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AT THE LIMITS OF KNOWLEDGE: PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION IN SOUTHWESTERN NEO-KANTIANISM¹

ABSTRACT

The present paper investigates the essential tenets of the Southwestern Neo-Kantians' take on the philosophy of religion. Specifically, I concentrate on two diverse aspects of Windelband and Rickert's approaches to religion. In the first place, I look at the way in which they determine religious values. In the second place, I focus on the manner in which they confront religion with the systematic structure of culture. As a result of the analysis of the texts of both authors, we see that it is possible to detect at least three possible roads to elaborate a philosophy of religion. In spite of this plurality of paths, I argue that they exhibit a similar underlying problem, namely, the problematic relationship between transcendental philosophy and metaphysics. It is for this reason that the philosophy of religion takes the form of a reflection on the limits of knowledge, and with it, on the limits of transcendental philosophy.

KEYWORDS

Windelband, Rickert, holy, religious values, transcendental philosophy

1. Introduction

The place of the philosophy of religion within the system of philosophy represents one of the most obscure aspects of Southwestern Neo-Kantianism. On the one hand, writings exclusively devoted to the philosophy of religion are definitely scarce.² This could usher us to assume that both Wilhelm Windelband

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2 This represents a relevant difference in comparison with the Neo-Kantian School of Marburg. Taking exclusively the philosophical corpus of Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp, we find the following books on the philosophy of religion: P. Natrop: *Religion*

(1848-1915) and Heinrich Rickert (1863-1936), the two authors I am interested in, minimize the role of the philosophy of religion.³ On the other hand, when they do talk about the philosophy of religion, it seems to occupy a chief place in their philosophical systems. Whenever they address religion, they do not investigate religious phenomena as they merely occur in human life. Nor they query the communal organization of religion through ecclesiastical institutions. For them, philosophy of religion inquires about the validity of religious values and their place in the broader totality of culture (Ollig 1979:151). In this manner, philosophy of religion obtains its distinctive Neo-Kantian sense. The most salient point in this regard is that religion locates itself in an asymmetrical position with respect to other spheres of cultural life. Scientific, ethical and aesthetic values regulate our earthly life. In the philosophical vocabulary, they provide the form of experience. In contrast, religion claims to direct our gaze to what is beyond experience. Religion seeks the meaning of immanent life in a sphere that is transcendent to life. It is precisely because of this reference to transcendence that religion does not allow itself to be treated like the other spheres of culture. As a matter of fact, because of its role regarding the other spheres of culture, religion poses itself as a direct competitor of philosophy. The difference between both is that religion resolves in transcendence that which philosophy tries to realize in a purportedly immanent manner. Moreover, unlike philosophy, it does not do so by employing either a critical method or a conceptual discourse.

Religion can appear as a cohesive factor of cultural life. Under this role it would constitute the concluding chapter of the philosophy of culture. Yet, it can configure a counter-image of philosophy. Due to this dubious position in the system of culture and the above-mentioned interplay between transcendence and immanence, religion brings forth one of the most complex aspects of the development of transcendental philosophy carried forward by the Southwestern Neo-Kantians.

Provided this problematic context, the present article investigates the essential tenets of the Southwestern Neo-Kantians' take on the philosophy of religion. Specifically, I will concentrate on two diverse aspects of Windelband's and Rickert's approaches to religion. In the first place, I will look at the way in which they determine religious values. In the second place, I will focus on the manner in which they confront religion with the systematic structure of culture. As a result of the analysis of the texts of both authors, we will see that it is possible to detect at least three possible roads to elaborate a philosophy of religion. But, beyond this plurality of paths, I will argue that they exhibit

innerhalb der Grenzen der Humanität (1908); H. Cohen: *Der Begriff der Religion im System der Philosophie* (1915), and H. Cohen: *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums* (1918).

³ A comprehensive study of the philosophy of religion of the Southwestern School of Neo-Kantianism should also consider writings of Bruno Bauch, Jonas Cohn, Georg Mehlis, among others.

a similar underlying problem, namely, the problematic relationship between transcendental philosophy and metaphysics. To accomplish this objective, the research will be divided into three sections. Before all else, I will deal with Windelband's position (section 2). Next I will discuss two alternative formulations corresponding to Rickert's thought (section 3). In closing, I will offer a comparison between their elaborations of the philosophy of religion. I will indicate their points in common, their divergences, and what I perceive to be a problem shared by both authors (section 4).

2. Windelband: the Holy as Religious Value

Frequently, the philosophies of Windelband and Rickert are depicted as constituting the program and system of Southwestern Neo-Kantianism. Windelband's philosophy establishes the contours of the basic problematic of the School, whereas Rickert offers the complete and systematic position in the face of this problematic.⁴ The philosophy of religion is no exception to this diagnosis. Despite some differences relevant to our analysis, the way in which Rickert frames the discussion of religious values is akin to Windelband's proposal in his *Introduction to Philosophy* (*Einleitung in die Philosophie*).⁵ This relationship justifies a preparatory reference to Windelband's thought. Therefore, I will concentrate briefly on the concept of philosophy defended by Windelband in order to clarify afterwards his programmatic philosophy of religion.

For Windelband, the subject matter of philosophy is the general validity of the various principles that articulate our practices as rational subjects. These practices require, according to Windelband, a set of standards to which they must conform. In addition, these standards do not function as natural laws but rather as rules for assessments, i.e. rules that do not condition but guide those rational practices (Heinz 2006: 76). In view of their intrinsic normative force, Windelband decides to call these principles 'norms'.

