

*Faith and Value: Heinrich Rickert's
Theory of Religion*

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The work of Heinrich Rickert (1863–1936), standard-bearer of the “Baden” or “South-west German” school of neo-Kantianism, exercised a profound influence on generations of theorists in a host of disciplines. Martin Heidegger, in philosophy, Max Weber and Georg Simmel, in sociology, and Ernst Troeltsch, in theology, were all deeply indebted to Rickert in various ways.¹ Yet, like most of the German neo-Kantians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Rickert’s work has largely passed into oblivion. There are, however, signs of a growing revival of interest in these

¹ Heidegger’s debt to Rickert, and to other neo-Kantians, has recently become a subject of intense scholarly scrutiny. Some of this literature highlights the critical dimensions of Heidegger’s relation to the neo-Kantians; for example, Charles R. Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994); Daniel O. Dahlstrom, *Heidegger’s Concept of Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1–47; Marion Heinz, “Philosophy and Worldview: Heidegger’s Concept of Philosophy and the Baden School of Neokantianism,” in *Heidegger, German Idealism and Neo-Kantianism*, ed. Tom Rockmore (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 2000), 209–38; and George Kovacs, “Philosophy as Primordial Science in Heidegger’s Courses of 1919,” in *Reading Heidegger from the Start*, ed. Theodore Kisiel and John Van Buren (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 91–110. However, another recent piece, in addition to providing a clear discussion of neo-Kantianism in general, brings out the positive influences of Rickert on Heidegger: Ian Lyne, “Rickert and Heidegger: On the Value of Everyday Objects,” *Kant-Studien* 91 (2000): 204–25. On Rickert and Weber, see the excellent study by Guy Oakes, *Weber and Rickert: Concept Formation in the Cultural Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988).

figures. Work has begun on a critical edition of Rickert's works.² A recent issue of the journal *Fichte-Studien* was devoted to the question of the reception of Fichte's work by the neo-Kantians, particularly by Rickert.³ Two substantial collections of essays by leading scholars in the field have also appeared.⁴ It would seem that the neo-Kantians in general, and Rickert in particular, are finally getting the attention that they deserve.

The aim of this essay is to contribute to this encouraging trend by examining an aspect of Rickert's work that has been largely undiscussed up till now. The majority of the interest in Rickert has revolved around his work in the philosophy of science, leaving his *philosophy of religion* for the most part untouched. The only significant exceptions to this rule are two essays by Hans-Ludwig Ollig, which discuss not only Rickert's work, but that of other significant members of the neo-Kantian school.⁵ In both of these valuable studies, Ollig focuses on the later period of Rickert's work. However, Ollig does not examine Rickert's earlier work on religion, nor does he situate Rickert's theory of religion within his larger theory of values (*Wertslehre*). These latter are essential elements of his overall theory, and require their own independent treatment.

My discussion will proceed in three stages. First, I will show how Rickert's theory of value, of which his philosophy of religion forms an integral part, is ultimately motivated by the problem of world-view, i.e., the problem of a unified, theoretically grounded system that is able to provide an account of the meaning of human life. With this in mind, Rickert challenges other interpretations of religious phenomena, and intimates the significance of religion for the more general problem of world-views. Second, I will examine Rickert's conception of religion as part of his theory of values, as found in essays from the 1910s and the 1921 work, *System der Philosophie*. Finally, I will turn to Rickert's last published piece, from 1934. Here, Rickert argues that reason, driven by the imperative of completeness, necessarily points beyond itself to the domain of *faith*. That is, Rickert's project of grounding a world-view in a science of values can ultimately only be com-

² The first installment of this planned edition appeared in 1999.

³ *Fichte-Studien* 13 (1997).

⁴ The first is Hans-Ludwig Ollig, ed., *Materialien zur Neukantianismus Diskussion* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1987). The second, more recent, volume is Ernst Wolfgang Orth and Helmut Horzhey, ed., *Neukantianismus: Perspektiven und Probleme* (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 1994).

⁵ See Hans-Ludwig Ollig, "Die Religionsphilosophie der südwestdeutschen Schule," in *Materialien zur Neukantianismus Diskussion*, 428–57; and "Das Problem der Religion und die Philosophie des Neukantianismus," in *Neukantianismus: Perspektiven und Probleme*, 113–35.

pleted by a step beyond science and reason into the sphere of symbolism and metaphysics.

I. PHILOSOPHY AND WORLD-VIEW

In his writings before about 1910, Rickert's focus is on the theory of history and the epistemology of the cultural sciences. Religion, as well as the larger problematic of world-view, play only peripheral roles in works such as the 1902 edition of *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*. Shortly before the outbreak of World War I, however, one can see a change in focus in Rickert's concerns. This is particularly evident from a number of programmatic essays, such as a 1910 essay tellingly entitled "Vom Begriff der Philosophie." Rickert's new orientation is advertised by the claim that philosophy is driven by what one might term the "world-view imperative," i.e., the demand to contribute to or to ground a comprehensive orientation for human action and thought.⁶ A world-view is designed to provide us with a coherent understanding of the "meaning [*Sinn*]" or significance of our lives. Philosophy, which takes the world as a whole to be its object, must address the issue of world-view. Rickert rejects the opinion of those who, like Husserl, attempt to expunge questions of world-view entirely from "scientific" philosophy.⁷

