesthetic sphere does neither adequately account for primitive aesthetic phenomena, whose rapport to the sphere of religious cult constitutes a problem for their systemic collocation. And similar discussion would deserve to be developed even in the case of science and ethics.

And yet we must recognize that the openness of the system can be understood in two different ways. It consists, firstly, in the capacity to integrate within the system future historical cultural goods. Science will continue its progress coming to experience ever new revolutions, aesthetic tastes will constantly change, and customs, as much as religious sentiment, will evolve with likewise speed; and nevertheless a science, an art, an ethics, and a religion will always exist as eternal forms of culture, relating, on one hand, to values and, on the other, to real cultural goods. In this framework, the openness of the system means that the eternal flow of cultural material can be ordered within an articulation of eternal forms.

Secondly, the system's openness can be intended in another meaning which – in my opinion – makes the very idea of a system problematic. The overall cultural asset, available for reflection in the present, contains an infinite series of value concretions (goods and evaluations) which allow identifying a finite series of value forms. Nevertheless, we cannot rule out the possibility that the future may bring forth not only new cultural goods that can be integrated in the known spheres of value, but even cultural materials that relate to values yet unknown unto now. Who could ever tell if the scope of non-existing validity is already fulfilled within the positional system of bourgeois culture as articulated into science, arts, ethics, and religion? Who could ever tell if the historical reality known to us must necessarily include the realization of all values? A new era will see the rise of new values; and thus to what extent will they find a place in the system?

Rickert believes it will be possible to integrate into the open system all the new goods and “new” values²⁷ that the future historical development may bring. In fact, the system of values is designed as the articulation of a whole, within which every new part can find a place without exposing the general structure. This solution is problematic, in my opinion.

According to the very premises of Rickert's inquiry, the cultural unfolding is differentiation and fragmentation of the unity of culture into autonomous and conflicting spheres, each endowed with an immanent legality tending to rise as the dominant point of view over the whole. Each new sphere of value that discloses is not merely a part of a whole, but moreover a perspective of signification of the whole. In other words, it contains a perspective of structuring and hierarchical ordering of the other spheres and of the other values. In this way, culture not only diversifies and specifies in its historical unfolding, but it constantly re-articulates its own structure, the positional system of the cultural goods, in reference to the values that, time after time, take up a dominant position. The disclosing of a new value scope is not merely a new part that adds up to a whole which remains unchanged. It opens a new perspective over the whole, renovating its structure. The new is not simply integrated into the existing structure, rather it puts forth the pretension of structuring according to itself the whole.

The definition of the system is possible only within a certain perspective immanent to the value material to be ordered. Rickert – in spite of the criticism to intellectualism²⁸ – discovers this structuring and unifying perspective in the theoretical, which is in fact a specific sphere of values. But truthfully, such unifying structuring remains bound to the contingency of the historical moment and of the material available to it. The systematic collocation that Rickert gives to philosophy as worldview confirms indeed its “cultural” provenance. Worldview philosophy, ultimately, is the contingent strive to self-awareness that culture exerts unto itself. It is a theoretical effort suffering the stigma of contingency; an effort that wholly belongs within the scope of culture that aspires to understand itself reflexively. Culture can be understood only through itself and cannot be transcended; its self-understanding is a moment in its historical life.

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²⁷ Of course, values are new only in reference to their historical becoming. In reality they – considered *per se* – are eternal.

²⁸ On the challenges that Rickertian criticism to intellectualism determines for the systematization of irrational values Cf. Krijnen 2001: 581.

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Đovani Morone

Između istorije i sistema: pojam kulture Hajnriha Rikerta

Apstrakt

Autor rekonstruiše pojam kulture koji proilazi iz neo-kantijanizma Hajnriha Rikerta, otkrivajući njegove značajne istorijsko-problemske, metodološke i filozofske implikacije. Prvi paragraf se prvenstveno bavi idejom da je moderna kultura jedinstveno okarakterisana "fragmentacijom" i posvećen je analizi programa Rikertove filozofije kulture koja nastoji da rekonstruiše izgubljeno jedinstva kulture. Drugi paragraf objašnjava metodološke implikacije problematičnog odnosa između vrednosti i realnosti koji je zasnovan u kulturnim dobrima i sudovima. Treći deo rekonstruiše Rikertijanski sistem vrednosti, sučeljavajući se sa specifičnim podvigom ovog sistema da izmiri historicizam i apsolutizam vrednosti. Poslednji paragraf razvija kritičku diskusiju Rikertijanskog projekta.

Ključne reči: kultura, filozofija kulture, neo-kantijanizam, filozofija vrednosti