Windelband frames his discussion of the validity of norms through an analysis of different layers or meanings of consciousness. As we shall see, the core

4 It is interesting to note that Rickert himself emphasizes the commonalities but also the differences with respect to Windelband's philosophy. Rickert states: "The path to this knowledge [here Rickert refers to the relevance of the history of philosophy] I owe to my teacher Windelband, the last great historian of philosophy besides Dilthey. After Hegel the only one who would be able to give an overall picture of European thought. Systematically, I could never completely agree with Windelband, not even in those areas where our names are almost always mentioned together today. I was too much of a 'positivist' for him, and indeed his thinking, despite all the admiration and veneration I had for it, always seemed to me both too metaphysical and too psychological, which does not mean a contradiction, for they necessarily belong together. Psychology in the wrong place, i.e. in the basic philosophical concepts, will lead all the more surely to their metaphysical reinterpretation" (Rickert 1921: X–XI). All translations of German texts are mine.

5 Originally published in 1914, all textual quotations are taken from the second edition, published in 1919.

of Windelband's proposal is his interpretation of the interrelationship between these meanings.

In keeping with the Kantian tradition, the most comprehensive distinction would correspond to a difference between empirical and transcendental consciousness. Empirical recognition of a norm can be established at both the individual and the collective level (i.e., at the level of a given society or people). However, the factual acceptance of norms by the individual subject or a given community is not a sufficient guarantee of their general validity. Whenever we refer to a claim to general validity we must consider a transcendental sense of consciousness. Windelband calls this type of consciousness normal consciousness⁶: "Wherever, therefore, empirical consciousness discovers in itself this ideal necessity of what ought to be universally valid, it encounters a *normal consciousness* whose essence *for us* consists in our being convinced that it is to be real, without regard to whether it is real in the naturally necessary unfolding of empirical consciousness" (Windelband 2021a: 46 [Italics in the original]). Normal consciousness is recognized through the aim of transforming empirical consciousness into a rationally grounded consciousness. Hence, philosophy's questioning upon the general validity of the principles of rational behavior takes the following form: What determinations of empirical (individual or collective) consciousness actually belong to normal consciousness?

In addition, philosophy, as the science of normal consciousness, represents a normative ideal (Windelband 2021a: 48). Windelband interprets that during the history of civilization, empirical consciousness at its different levels shows a progressive process of realization of normal consciousness. In this sense, the task of philosophy could be also interpreted as fulfill the ever-unfinished project of transforming what is individual and collective into what is genuinely universal. This process of transformation takes the form of a dialectical confrontation. Windelband affirms, in a relatively simplistic manner to tell the truth, that progress is driven by the struggle between individual consciousness and collective consciousness. In this conflict, the individual recognizes that the social norm does not conform to a truly valid principle. Therefore, the individual seeks to overcome the prevailing norm. For instance, Windelband interpret Socrates' trial in exactly these terms, i.e. as a clash between the individual consciousness of the philosopher and the social norms. Socrates recognizes that existing social norms do not conform to the standard of a truly universal norm. In this way, the philosopher demands that the prevailing values be transformed so that they reflect a truly rational ideal.

This overcoming cannot consist in the mere affirmation of individual will but takes the form of a reference to a transcendent instance. This means that the contrast between empirical consciousness and the demands of the ideal always present a certain degree of tension. This tension is precisely that which

⁶ Windelband employs interchangeably the terms normal consciousness and normative consciousness. For the sake of consistency, I will employ exclusively the term normal consciousness.

keeps the demand for a critique as an ever-open enterprise. The only way to solve this incongruence would be by introducing a new level of consciousness, i.e. an absolute one (Windelband 2021a: 56).⁷ The affirmation of an absolute consciousness would force a halt to the critical process, because it represents a complete identification between the factual and the ideal. As we will readily see, this kind of consciousness could only correspond to God. While normal consciousness operates as an ideal in the Kantian sense, absolute consciousness would represent a hypostasis of normal consciousness, i.e., a metaphysical interpretation of normal consciousness in terms of a divine consciousness. For this reason, absolute consciousness does not belong to the discourse of transcendental philosophy.

Another source of philosophical concern is the determination of the fundamental principles that configure normal consciousness. Windelband employs a psychological thread to justify his reference to three specific directions of consciousness. Based on a probably questionable theory of the faculties of the mind, Windelband distinguishes between thought, willing and feeling as mind's primary activities (Windelband 2021a: 44).⁸ Each of these activities signals a concrete sphere of cultural values. It is in this way that we encounter the 'classical' triad of values: the true, good, and beauty. Accordingly, these three spheres of values seem to comprise the sheer scope of our evaluative activity. And to them correspond the three central sub-disciplines of philosophy: logic, ethics, and aesthetics.⁹ Notably, there is one major absentee in this presentation, for in this list we do not come across with the philosophy of religion. There is not a psychic activity, and therefore no proper value, related to our

7 An interesting presentation of these peculiar meanings of consciousness is provided by the Neo-Platonic scholar Philip Merlan (1897-1968). From a systematic point of view, Merlan's interpretation is similar to the one we have uttered in the preceding paragraphs (Merlan 1963: 121). However, what is more interesting and relevant for our topic is the historical genealogy of these ideas proposed by him. Merlan tracks the origins of the concept of 'general consciousness' s' back to the beginnings of Western philosophical thought, i.e. to metaphysics. Explicitly, Merlan traces the conception of collective consciousness or an unconscious consciousness back from Kantianism, including Windelband, to a medieval discussion of the Aristotelian concept of *nous poiētikós* (Merlan 1963: 114; Merlan 1963: 118). In this manner, Merlan sets the problem of articulating the levels of consciousness through ancient and mediaeval antecedents. The passages in which the Neo-Kantians refer to absolute consciousness are rather marginal. Despite this fact, this historical relation shows that in fact this marginality may be the index to a latent problem.