According to Rickert, a philosophy that is adequate to the task of world-view must incorporate the *subjective* viewpoint of the person for whom world-view is an issue. That is, it is only for a subject that the issue of "meaning" arises at all. Any philosophical position that eliminates or excludes this viewpoint is, by Rickert's lights, simply unsuited to fulfilling the ultimate tasks of philosophy. In "Vom Begriff der Philosophie," Rickert argues that "objectivism," by which he seems to mean a species of naturalism, "annihilates the subject" and "thereby renders the whole world into a totally indifferent being or occurrence, in regards to which it is no longer possible to ask about its meaning."⁸ That is, by integrating the subjective viewpoint too closely with the causal system of nature, naturalistic theories exclude the subjective concerns of morality, art, and religion, and of "mean-

⁶ Heinrich Rickert, "Vom Begriff der Philosophie," in *Philosophische Aufsätze*, ed. Rainer A. Bast (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1999), 3–36. This claim can be found on p. 8.

⁷ See Husserl's famous essay, "Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft," *Logos* 1 (1910): 289–341.

⁸ "Vom Begriff der Philosophie," 8.

ing” in general, from consideration. Only a philosophical stance that takes the subjective point of view into consideration, without sliding into solipsism or skepticism, is able to do the work that philosophy is supposed to do. For Rickert, this role is filled by Kantian or “critical” subjectivism.⁹ By “critical” subjectivism, Rickert means a non-metaphysical view according to which the subject is not a “reality,” but rather a “logical form” or “concept.” This anti-metaphysical stance is, as will be made more clear below, one of the enduring features of Rickert’s thought.

In Rickert’s view, however, Kantian critical philosophy needs to be supplemented by a fully articulated theory of value. World-view is an eminently *practical* affair, and in practical life, our first concern is with value. Rickert elaborates:

In every case, the validity of values remains the primary thing for the question of the meaning of life. Willing and acting come later. World-view, as an understanding of the world, can never emerge from a mere understanding of the subject, but rather only from an understanding of value. Only when we are certain about values does the subject, who takes a position on them, become significant. Whoever struggles against objectivism because it denies the meaning of life achieves nothing at all by simply raising the subject above the objective context. That is simply negative. A concept of the world achieved in this way is, with its voluntarism, actualism, and principle of freedom, still completely empty with regard to the problem of world-view.¹⁰

Recall that, by this time, the focus of Rickert’s theory of value has shifted from his earlier, more epistemologically oriented writings. There, at issue is the delimitation of the logical domain of the cultural sciences. Here, one might say that an “existential” issue is at stake. Rickert’s argument in this passage is that it is insufficient simply to establish the independence of the subject from the causal nexus of the objective world. While this is certainly a necessary part of any philosophically grounded world-view, this move is incapable of filling in the *content* of such a world-view. Rickert no doubt has in mind Kant’s argument for the freedom of persons in section 9 of the “Antinomy of Pure Reason” in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Here, Kant argues that the transcendental subject, as a noumenon, stands outside the

⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

causal nexus of the empirical world. For Rickert, however, the metaphysical point is not enough. As he puts it here, “The subject must be positively anchored if we want to achieve an understanding of the meaning of life, and the ground that we need for this purpose can only be a domain [*Reich*] of valid values [*Wertgeltungen*], not the reality of subjectivism.”¹¹ Like both Hermann Lotze and his own teacher, Wilhelm Windelband, Rickert is emphatic that this realm of values is not to be identified with any aspect of empirical reality. Therefore, it makes no sense to ask about whether or not a value “exists.” Rather, “One can only ask whether it is ‘valid [*gilt*]’ or not, and under no circumstances does this question coincide with that of the existence of values.”¹²

In an essay published in 1913, “Von System der Werte,” Rickert reiterates the ultimate motivation behind his search for a theory of values. On his view, the investigation of “realities” ought to be left to the specialized sciences, whereas philosophy has a different task, viz., that of contributing to the formation of a world-view. A “theory of valid values,” which forms the foundation for a world-view, becomes the exclusive purview of philosophy.¹³ In the 1921 edition of *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, Rickert adds a section entitled “Geschichte und Weltanschauung.” Here, he baldly states that “the *ultimate* purpose of this work, as of every genuine philosophical investigation, consists in making a contribution to the theoretical clarification of the so-called *problem of world-view*.”¹⁴ Fulfilling this purpose requires a robust appreciation of each of the distinctive domains of human cultural life—moral, political, artistic, and religious.¹⁵ Each of these domains should be treated as “problems of value.” That is, the philosophical task is to articulate and ground the a priori values that are constitutive of the *meaning* of various activities in these domains. A proper theory of value, then, will embrace the whole of human life, rather than one particular part.¹⁶ The ultimate payoff is *not* merely a tool for interpreting culture, but rather a scientifically grounded world-view. As Rickert puts it here, “When philosophy succeeds in producing a compre-

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹² *Ibid.*, 14.

¹³ Heinrich Rickert, “Von System der Werte,” in *Philosophische Aufsätze*, 73–105. This comment is found on p. 74.

¹⁴ Heinrich Rickert, *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung: Eine logische Einleitung in die historischen Wissenschaften*, 4th Aufl. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1921), 531.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 532.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

hensive theory of value, then it can seek to understand on this basis the values upon which the sense of our life rests, and so arrive at a theoretical clarification of what we call a world-view."¹⁷

These ideas are also clearly discernible in another work from 1921, the incomplete *System der Philosophie*. Philosophy, Rickert contends, is the only truly “universal science.”¹⁸ This means that it not only provides an all-embracing theoretical account of the whole of reality, but it also addresses the specific “convictions” that concern not simply the theoretical or scientific person, but the *whole* person.¹⁹ As he had previously argued in the programmatic essay from 1910, Rickert here reiterates the claim that philosophy must contribute to the problem of world-view by becoming “a science of complete *life*.”²⁰ Again, contrary to those who want to banish issues of world-view from the ken of “scientific” philosophy, Rickert maintains that the formation of a world-view is the ultimate purpose of philosophical inquiry. At the same time, philosophy proper is not itself a particular world-view, but rather a theory *of* world-views. In other words, philosophy provides a systematic account of the totality of the values involved in all departments of human life.²¹ Philosophy helps one achieve clarity about personal convictions in various cultural spheres, yet it should not be placed on the same level as these convictions.²²

This sampling of representative works shows that Rickert’s ultimate philosophical concern is, from about 1910 onward, with world-view, i.e., with the search for a comprehensive framework for interpreting the meaning of life as a whole. This concern with culture, with practical life, and with historical reality was shared by many of his contemporaries, both inside and outside of the circle of neo-Kantianism. Moreover, this concern with culture provides a common ground that links the otherwise diverse positions that have been traditionally gathered under the heading of “neo-Kantianism.”²³ For Rickert, the imperative of world-view requires that phi-

¹⁷ Ibid., 533.

¹⁸ Heinrich Rickert, *System der Philosophie, 1. Teil: Allgemeine Grundlegung der Philosophie* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1921), 15.

¹⁹ Ibid., 26.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 31.

²² Ibid., 33.

²³ Ernst Wolfgang Orth has persuasively argued for this claim. See his essay “Die Einheit des Neukantianismus,” in *Neukantianismus: Perspektiven und Probleme*, 13–30. See also Friedrich Tenbruck, “Neukantianismus als Philosophie der modernen Kultur,” in *Neukantianismus: Perspektiven und Probleme*, 71–87.

losophy be *comprehensive*, that it embrace the whole of life in all its spheres—both theoretical *and* practical. For this reason, he argues that “intellectualism,” i.e., the privileging of theoretical values, such as truth, above all others, inevitably leads to distortions and one-sidedness.²⁴

What is distinctive about Rickert's position throughout, however, is its strongly anti-metaphysical character. In the 1904 edition of *Der Gegenstand der Erkenntnis*, Rickert sharply differentiates the “transcendental” or “critical” approach from both psychology and metaphysics. “To answer epistemological questions through metaphysics,” he quips, “means to replace the solution to a problem with an insoluble problem.”²⁵ Almost two decades later, in *System der Philosophie*, Rickert insists that the theory of values need not be “anchored in some solidly real foundation.”²⁶ He goes on to reiterate another earlier point, viz. that transcendental philosophy is an authentic alternative to both empirical science and to metaphysics.²⁷ As he had in “Vom Begriff der Philosophie,” Rickert argues here that the “subject” of his value theory is not the “metaphysical soul” of dogmatic idealism. Indeed, it is not “real” at all; it belongs neither among sensible nor supersensible realities, since “what is sought is the *a priori*, or the ‘presupposition’ for the knowledge of reality, and this cannot consist in some part of what is known to be real.”²⁸

Because of the requirement of completeness, Rickert stresses that the philosophy of religion must comprise an *integral* element of the overall theory of value.²⁹ In fact, the historical religions are to be credited with bringing the whole problematic of value to light in the first place. That is, 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. As Rickert points out, while values belong to a realm that transcends reality, we only have access to them *in reality*.³⁰ More specifically, we discover values through the realities to which they are attached, and these are located primarily in the domain of *culture*.

²⁴ *System der Philosophie*, 29.

²⁵ Heinrich Rickert, *Der Gegenstand der Erkenntnis. Einführung in die transcendentale Philosophie* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1904), 152.

²⁶ *System der Philosophie*, 133.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 157–58.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 157.

²⁹ “Vom Begriff der Philosophie,” 20.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

“Philosophy must therefore direct its gaze to cultural goods in order to find in them the multiplicity of values.”³¹ Religion therefore provides a useful analogy for the philosophical project that Rickert is proposing. He writes:

It lies in the nature of religion that it transcends all culture and all history, and in the same way philosophy strives for the supra-historical and transcendent. Nevertheless it must start with the historical and the immanent in order to achieve at all the immediately accessible material for the development of its problems, just as religion only finds its expression in earthly life. The way to the supra-historical can only lead from the historical.³²

Given the close analogy between the philosophical theory of value and religious systems, one is not surprised to find Rickert later ruling out certain ways of interpreting religious phenomena. In a 1913 essay, “Lebenswerte und Kulturwerte,” he criticizes a then-fashionable strand of philosophy that he labels “biologism.”³³ He associates this stream of thought with figures as diverse as Nietzsche, Bergson, and the American pragmatists.³⁴ “Biologism,” according to Rickert, is a family of views on which “life” is somehow the “highest good,” and all values must therefore be “life-values”; that is, all other values or cultural goods are assessed in terms of their capacity for either “enhancing [*aufsteigenden*]” or “diminishing [*niedergehenden*]” life.³⁵ This view, applied to the interpretation of religious phenomena, apparently yields the following claim: “Even faith in the supra-sensible is supported by biologism: religion receives a justification for its existence as soon as it is placed in the service of life, and made useful for peoples in the struggle for existence.”³⁶ Against this kind of biologism in general, Rickert argues that cultural achievements in any domain actually require a kind of distance from life, a separation of a person from his or her immediate drives or instincts.³⁷ While this is particularly true for scientific achievements, which require suspension of one’s immediate needs and desires, it also applies to art and religion, despite their apparent “closeness” to life.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

³² *Ibid.*, 20–21.