8 In his methodological essay "Critical or Genetic Method?" Windelband would claim again that a specific psychological theory helps us to discover fundamental values. But, once discovered, we can consider them critically, that is, independently of the way in which we obtained them in the first instance (Windelband 2021b: 377). This idea will not be taken up by Rickert.

9 For instance: "With the logical, ethical and aesthetic values the range of the human value activity, which can claim general recognition and the necessity of objective unconditionality in relation to the conveniences and purposes of the everyday life, is exhausted for the philosophical investigation" (Windelband 1919: 390).

religious life. In this tripartite schema, philosophy of religion secures for itself no visible place.

We have found so far two problems specifically connected with the philosophy of religion. Firstly, the problematic character of an absolute (i.e. divine) consciousness. And secondly, the lack of a psychic function associated to religion. It is because of this lack that we are unsure what value assign to religion. And yet, the treatment of the problem of religion occupies a preponderant role in *Introduction to Philosophy*, Windelband's last publication.¹⁰ I will begin with the problem of the specific value associated with religion.

The *Introduction* is no exception to Windelband's architectonic of psychic functions. Windelband still identifies three fundamental psychic functions and through them three fundamental spheres of valuation: logical, ethical, and aesthetic valuation. The analysis of these values provides us with an understanding of the guiding forces of human life: science, morality and art. Nevertheless, in this book Windelband claims that religion possesses a value of its own: the Holy (*das Heilige*).¹¹

Windelband's solution to this conflict reads as follows. The three core values already mentioned correspond to the architecture of our evaluative activity. To this extent, they regulate the content of our psychic life. The Holy, on the other hand, belongs to the form of valuation. It is for this reason that the Holy does not require to be grounded on a specific psychic function. That is to say, holiness comprises a form that the other values can obtain or be imbued with (Windelband 1919: 391; Windelband 2021c: 521–522). The Holy is, therefore, the value of the other values.

Each of the guiding principles of culture (the true, good, and beauty) can acquire a religious form.¹² However, none of these forms succeeds either in itself or in their conjunction in completely exhausting the religious impulse. What is specific to religion and present whenever values assume a religious form is the reference to the otherworldly: “if one asks for the common characteristic of all those evaluations which in this way possess a religious coloring, it is always the relation of the values to a supra-sensible, supra-empirical, supersensible reality” (Windelband 1919: 391).¹³ The value of the Holy corresponds to

10 I do not overlook the fact that Windelband published in 1903 an essay entitled “The Holy (Outline of the Philosophy of Religion)” (Windelband 2021c). The text of the *Introduction* takes up and expands on the ideas set forth in that essay. Yet, for my present purposes it is sufficient to refer to this work, even though the earlier essay presents some original features of its own.

11 This is, of course, a point in common with Rudolf Otto's famous book published in 1917, *The Idea of the Holy (Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen)*. To my knowledge, Otto does not mention Windelband's use of this concept. For a broader overview of the different characterizations of this concept, the reader may consult the compilation of German texts by Carsten Colpe (Colpe (ed.) 1977).

12 The reader will find a specific characterization of this religious form of values in Windelband (2021c: 529, 539).

13 See also Windelband (2021c: 526).

the normal consciousness but seen as if it were a transcendent reality. Values are imbued with the aura of the sacred insofar as they surpass the dimension of existence of the individual and society. Hence, what is Holy is reason itself no longer understood as an ideal but as an extramundane reality. The goal, and the systematic place of religion in culture, is linked to this characterization.

As it is apparent, the impulse that originates the religious formation of values seems to be the same one behind the transformation of the empirical consciousness into a normal one. Religion is one of the ways in which empirical consciousness seeks to relate itself to that which is ideal. The problem of the validity of the Holy, i.e. the specific religious value, is the result of a problem of philosophical consciousness itself. This is what justifies the lofty seat of religion in the system of culture.

In view of our exposition of Windelband's ideas, we can understand why he claims that the foundation of religion is the demand for a metaphysical anchoring of values (Windelband 1919: 394). God is just another name for the problematic absolute consciousness. And his reality is assumed as a result of his necessary relationship with human consciousness. Hence, religious life is "the life of value which is conscious of these connections [between values and their metaphysical anchorage]" (Windelband 1919: 394). Windelband attempts to diminish the weight of his own assertions by stating that this reference does not contain the claim of a proof but that of a postulate in the Kantian sense.¹⁴ As is clear from the definition of religion, its sphere of problems is none other than the connection between values and reality.