³³ Heinrich Rickert, “Lebenswerte und Kulturwerte,” in *Philosophische Aufsätze*, 37–72.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 42–48.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 40–41.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 60–62.

Thus, biologicistic accounts of culture fail for this general reason, and this is particularly clear in the case of religion. As Rickert puts it, “The attempt to justify religious faith through the claim that religious peoples have better chances in the struggle with other peoples must seem startlingly odd to a real religious person.”³⁸ This is because, for the religious person, religious values transcend all others, including those of survival. Hence, biologicistic accounts have “as little to do with the grounding of religious values” as does “the familiar extolling of religion as a support for the throne or the state.”³⁹ Rickert does not, however, claim that religion is completely cut off from life. To the contrary, all of life is irradiated, as it were, by the transcendent values to which religious people ascribe. He writes:

In this way, the greatest conceivable evaluations of life can emerge from religious points of view. But the concern is never with mere life in its vitality, rather life is only the “external side” of a transcendent value-reality [*Wertrealität*] contained within it, and this-worldly life only has significance as the living mantle of the divinity. Vital life is, in this case, nothing but a symbol for a being of a totally different kind—no longer vital, but supra-vital.⁴⁰

Here again, Rickert is drawing attention to the way in which religion brings out the problematic of value in a particularly acute form. On the one hand, religious phenomena are alleged to be resistant to “biologicistic” reductions, because religion clearly subordinates biological life to a domain of transcendent values. On the other hand, religion provides a comprehensive evaluation of life in all departments—political, moral, familial, artistic—and so is “close” to life in some sense. Similarly, philosophy as a theory of values resists any conflation of empirical reality with the domain of validity. Yet, the ultimate motivation for philosophy as a theory of value is to contribute to the formation of a world-view, which, like a religion, embraces the entirety of human life. The tight parameters within which Rickert has posed these issues define the uniqueness of his approach. As part of a theory of world-view, the philosophy of religion must be *critical*. That is, the values constitutive of religion must be reconstructed without appeal to supersensible entities.

³⁸ Ibid., 70.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

II. RELIGION IN THE SYSTEM OF VALUES

Having sketched out his general program in the 1910 essay “Vom Begriff der Philosophie,” Rickert fleshes out his project in substantial detail in an essay from 1913 and a monograph from 1921. In this section, I will first of all outline the general structure of Rickert’s system of values, and then I will focus particular attention on the place that religious phenomena occupy within this system.⁴¹

In “Von System der Werte,” Rickert first of all argues that the primary task for a systematic theory of values is to find some classificatory order or “arrangement [*Ordnung*]” of values.⁴² This requires a principle that unifies and lends systematic order to the diversity of values that can be read off from human cultural activities. That is, the system of values cannot merely be an encyclopedic list of values, but must include a “hierarchy” or “rank-ordering.”⁴³ At the same time, the system of values must accommodate the open-ended, incomplete nature of history, of the reality within which values are first of all discovered. Rickert goes on to argue that both of these demands can be met through an examination of the actual evaluative behavior of the human subject. After all, the “meaning” of life as a whole, grounded in a system of values, is always only meaningful *for* a subject.⁴⁴

Rickert then claims that a single principle can be seen to be at work in all human evaluative behavior, the so-called “tendency towards *completion* [*Voll-Endung*].”⁴⁵ In other words, human activity is goal-directed, and its meaning depends on whether or not it actually reaches, or at least approximates, the relevant goal. This tendency is a *formal* feature of human activities. The ends that are aimed at in such goal-oriented behaviors can be conceived of as realizations of a value or of a set of values. Rickert argues that these ends can be conceived of as wholes, consisting of both “content” and “form.” The “content” is provided by the *real* aspect of the realized end, while the value that attaches to this content constitutes the “form.” Armed with these, quite general, observations about human behavior, Rickert goes on to argue that three formal “domains of goods” can be distinguished according to variations in the relation between content and form.

⁴¹ To date, the only work that approaches a complete consideration of Rickert’s theory of value is Christian Krijnen’s magisterial *Nachmetaphysischer Sinn: Eine problemgeschichtliche und systematische Studie zu den Prinzipien der Wertphilosophie Heinrich Rickerts* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001). See, in particular, pp. 538–70.

⁴² Rickert, “Von System der Werte,” 75–76.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

First of all, there are goods that involve the combination of a value and an “inexhaustible totality of material.” The achievement of these goods is a matter of reaching successive stages in an infinite process of development. The domain of goods that possesses this characteristic is what Rickert calls the domain of “infinite totality.”⁴⁶ Second, there are ends that involve the connection between a value or set of values and some finite, particular body of material, or an already completed whole. These belong to the domain of goods of “complete particularity.”⁴⁷ Finally, there are ends that, in a sense, involve a synthesis of the preceding two domains of goods. This is the domain of “complete totality,” in which “we have the ultimate goal that a striving for the realization of values is able to pose for itself.”⁴⁸ These three domains, according to Rickert, exhaust the goods to which values can be attached.