In the context of the philosophy of religion, Windelband discusses some of the most problematic aspects of his philosophical program. It is precisely in this context that Windelband develops, for one last time, his vision regarding the relationship between reality and values. Windelband's conception of values requires that they cannot be completely identified with reality. It is not only that normal consciousness fails to identify itself with absolute consciousness, thus leaving open the need to travel an infinite path. If it were to do so, it would lose its character of consciousness as such: "it is part of the essence of valuation that the norm which determines cannot be fulfilled by itself ... Ought and being, value and reality must be different" (Windelband 1919: 425–426). The duality between value and its realization is a necessary requirement that belongs to the very essence of our thinking and our will. That is why such an identification would destroy our very rationality (Windelband 1919: 434). The whole gamut of metaphysical and religious positions are built

14 For Kant's definition of a postulate it is advisable to consult the following entries in the *Kant-Lexikon*: "Postulat" and "Postulate der reinen praktischen Vernunft" both written by Sebastian Gardner. This is an attempt by Windelband to bring his own exposition closer to Kantian doctrine, although the arguments of the two philosophers follow different paths. Although Windelband rescues the idea of an interest of reason as the foundation of belief in a suprasensible reality, his presentation of the relation between theoretical reason and practical reason does not allow for a repetition of the Kantian solution.

around the necessary connection and repulsion between the sphere of reality and the sphere of value.

It would seem then that, just as values can be considered from a psychological point of view or a philosophical point of view, there is also the possibility of a properly religious (metaphysical) point of view. At the end of the journey of transcendental philosophy, as developed by Windelband, we encounter a problem that is refractory to philosophy itself. As Windelband claims, “it belongs to the essence of things that this last problem [the reality of the ideal] is unsolvable. It is the sacred mystery, by which we experience the limits of our being and our cognition” (Windelband 1919: 434). Ultimately, the immanent worldview of philosophy inevitably confronts the fact that it cannot close in on itself, that is, it cannot preclude the alternative of a transcendent conception. If it were to do so, it would end up denying one of the conditions of possibility of valuation.

3. Rickert’s Two Interpretations of the Philosophy of Religion

Rickert shares with Windelband the basic tendency to transform transcendental philosophy into a science of absolute values. Yet his definition of philosophy is supported by arguments that are original.¹⁵ In my exposition of Rickert’s philosophy, I will focus on three different aspects. To draw the parallel with Windelband, I will present succinctly Rickert’s definition of philosophy. Next, I will dwell on the treatment of religion in two different presentations corresponding to the mature phase of his thought: *System der Philosophie* (1921) and *Grundprobleme der Philosophie* (1934).

Rickert does not follow Windelband’s lead in defining philosophy as a science of normative consciousness. This characterization, which places consciousness in the foreground, probably had for him a psychologistic overtone.¹⁶ Accordingly, he defines philosophy as a science that deals with the world as a whole.¹⁷ Under this definition, philosophy is opposed to the special sciences, since they explore distinct parts or regions of the world. Furthermore, with this definition Rickert also moves away from the consideration of philosophy as a worldview. Worldviews also correspond to views of the totality, but philosophy displays the property of constituting knowledge.¹⁸ As Crowe notes, Rickert’s philosophy “is ultimately motivated by the problem of world-views, i.e.,

15 See Krijnen (2001), especially chapter three. Important points of reference for Rickert’s definition of philosophy are: Rickert (1910); Rickert (1921: 1–49); and Rickert (1934: 1–53).

16 A systematic explanation of the difference between Windelband and Rickert on this point can be found in Krijnen (2001: 507–510). See especially the footnote n°123.

17 Rickert uses various formulations: *Weltganzheit*, *Weltall*, *das All*, etc. For instance: “the world in its totality [*die Welt in ihrer Ganzheit*], and what is to be understood by it, is to be determined first by philosophy” (Rickert 1934: 11). And later: “Philosophy, i.e. universal knowledge of everything that there is in the world” (Rickert 1934: 44). See also Rickert (1921: VII).

18 As Rickert points out, if we want to consider worldviews as philosophy, we would have to accept two senses of philosophy: as a worldview and as a science (Rickert 1934: 10).

the problem of a unified, theoretically grounded system that is able to provide an account of the meaning of human life ” (Crowe 2010: 618). Nevertheless, philosophy does not develop a worldview of its own. As the German word [*Weltanschauung*] points out, worldviews are primarily intuitive. Philosophy, on the contrary, is articulated as a science, that is to say, in philosophy the conceptual component prevails.¹⁹ In addition, religion also has a say in this constellation. Philosophy and religion, from the point of view of this characterization, can become antagonistic powers: “because religion, like philosophy, will display the tendency to relate itself also to the *whole* of the world, any attempt to recognize this whole merely theoretically, may appear as a derangement of religious beliefs (Rickert 1934: 9 [italics in the original]). This same situation is reflected in one of the few direct references to the problem of the philosophy of religion before 1921. In Rickert’s programmatic essay “On the Concept of Philosophy”, he says: “It is in the nature of religion that it goes beyond all culture and all history, and in the same way philosophy will also strive towards the supra-historical and the transcendent. Nevertheless, just as the religious finds its expression only in earthly life, it must everywhere tie up with the historical and immanent, in order to gain any immediately accessible material for the treatment of its problems. The path that leads us to the supra-historical goes through the historical. Thus, philosophy has to make itself aware of values as values by means of historical material” (Rickert 1910: 30). As can be seen from this passage, the problem in question consists in explaining the relationship between concrete historical existence and rational principles.²⁰ It is possible to see here the same duality between religion as cultural sphere and religion as the other in relation to philosophy, i.e., non-scientific philosophy or metaphysics. Philosophy is opposed to these other activities because it deals with the totality, because it adopts a theoretical position and because it is eminently conceptual.

As mentioned, philosophical discourse must meet two requirements: it must be conceptual and must refer to the totality. The conceptual determination of this totality is not a comprehensible undertaking in itself. The apprehension of this totality, as Rickert understands it, does not proceed by the addition of concepts belonging to various regions of the world.²¹ The discourse on the dif-

19 This is not to say that worldviews are not the subject of philosophy. Insofar as philosophy is a science of totality, its theme is the opposition between the totality of the human being and the totality of the world. The worldviews as modalities of this relation are also a subject of philosophy understood not as a conception of the world but as a doctrine of worldviews in general.

20 This use of history is a characteristic feature of the philosophy of the Baden Neo-Kantians. For example: “history is the bond between time and eternity, between value and reality. And this is itself the meaning of history” (Bauch 1932: 131).

21 Why are ordinary concepts useless? “The reasons why it must be so can be easily understood. Spinoza once says: ‘Omnis determinatio est negatio’, and this is true insofar as every content-related conceptual determination is a demarcation against other concepts and thus includes a negation. The totality of the world [*Weltganze*], however, cannot be delimited in this way. This would virtually contradict the concept of its

ferent regions of the world presupposes the clarification of the possibility of referring to such a totality. In relation to this characterization, values have to represent the concepts proper to account for the totality of the world as such.²² Rickert's idea is that "we possess concepts which relate to each other in such a way that all parts of any whole fall *either* under one *or* under the other of them. Then the meant whole is to be determined conceptually in such a way that it includes everything that can be brought under one *as well as* under the other of the two concepts" (Rickert 1934: 41 [italics in the original]).²³ In this way, both concepts would offer in their combination a concept of the world as such. The distinctive note of these pairings is that the negation of one of these concepts involves a positive knowledge of its opposite.²⁴ Values are the concepts that work in this specific way. The task of philosophy is then to establish a system of such concepts.

The most detailed formulation of such a system is contained in Rickert's *System of Philosophy* (*System der Philosophie*). In this book, Rickert devotes a specific section to religion entitled "Religions and the Divine." The first thing that stands out is obviously the plural form. The starting point of the philosophical investigation are concrete religions. This starting point is relevant insofar as it is connected to Rickert's attempt to classify the different instantiations of religion according to his own value system.²⁵ For my part, instead of going into these details, I will concentrate myself exclusively on the architectonic problem.

As Rickert himself takes care to make explicit: "it is not as obvious as it is in ethics and aesthetics, which tasks philosophy has, as a science of value, in relation to religion. What does the religious good consist in and what value is it that constitutes the religious object?" (Rickert 1921: 338). Returning once more to the architectonic problem, there is an asymmetry between properly religious values and the values corresponding to the other spheres of culture. However, this difference becomes, once again, an extremely productive difficulty for philosophical thought.

wholeness, apart from which there is nothing else against which we could delimit it" (Rickert 1934: 11).

22 Let us recall that in Windelband's case, the introduction of the concept of value occurred in connection with value consciousness. The story line pursued by Rickert is markedly different.

23 This is Rickert's famous heterology. For a detailed reconstruction of this idea, see chapter five from Krijnen (2001).

24 This idea articulates Rickert's entire philosophical theory. To give it a more concrete character here, we can refer to one of the examples he offers. The totality of bodies is divided into mechanical bodies or living bodies. When it is affirmed that a certain body is not a mechanism, we do not encounter a mere infinite judgment but a positive determination of that body, namely, that it is a living organism (Rickert 1934: 42).

25 In any case, this is not a minor aspect. Specifically, it allows Rickert to refer variants such as theism, polytheism, and pantheism to the same conceptual framework. In contrast, Windelband's own exposition in the *Introduction* is much more rhapsodic.

First of all, one characteristic of cultural goods is its imperfect or unfinished nature. They are, as Rickert says, “all too human” (Rickert 1921: 338). Religious values, on the contrary, correspond to a perfect, finished, superhuman reality: God (*Gott*) or the Divine (*das Göttliche*). And, regardless of one’s belief in such entities, the fact is they can only be thought of in reference to specific values. In line with Rickert’s heterology, the religious man understands the perfect totality represented by the eternal goods either as a person or as impersonal, he binds himself to it practically or contemplatively, as placed immanently or transcendently, etc. The philosophy of religion must therefore clarify these different alternatives.

It is relevant to note already the similarities and differences with respect to Windelband’s position. Both authors deal with the values proper to religion. Only if we can determine specific values of religion can we justify the autonomy of the philosophy of religion from logic, ethics or aesthetics. Nonetheless, Windelband and Rickert defend this autonomy by means of arguments that reveal important differences between their ways of thinking. Windelband argues from his consideration of the subject’s evaluative capacity. This has already been sufficiently explained in the previous section. Rickert, on the other hand, argues for autonomy on the basis of concrete religions (Rickert 1921: 339). Concrete, i.e. historical, cultural life brings us face to face with the religious problem. Regardless of personal belief, there are in our cultural life religious goods and values associated with them. Philosophy must try to understand them as such. Therefore, Rickert is not concerned with postulating a value for religion from philosophy. What he seeks is a classification of the different manifestations of religious life present in culture from the point of view of an *a priori* system of values. Nevertheless, both authors employ an argument that could be considered intellectualist. And it is this argument that I will use to present in a philosophical manner the concept of the Holy.

The autonomy of the philosophy of religion is the result of considering a systematic problem inherent in the other philosophical sub-disciplines. The mismatch between reality and value was what motivated the religious form of values, that is, their sacralization. The imperfect character of human cultural goods leads Rickert to advance a similar claim: “We can call everything human imperfect only under the presupposition that a supra-human value, against which man can be measured with regard to his perfection or imperfection, is valid. Thus, the human as the imperfect demands the concept of the perfect, not as that of a reality [*Realität*], but as that of a valid value [*eines geltendes Wertes*] [...] and this is also the basic religious conviction as it confronts us through history: there is something absolutely perfect, supra-human, the Holy” (Rickert 1921: 339). Once more, the specificity of the philosophy of religion is associated with this overcoming of the sphere of experience. The incompleteness of the human being cannot be understood, this would be Rickert’s point, without also assuming some kind of concept of the complete.