These domains can also be characterized *temporally*. First, there are “futural goods [*Zukunftsgüter*],” which are best seen as stages in an endless process of development. Then, there are “present goods [*Gegenwartsgüter*],” which are somehow abstracted out of this process. Finally, there are “eternal goods [*Ewigkeitsgüter*],” goods that involve a synthesis of infinite material with value such that this synthesis cannot be located or achieved at any particular time. Rickert is careful to point out that nothing he has said so far implies any claim about the actual *existence* of these eternal goods. Instead, the overall point is taxonomic: “The goods of temporal, earthly, sensible or ‘immanent’ life are always either futural or present goods, while we must assign the eternal goods, if we want to postulate them, to the supra-sensible or ‘transcendent.’”⁴⁹

It is worth pausing at this point and taking note of the fact that Rickert describes “eternal goods” as “postulates.” This terminology is perhaps most familiar to readers of Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason*. There, Kant had argued that the requirements of moral action necessitate the postulating of both God and of eternal life. As postulates, these ideas do not actually enlarge our knowledge of reality. Instead, they articulate necessary conditions for moral action. That is, to *postulate* God or some other transcendent value is not to claim that such a thing *exists*. It is instead to point out something that is true of our own ways of thinking. Wilhelm Windelband, Rickert’s teacher and the founder of the “Baden” school of neo-

⁴⁶ Ibid., 80.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 81.

Kantianism, had employed this same concept in his own discussions of the philosophy of religion.⁵⁰ Religious goods, including God Himself, seem, on Rickert's account, to have the status of regulative ideas. This, of course, seems to be much more than a merely taxonomical point about how to classify various aspects of human culture. Indeed, this view seems to be a substantive commitment, one that, as Rickert was well aware, many religious people would dispute. The implications of this commitment impact Rickert's entire philosophical system, as will be shown in detail in the concluding section of this essay. For now, it can be said that it clearly follows from Rickert's conception of the project of transcendental philosophy.

Having presented a formal classificatory scheme of the domains of goods in which values can be located, Rickert goes on to add one more distinction that is designed to complete the framework of his system. This is the distinction between "active" goods, in which "values attach to active, social personalities," and "contemplative goods," in which values attach to "things [*Sache*]."⁵¹ Activities that correspond to contemplative goods involve a "*monistic* tendency towards completion," that is, they tend towards "unification [*Vereinheitlichung*], in the sense of simplification [*Vereinfachung*]."⁵² Activities aimed at "active" goods, on the other hand, are directed towards the "totality of personalities with which we have social connections," and so seek to preserve the "individual diversity and multiplicity" of these personalities. In other words, the tendency towards completion at work here is *pluralistic*.⁵³

The three domains of goods, and the twofold distinction between active and contemplative goods, constitute the formal skeleton of Rickert's theory of value. That is, the framework created by these distinctions is supposed to provide an *exhaustive* classificatory scheme for human cultural activities and their associated goods. This, in turn, corresponds to a taxonomy of a priori values that are attached to these goods. The system of values can, as it were, be "read off" from this classificatory system. The 1913 essay, "Von System der Werte," represents Rickert's first attempt to develop this theory of value. The 1921 monograph, *System der Philosophie*, expands upon this earlier essay, though without altering the basic scheme.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ See Wilhelm Windelband, *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, 2. Aufl. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1920), 391.

⁵¹ Rickert, "Von System der Werte," 83.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 84.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ One thing that *System der Philosophie* adds is a foldout chart in which Rickert presents his entire theory in a clear, schematic outline. In his lecture course for summer semester 1923, Heidegger lampoons this chart, though without explicitly naming Rickert. See *Ges-*

The important point here is that this framework grounds Rickert's understanding of various religious phenomena. That is, an essential element of Rickert's philosophy of religion lies in his situating of religious phenomena within this larger taxonomic scheme.

First, it should come as no surprise that Rickert locates the goods of religion in the domain of "complete totality" or of "eternal goods." Intuitively, most, if not all, religions are concerned with goods that transcend history and empirical reality. On Rickert's account, certain types of religion fulfill the *monistic* drive behind contemplative activities. In particular, certain religions take the overcoming of all dualism, the total absorption of the "finite subject into the universal One [*All-Einen*]" to be the ultimate goal of human existence.⁵⁵ This type of religion is historically instantiated, according to Rickert, in world-religions like Buddhism, and in certain types of mysticism.⁵⁶ He goes on to characterize the ends of such religious phenomena in the following way:

Not only does monism find its completion in *pantheism*, but also its supra-personal and asocial character is most purely expressed in this domain of complete totality. The individual is nothing. The community of individuals no longer discloses a relationship between one person and another. I am you, you are I. All plurality, every social moment, which assumes at least two persons, is submerged into the universal One. The "world" is negated. God alone is everything.⁵⁷

Contemplative mysticism, then, illustrates quite clearly the main import of Rickert's system of values. Certain religious phenomena, such as pantheism, theosophy, or mystical experience, can be located at a determinate point in an overarching taxonomy of human cultural activities, goods, and values connected with the latter. In the schematic table of the system of values and goods, appended to the 1921 monograph *System der Werte*, this is graphically illustrated. The "domain of mysticism" belongs to that of "complete totality" or of "eternal goods." The value that grounds its meaning is "impersonal holiness [*unpersönliche Heiligkeit*]." The good, as

amtausgabe, Vol. 63: *Ontologie: Hermeneutik der Faktizität* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1988), 57.