Rickert’s analysis is slightly more complex than Windelband’s, introducing still other interesting nuances. Rickert finds that religion has a specific mode

of incompleteness. In relation to values, the ideal of the sacred operates as a presupposition, namely, as the ideal against which we try to measure our activities. But, in its specifically religious character, the value of the sacred does not only depict the impossibility of completeness. The desire for completeness is not possible either. For the subject, the concrete realization of the sacred means nothing other than becoming a god oneself. But this would be precisely a negation of the sacred character of the Holy: “Whoever is truly human, rejects the supra-human, in order to preserve this supra-human for itself. As soon as we try to understand this, we have come to the religious-philosophical problem of value” (Rickert 1921: 340).²⁶

Rickert’s explanation functions as a better characterization of holiness. This reference to the contradiction in the realization of the Holy brings his presentation closer to the religious phenomenon. The characteristic of this phenomenon is precisely the conceptual contradiction between the real dimension and the ideal dimension of the divine. The affirmation of a transcendent reality is not only problematic in terms of its lack of theoretical legitimacy. The assumed transcendent reality of the ideal remains impossible to grasp in strictly conceptual terms.

Ultimately, the problem of the philosophy of religion is not merely religious life. Its problem is equally the relation between the real and the ideal, between the concrete and the transcendental, between being and value. In this sense, I believe that Crowe’s statement is very accurate when, in the context of his analysis of Rickert’s philosophy of religion, he affirms that “religions, with their concern for transcendent, ahistorical values such as God as ‘highest good’ and human salvation, present in a particularly acute form the problem of the relation between ‘valid values’ and contingent historical and psychological realities” (Crowe 2010: 623).

The philosophy of religion represents a survival of metaphysical problems. Obviously I cannot discuss here Rickert’s detailed characterization of the various forms of religion. However, there is something important that should not be overlooked. In referring to Windelband, I pointed out the tension between philosophy of culture and religion. This can be comprehended as the opposition between an immanent and a transcendent worldview. Granting legitimacy to the latter seemed, moreover, to imply the negation of the former. Rickert is also aware of this seeming paradox (Rickert 1921: 344). While philosophy searches for the meaning of life in culture itself, there are forms of religion that deny this search in their flight to what is beyond experience. Rickert sees this form of religion for what it is, i.e., as another manifestation of cultural life. Although it constitutes a negation of culture as philosophy wants to unravel it, this religion itself is part of that culture. It is for this reason that it must itself form a part of the philosophical discourse. In the end, the relationship between philosophy and this form of religion ends up being asymmetrical again.

²⁶ This is certainly not the case in other spheres of culture. There would not be the same kind of contradiction in the realization of a “truly” beautiful work of art.

Rickert takes up the general problem of the philosophy of religion once more in *Grundprobleme der Philosophie* (Rickert 1934). The problem is again characterized in terms of the presence of values that do not allow themselves to be realized in experience. However, here Rickert defends a slightly different view. For Rickert directly discusses the mode of being assumed by religion, namely, a metaphysical mode of being. Rickert does not abandon the discussion of the place of religion in cultural life. However, he confines this subject to what he calls the anthropological dimension of the philosophy of religion.²⁷ This anthropological dimension is contrasted with an ontological dimension. The latter poses the discussion in terms of a mode of being (Krijnen 2002: 196). This shows Rickert's attempt to distance, in his own presentation, the divine and the sphere of value.²⁸ Another aspect to note is that Rickert no longer employs the concept of the Holy.

It remains for us to consider how Rickert, in this mature work, considers this nexus between religion and metaphysics. The core of religion is still understood in terms of the mysterious realization of that which is not but has a value. We must remember that for Rickert "a value that is effective [*der wirkt*] is not permissible for our concepts" (Rickert 1921: 340). Now, however, insofar as the understanding of the limits of knowledge has been modified, this possibility must be revisited.

The paradox Rickert points out is that our own acts of taking position guarantee the realization of values in the world. The enforced connection between value and reality only exists in reverse if we think that the world is configured or arranged in such a way that values can be realized in it or real goods produced that extend beyond the free act of the subject. Our own thought requires the possibility of this connection as a presupposition. The difference, in this case, is that the presupposition is no longer only meta-theoretical. When Windelband presents this same problem in the *Introduction*, he employs recourse to a postulate of reason to account for the very limits of knowledge. Now, Rickert concludes that the very understanding of the possibility of knowledge involves a metaphysical aspect (Rickert 1934: 138; Krijnen 2002: 197). To account for this aspect, Rickert introduces the idea of symbolic knowledge.²⁹

Through symbolism, concepts refer to a sphere of being that is different from the one through which these concepts are produced. What is said by means of

27 Here Rickert briefly takes up the exposition made in Rickert (1921). For this reason, I will not dwell on this text. It should be noted that Rickert continues to assert a certain asymmetry between science, ethics, or arts, on the one hand and religion on the other. Religion manifests a claim to organize human life in general that conflicts with the autonomy of the other spheres of culture. Religious life can become "intolerant" (Rickert 1934: 200) of other areas of culture.