⁵⁵ Rickert, "Von System der Werte," 87.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 87–88.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

already seen in “Von System der Werte,” is the “universal One.” The subjective relation that corresponds to these is “detachment [*Abgeschiedenheit*].” With Rickert’s system of values in place, we are supposed to have moved one step closer to the ultimate goal of a well-grounded world-view. The system allows us to comprehend and interpret the full range of human activities, including religious activities. As such, the system contributes to the achievement of some kind of over-arching evaluative orientation towards life as a whole.

Turning now to the “complete totality” that corresponds to “active” goods, Rickert once again identifies this classification with particular religious phenomena. The sphere of “active” goods—the moral, social, and political worlds—are irreducibly pluralistic. That is, in this part of human culture, “Each individual finds particular completion in his own *unique* [besonderen] way.”⁵⁸ Hence, the ultimate completion of the active life cannot involve the total submergence of “the fullness of personal life” in some pantheist universal One. The subject cannot be absorbed without remainder into the object. Instead, we find the “ideal of the absolute completion of the *subject*,” which is nothing else than “belief in a personal God.” Moreover, the individual is not absorbed into this personal God, but continues to exist perpetually alongside of it.⁵⁹ Rickert gives a summary description of this “domain of complete totality” in the following passage:

The relation to divinity as the complete, total personality does indeed free the finite existence of the subject from incompleteness, yet it cannot somehow mystically annihilate it. To the contrary, through personal participation in something that is personally transcendent and eternal, which we love, and by which we should believe that we are loved, we have elevated [*erhöhen*] our personal life in its individual *fullness*. Only in this way does the pluralistic tendency arrive at a conclusion.⁶⁰

As in the case of “contemplative” religious phenomena, the ultimate point of all this is that, with the system of values, we have achieved a framework for comprehending and interpreting classically *theistic* religious phenomena. Here, too, the schematic chart from *System der Philosophie* illustrates the exhaustiveness that is claimed for this system. In the “domain

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 98–99.

of the philosophy of religion," the relevant value is "personal holiness." The good, in which this value is realized, is the "world of the gods [*die Götterwelt*]." The subjective relation that corresponds to both of these is "piety [*Frommsein*]." Both theism, by which Rickert means *mono*-theism, and polytheism can be grouped together under this heading. Once again, when such a comprehensive understanding of religious phenomena has been achieved, we have, by Rickert's lights, progressed significantly on the path to a total world-view. Not only do we now have a schema for understanding religious phenomena, but we have a grasp on the values immanent to them, by which we can critically evaluate these phenomena.

III. THE KANTIAN LEGACY: RICKERT'S LAST WORD?

Up to this point, the focus has been on reconstructing Rickert's theory of religion as part of his overall theory of values. Throughout his writings from the 1910's and 1920's, Rickert repeatedly emphasizes the status of his philosophical work as a rational, "scientific [*wissenschaftlich*]" system. In several works, he defends the claims of "scientific" philosophy against various species of vitalism or "biologism."⁶¹ In his incomplete presentation of his entire system, *System der Philosophie* (1921), Rickert also undertakes the refutation of skepticism about the possibility of a philosophical system, which was quite prevalent at the time. In short, Rickert, like other neo-Kantians, is emphatic about the scientific, or rational, nature of philosophical inquiry.⁶² At the same time, however, unlike some of his contemporaries, Rickert also insists that philosophy address the problem of world-view. While philosophy is not to be placed on the same level as personal conviction, it is nevertheless properly conceived of as a "science" of world-views.⁶³

As a science of world-views, philosophy must first of all be comprehensive. That is, it must embrace not only the "theoretical" activities of science,

⁶¹ In addition to "Lebenswerte und Kulturwerte," published in 1913 and discussed earlier, Rickert also composed a monograph exclusively devoted to the refutation of the "philosophy of life." See *Die Philosophie des Lebens* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1920).

⁶² This viewpoint was championed by Rickert, and by many of his contemporaries, in the journal *Logos*. For an interesting discussion of the history and characteristics of this famous publication, see Harald Homann, "Die 'Philosophie der Kultur': Zum Programm des *Logos*," in *Neukantianismus: Perspektiven und Probleme*, 88–112.

⁶³ See, for example, Rickert, *Die Grenzen*, 532.

but also the “practical” sphere of religion, morality, and, ultimately, of life itself.⁶⁴ As a genuinely *universal* science, philosophy must comprehend subject, object, and the “irreal” or “unreal” domain of a priori values.⁶⁵ As such a universal science, the problems of philosophy actually overlap to a significant degree with the problems of world-view. The problem of world-view, after all, is the problem of how to make sense of, or ground the meaning of, the entirety of human experience. Meaning, on Rickert’s view, derives from a connection between ahistorical, transcendental values, on the one hand, and historical realities, on the other. Thus, the problem of world-view is the problem of how value and reality can be made to fit together.⁶⁶ This is simply a reflection of the goal-oriented structure of all human activities, discussed in the previous section. All activity is driven onward by a “tendency toward completion.” This tendency only achieves ultimate fulfillment in the domain of “eternal goods,” in the complete synthesis of the infinite material content of reality with the realm of values.