28 "Nor can the divine be located in the realm of the 'mundus intelligibilis' as we understand it. In it, there are only unreal meaning formations [*Sinngebilde*], and they never adequately express the essence of a 'mighty' God on whom we depend." (Rickert 1934: 198)

29 Christian Krijnen also highlights how the inclusion of this symbolic knowledge represents a problematic return to metaphysics (Krijnen 2002: 195).

symbols represent only an image of what is really meant. Metaphysics subsequently employs images taken from the sensible world to conceive the supra-sensible. The most straightforward case of a symbolic concept is that of the reality of value, by which a “higher reality” (Rickert 1934: 144) is attributed to that which we know cannot be real in the sense of the reality of experience. In this way, the paradox of the realization of that which is not, but possess validity, obtains a novel resolution.

The sphere in which symbolic knowledge finds its most concrete presentation is precisely religion. Rickert encounters a way of reintroducing themes proper to the religious tradition by accepting a certain flexibility in adopting a metaphysical point of view. Normally, the statement of Kantian heritage according to which the very limits of knowledge leave room for religious conviction does not involve the specific adoption of such a conviction.³⁰ Philosophy pushes such convictions beyond the limits of knowledge. And while it affirms a high degree of tolerance in this regard, it does so on the premise of leaving what is beyond knowledge as indeterminate. It is for this reason that philosophy and religion, immanent and transcendent worldview, come into conflict. On the contrary, in *Grundprobleme*, Rickert does take care to suggest the possibility of expanding discourse beyond the limits of knowledge. And it does so with a very concrete conviction: “may therefore the belief, which, formulated as a proposition, goes to the effect that I, as an individual soul, stand in a personal relation to a personal God, however unprovable it may be scientifically, be regarded as *refuted* or even as refutable by the science which tries to know the totality of the world, and have we therefore here the right to speak of the destruction of faith by philosophy?” (Rickert 1934: 203). And Rickert’s answer is no.

Certainly, there can be no scientific or theoretical foundation of a religious conviction as such. Neo-Kantians cannot move away from this insight. However, in contrast to what was stated above, it is possible to encounter representative vehicles to express or articulate such a conviction. In this way, the essential mystery of religion is mitigated through a certain type of “concepts”, i.e. symbols. Thus, Rickert states that “a symbolic thinking, without having to fear scientific refutation, may tie up to the concept of the free spiritual subject and develop it symbolically towards the religious side in such a way that it comes to the concept of an *indestructible* soul, as the religious believer thinks it.” (Rickert 1934: 205 [italics in the original]). Although he does not develop or explain in detail how this expansion from the concept of the subject to the concept of the indestructible soul could be carried out, he does refer to the possible model represented by Leibniz’s monadology (Rickert 1934: 206). Of course, these are not theoretical conceptions, but they are called beliefs formulated from a “symbolic-metaphysical” (Rickert 1934: 207) point of view. On this last point, Rickert’s own proposal bears some resemblance to that of his

30 However, Rickert’s ideas have a clear antecedent in the *Critique of Judgment*, in which Kant states that all our knowledge of divinity is symbolic (Kant AA V: 254). For a reconstruction of this aspect of the Kantian doctrine, see Maly (2012).

teacher. Indeed, symbolic knowledge appears as the specifically transcendent form that the fundamental concepts of scientific philosophy acquire.

4. What's at Stake with the Philosophy of Religion?

We can now synthesize the three possible paths for the philosophy of religion, i.e., Windelband's position, the position defended by Rickert in his maturity, in 1921, and his late position, namely, in his last work published in 1934.

In a general methodological consideration, Christian Krijnen states: "From a principle-theoretical point of view, the philosophical tradition provides three paradigms to answer the question of the validity of our claims [*Leistungen*]: the metaphysical, the empiricist and the transcendental philosophical theorem of justification [*das transzendentalphilosophische Begründungstheorem*]" (Krijnen 2002: 181). This tripartition is of course one of the keys to understand the different argumentative strategies stemming from the Kantian tradition. It is precisely a matter of clarifying the transcendental alternative against the two traditional answers: empiricism and rationalism. It is also fair to state that, in the context of the post-idealist identity crisis of philosophy, the major problem of transcendental philosophy is not linked to metaphysics directly. On the contrary, the discrediting of metaphysics only strengthened the empiricist position. That is why the central task for the Neo-Kantians became the correct counter position to empiricism. An example of this is Windelband's or Cohen's emphasis on strictly upholding the distinction between questions of genesis and questions of validity.³¹ Hence, the argumentative effort of Baden's Neo-Kantians consists in showing the separation between the transcendental and the factual. However, they must immediately produce their reunion since otherwise the theory would have no explanatory power whatsoever. It is this second question that comes into play when addressing the problems of the philosophy of religion. And what is at issue in this case is to delimit in a correct way the fields of experience with respect to that which is beyond experience. The problem is that religion resembles metaphysics, but is not itself metaphysics. And, to be true to the Neo-Kantian motive of offering a philosophy of culture, religion cannot be merely discarded. Quite the contrary, it must encounter some form of placement in the architecture of the philosophical system. The tensions linked to this situation can be seen throughout the philosophical evolution of both Windelband and Rickert.

As Baden's school philosophy is transformed from a program into a system, the tensions between the development of philosophy and religion becomes more relevant. Windelband's entire treatment of the problem goes in this direction. For him, in the philosophy of religion two different ways of considering reason are opposed, an immanent and a transcendent way. This is what he explains to Rickert himself in a letter from 1913: "As far as the system of values is concerned, I only briefly hint at it today: I deny that there are actually

31 See Windelband (2021b).

religious values in terms of content (and my “Introduction” brings this out even more sharply than the *Praeludien*), because the so-called [religious values] are only the other values in the coloring of the supra-sensible [*der Färbung des Uebersinnlichen*]: I can therefore least of all assume two areas of religious values, I see rather just in your distinction of pantheistic and theistic values only a confirmation of the fact that they are again the same ethical-logical-aesthetic values only in two different supra-empirical colorings, one immanent and one transcendent” (Windelband 1913).³²

Rickert begins by nuancing this idea in his mature writings, concentrating on the problem of the general structure of religion. In this sense, he achieves a clear answer to the problem of the systematic articulation of religion in the system of culture. In his later writings he takes an even more radical path than that proposed by Windelband previously. This is why we can speak, in considering his case, of a third way of approaching the problem of the philosophy of religion. While Windelband attempted to link the possibility of a transcendent discourse with the practical postulates of reason, Rickert opens up the possibility of a theoretical recourse. This is the sense we have to give to the use of ‘symbolic’ knowledge.

Symbolic knowledge is that which allows us to present through our language the paradox of the realization of values, that is to say, of the real becoming of that which is not but possess validity. From the point of view of the theory of knowledge, the formulation of the realization of values is always problematic. Philosophical reflection in general, that is, that vision broader than the mere theory of knowledge, is the one that leads to the very limits of theory. From the reflection on these limits emerges the possibility of a symbolic expansion of our concepts. Religion, finally, appears as the sphere where this use of symbols operates in an articulated fashion. Although there is invariably a reluctance in this regard, this is the reason why the philosophy of culture as transcendental philosophy systematically culminates with religion.

Conclusions

As we have seen, the problem of the philosophy of religion is indeed a source of obscurity in the philosophical theories of Windelband and Rickert. It is also a sign of the innovative character of Neo-Kantian philosophy. This statement should not be considered lightly. The Neo-Kantians’ treatment of the problem of religion is far removed from the Kantian presentation itself. Precisely, Kant’s philosophy of religion does not operate as the basis for solving the problem of the place of religion in culture. Yet the Neo-Kantians carry out this task in the form of the transcendental philosophy inaugurated by Kant (Bauch 1925:

³² Windelband to Heinrich Rickert, Heidelberg, 20.12.1913. This letter can be retrieved in the following link: http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/heidhs2740II-IA-224_100. A transcript of this letter can be accessed at <http://elpub.bib.uni-wuppertal.de/servlets/DocumentServlet?id=14793>. Consulted on December, 2021. The translation is mine.

2–3). Neo-Kantians offer a novel understanding of the system of transcendental idealism. And as we have seen, religion fulfills no minor role.

On the other hand, the problem of the philosophy of religion allows us to offer an alternative perspective on Neo-Kantian philosophy. Beyond the connoisseurs of the subject, the association of Neo-Kantian philosophy with an exclusive predominance of the theory of knowledge still survives. This view has foundations in the texts insofar as the theory of knowledge remains the cornerstone of philosophy. But just as Kant's philosophy is not exhausted in the first critique, neither is Neo-Kantian reflection limited to epistemology. Through the years, Neo-Kantians deepen their own reflection by considering the possibility of expressing the truths of religion and metaphysical thought.

As for the philosophy of religion itself, it seems to occupy the highest place in the system of culture proposed by these Neo-Kantians. This position remains problematic. But in this problem also lies its relevance. The possibility of articulating a system of philosophy, understood as an all-encompassing theory of the world and as a doctrine of the worldviews, is confronted with the fact of its own immanent character. As such, it cannot fail to recognize that such immanence cannot be thought of except in connection with transcendence. Whether the symbolic procedure proposed by Rickert is the proper path for establishing a link between the transcendental and the transcendent remains in this writing an open question. The denial of immanence does not offer a positive knowledge of transcendence. But neither is it a mere nothingness. That is why it demands a language of its own. Just as in religion, philosophy also finds a mystery in its own essence. On this point, the texts are not sufficiently clear or detailed so I believe that this question no longer belongs to historical research but to philosophical reflection in its purity. What I do hope is that I have made clear both the need to consider this subject area in order to gain an accurate picture of Baden's Neo-Kantian philosophy, as well as the undeniable effort made first by Windelband and then by Rickert to push reflection on transcendental philosophy to its very limits.

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Hasinto Paez Bonifasi

Na granicama znanja: filozofija i religija u Jugozapadnom Neokantijanizmu

Apstrakt

Ovaj rad istražuje suštinska načela jugozapadnog neo-kantovskog poimanja filozofije religije. Specifično, usredsređuju se na dva različita aspekta Vindelbandovog i Rikertovog pristupa religiji. Najpre, osvrću se na način na koji oni određuju religijske vrednosti. Potom, fokusiraju se na način na koji oni sučeljavaju religiju sa sistematskom strukturom kulture. Kao rezultat analize tekstova oba autora, videćemo da je moguće otkriti najmanje tri moguća puta za razradu filozofije religije. Uprkos ovom mnoštvu puteva, tvrđicu da oni pokazuju sličan osnovni problem: oni pokazuju, naimе, problematičan odnos između transcendentalne filozofije i metafizike. Zbog toga, filozofija religije poprima formu refleksije o granicama znanja, a samim tim i o samim granicama transcendentalne filozofije.

Ključne reči: Vindelband, Rikert, svetinja, religijske vrednosti, transcendentalna filozofija