In this way, the problem of world-view, and of the system of philosophy, drives one to the consideration of *religion*. As has already been discussed, the domain of “complete totality” is occupied exclusively by religious values, religious goods, and religious modes of activity. It is in religion that the drive for “supra-human completeness” is most clearly expressed.⁶⁷ At the same time, the transcendence of this supreme good is also palpably experienced in religion. The paradigmatic religious experience, for Rickert, is the experience of “powerlessness [*Ohnmacht*].”⁶⁸ As Rickert maintains, “It belongs to the very concept of the holy, as the concept of a supra-human, absolute completeness, that, on the one hand, its realization is unattainable by us, and, on the other hand, it obtains as an unavoidable *ideal* by means of which we measure all human works.”⁶⁹ For the religious person, however, this domain of “complete totality” is not *merely* an ideal, but is a *reality* that actually exercises power and authority over human beings, and over reality as a whole. Crucially, this kind of existential commitment is clearly excluded from Rickert’s *critical* philosophy.

On Rickert’s view, the religious faith in a “holy power,” grounded in a

⁶⁴ *System der Philosophie*, 11–12.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 101–3.

⁶⁶ Rickert makes this point in “Vom Begriff der Philosophie,” 15.

⁶⁷ *System der Philosophie*, 338.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 339. Rickert also highlights this aspect of religious life in the fourth edition of *Die Grenzen*, 556.

⁶⁹ *System der Philosophie*, 340.

“value-reality [*Wertrealität*]” capable of establishing a final, indissoluble connection between reality and value, belongs to a domain that is “totally inaccessible to our scientific concepts.”⁷⁰ Nonetheless, from the perspective of reason, we can see that meaningful moral action *demands* the postulate of such a “value-reality.” Yet, reason forbids any dogmatic metaphysical claims to the effect that this transcendent reality can be demonstrated. This holds also for any doctrine of revelation. Both attempts to ground the convictions of faith transgress the boundaries of reason, to the apparent detriment of both reason *and* faith. At the same time, the rational science of world-views is inexorably pushed towards this extra-rational domain. As Rickert puts it here, “[. . .] a religion can never be *proven* or produced by a science; yet, it cannot be denied that our world-view manifests a gap that is first filled by a faith oriented towards a historical religion.”⁷¹

In these texts, we see Rickert arriving at the realization that his own project of a “science of world-views,” of philosophy as a universal science of the whole, necessarily remains incomplete. The ultimate unification of value and reality can only be an object of *faith*. True to his own Kantian heritage, Rickert wants to uphold a sharp distinction between the realm of what is rationally demonstrable, and so capable of “scientific” treatment, and the realm of metaphysics. Yet, by his own lights, it seems that his project of a unifying system of philosophy *requires* that one cross over this barrier, leaving science behind and entering the domain of faith.

In this regard, some light can be shed on Rickert’s development during these years by considering the work of Ernst Troeltsch, who was, by his own admission, deeply influenced by Rickert’s thought. In a 1904 essay entitled “Modern Philosophy of History,” Troeltsch carefully reviews Rickert’s work to date, seeing Rickert’s approach as a way to overcome “deep-rooted naturalistic and metaphysical prejudices.”⁷² Troeltsch offers a clear, accurate account of Rickert’s “*purely formal and methodological*” take on the problems of the philosophy of history, i.e., an outlook that grounds the distinctiveness of history as a discipline in an analysis of the concepts and methods of different sciences.⁷³ For Troeltsch, however, the issues raised by Rickert’s own analyses push in the direction of metaphysics, which, as he rightly notes, is antithetical to Rickert’s fundamental philosophical orienta-

⁷⁰ *Die Grenzen*, 558.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 561.

⁷² Ernst Troeltsch, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2. Band: *Zur religiösen Lage, Religionsphilosophie und Ethik* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1922), 678–79.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 681.

tion.⁷⁴ More specifically, Troeltsch contends that the problem of the relationship between *a priori* values and historical realities forces a *metaphysical* solution.⁷⁵

Troeltsch had expressed these concerns already in an 1899 letter to Rickert, occasioned by the publication of the latter's *Kulturwissenschaft und Naturwissenschaft*. While expressing his enthusiasm for Rickert's efforts at expanding Kantian epistemology beyond the domain of the natural sciences, Troeltsch confesses his doubts "about your decisive anti-metaphysical principles."⁷⁶ As in the 1904 essay mentioned above, Troeltsch here contends that the relationship of "spirit" to "nature" cannot ultimately be clarified in a satisfactory way within "a question framework [*Fragestellung*] that is purely immanent to consciousness."⁷⁷ For Troeltsch, methodological questions about the sciences do, in fact, raise metaphysical questions.⁷⁸

Elsewhere, in works that clearly reflect the influence of Baden neo-Kantianism, Troeltsch articulates a similar view. In a 1909 essay called "Zur Frage des religiösen Apriori," Troeltsch admits that his own position transcends the boundaries of a more strict Kantianism. In an effort to analyze the "rational core" at the basis of a unitary personality, Troeltsch confesses that he is going beyond what can be learned directly from empirically accessible mental functions and activities.⁷⁹ As he puts it, "The Kantian theory has a metaphysical position in the background, a modified monadology, and this presupposition must come to light, if the concern is not simply with the theory of experience and of causal thinking, or with an anti-utilitarian morality, but rather with the grounding and development of a philosophy of culture."⁸⁰ In other words, Troeltsch maintains that the "world-view imperative" can only be satisfied against the background of an idealist metaphysics, one of a very specific kind.

In a late essay, published in a second, revised version in 1934, Rickert brings out the issues raised by Troeltsch quite clearly, though without mentioning Troeltsch directly.⁸¹ Here, Rickert presents his own life's work as

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 682.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 707–8; 724–25.

⁷⁶ "Ernst Troeltschs Briefe an Heinrich Rickert," ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, *Mitteilungen der Ernst-Troeltsch-Gesellschaft* 6 (1991), 109.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 109–10.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁷⁹ Troeltsch, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2. Band, 758.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 758–59.

⁸¹ Ollig has commented on the importance of this piece in his essays on neo-Kantian philosophy of religion. See, especially, his "Religionsphilosophie der Südwestdeutschen Schule," 438–43.

an extension of Kant's critical philosophy. Within the Kantian system, the theoretical domain of science, and the practical domain of politics and morality, are sharply distinguished from one another. The demand for systematic completeness, for a "unitary conception of the *totality of the world* [*Weltganzen*]," however, means that one cannot rest content with this separation.⁸² "In philosophy, as the single science of the universal, we need a comprehensive world-bond [*Weltband*] that gathers all the parts together into a whole."⁸³ For Kant himself, this link is only established in the domain of religion.⁸⁴ Once again, Rickert introduces the idea of a "value-reality [*Wertwirklichkeit*]," a transcendent power that guarantees the ultimate unification of the reality discovered by theoretical reason and the values sought after by practical reason. This is a regulative ideal, which cannot itself be located *within* the system of "critical science."⁸⁵

The idea of a "value-reality," while seemingly demanded by systematic philosophy, takes one beyond the boundaries of philosophy itself. Once again, we have crossed over into the realm of faith. For Rickert, as for Kant, "faith" is taken to be the "antonym to knowledge."⁸⁶ Objects of faith belong to the domain of *metaphysics*, the domain of matters that forever elude any kind of theoretical demonstration. Metaphysics, on Rickert's view, is not a part of scientific philosophy. Once we have crossed the limits of reason, we no longer have any scientific methods at our disposal. The epistemological question of the relation between the metaphysical domain of faith and the domain of reality, while it is inevitably forced upon one, simply cannot be answered "scientifically."⁸⁷ As Rickert puts it, "We are in the domain of the *irrational*, and if we wish to reflect upon it without destroying its irrational character and thereby its uniqueness, we must as far as possible do without *ratio* as such."⁸⁸

Is there a tension here? Can Rickert consistently maintain the "scientific," rational character of philosophy, while at the same time holding that the philosophical project can only be fulfilled in the domain of supposedly "irrational" faith? Perhaps so, if it can be shown that there is a complemen-

⁸² Heinrich Rickert, "Die Heidelberger Tradition und Kants Kritizismus (Systematische Selbstdarstellung)," in *Philosophische Aufsätze*, 347–436. This quotation comes from p. 399.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 399.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 399–400.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 401.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 403–4, 407.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 407.

tary relationship between the rational system of “scientific” philosophy and the “irrational” domain of faith. Yet, in “Die Heidelberger Tradition,” and elsewhere, Rickert appears to exclude religious faith from the rational sphere altogether, going so far as to assert that “faith” and “knowledge” are actually antithetical. This insistence on his part makes it difficult to see how something as radically different as faith is from philosophy could actually complete or compliment the latter. This is, indeed, the force of the Troeltsch’s worries, discussed above.

Rickert quotes Kant’s famous phrase from the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, “I have therefore found it necessary to deny *knowledge*, in order to make room for *faith*.”⁸⁹ But what sort of “room” has been made for faith? Rickert denies, throughout his works, that religious faith can be *justified* by reason. While religion is certainly an important part of the totality of human cultural activity, and so must be accounted for in the system of philosophy, philosophy seems to be incapable of grounding the truth-claims made by religious people. Kant, of course, seems to have held that religion could be philosophically justified by practical reason. Rickert stops well short of claiming that the demands of systematic completeness provide any warrant for religion. His view seems to be that it makes no sense to even talk about reason and justification while talking about religious faith.

Moreover, Rickert insists that philosophy, as a rational science of values, is indispensable in the task of constructing a world-view. He also argues quite emphatically that only a Kantian or “critical” perspective, with its insistence on the limits of reason, can really fulfill the demands placed on philosophy. Yet, in works like “Die Heidelberger Tradition,” it would seem that Rickert is also committed to the radical insufficiency of a critical science of values vis-à-vis the problem of world-view. At the same time, it may well be that Rickert’s project all along was to clarify the limits of philosophical inquiry, to mark out the domain of world-view, and to provide a legitimate role for religion in human life. His insistence on the rational nature of philosophy, over against the allegedly irrationalist “philosophy of life,” might simply be part of this overall critical project. Yet, in the end, it seems that Rickert’s last word on religion remains richly ambiguous.

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⁸⁹ See *ibid.*, 402.

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