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## Heinrich Rickert's Axiological Foundation of Social Ontology

**ABSTRACT:** Against the background of contemporary “meta-theoretical” debates in the social sciences, esp. “Management and Organization Studies”, I will analyze the approach of South-West neo-Kantianism towards a social ontology, concentrating on its systematically leading thinker Heinrich Rickert. This analysis makes up a part of a larger project on the idealist foundations of social ontology and with that of the social sciences. Although here, like in the contemporary debate, ontology is closely related to and arises from problems concerning our knowledge of reality, an idealist solution of the ontological problem results in a radically different framework for determining the ontological determinations of the reality which the social sciences explore, in first instance, the most fundamental concept of that reality: the social. What is social reality? First, I will go into the task and the possibility of a philosophy of reality, its logical foundation and the type of philosophy of reality relevant for determining the concept of the social. Then, the concept of the social will be determined as far as its beginnings are concerned. Finally, I will point out to some problems connected to the sketched approach.

**KEY WORDS:** neo-Kantianism • social ontology • epistemology • philosophy of science

### I. Beyond Positivism, Social Constructionism and Critical Realism

The phenomenon ‘organization’ (also called ‘management & organization’) is one of the most striking in modern society. It is therefore not surprising that extensive organizational research is taking place<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, there is an intensive intellectual debate about the foundations of organization studies, which accompanies organizational research: what is known as the ‘meta-theoretical debate’. In the eighties and nineties of the last century, this debate was largely dominated by researchers operating from

<sup>1</sup> For a survey of organization studies cf. for example M. Reed, *Organizational Theorizing: a Historically Contested Terrain*, [in:] *The Sage Handbook of Organization Studies*, S.R. Clegg et al. (eds.), 2. edition, London et al. 2006, pp. 19–54; A. Strati, *Theory and Method in Organization Studies*, London 2000, chap. 1.

the point of view of either positivism<sup>2</sup> or social constructionism<sup>3</sup> (also called: social constructivism, post-modernism). Since the middle of the nineties, ‘critical realism’ has become an important participant in it<sup>4</sup>. Critical realism promises a way out of the cul-de-sac of a positivistically overstrained objectivity on the one side and a social-constructionistically overstrained subjectivity on the other.

The main contributors to the foundational discourse that accompanies organizational research are social scientists; the debate is an internal one within the social sciences. From the perspective of philosophy and its standards, however, it cannot be overlooked that in this foundational debate, philosophical concepts are used but that a sufficient reflection on the determination and validity of these concepts is lacking. For example, critical realism is surely correct in looking for an approach that avoids both the Scylla of positivism and the Charybdis of social constructionism. However, what it offers as an alternative, its ontology (to use the customary term in the discourse), or, more precisely, its ‘stratified ontology’, is in need of critical philosophical reflection. This reflection will have to go beyond critical realism, as it is necessary to understand the ontology of critical realism from its logical foundations<sup>5</sup>. This reflection leads to an idealist approach, as paradigmatically developed within the tradition of German idealism, and its relevance for contemporary social philosophy. Such a reflection could, to be sure, also lead to a discussion about social

<sup>2</sup> Cf. for an organization theory leaning methodically on the ideal of positivism studies like L. Donaldson, *For Positivist Organization Theory*, London 1996; *idem*, *Position statement for positivism*, [in:] *Debating Organization: Point-Counterpoint in Organization Studies*, R. Westwood, S. Clegg (eds.), Oxford 2003, pp. 116–127.

<sup>3</sup> For an organization theory leaning methodically on the ideal of social constructionism cf. studies like S. Linstead, *Organization Theory and Postmodern Thought*, London 2004; R. Westwood, S. Linstead, *Language/organization*, [in:] *The Language of Organization*, R. Westwood, S. Linstead (eds.), London 2001, pp. 1–19.

<sup>4</sup> For an organization theory leaning methodically on the ideal of critical realism cf. studies like M. Reed, *In Praise of Duality and Dualism: Rethinking Agency and Structure in Organizational Analysis*, [in:] *Realist Perspectives on Management and Organisations*, S. Ackroyd, S. Fleetwood (eds.), London/New York 2000, pp. 45–65; *idem*, *Reflections on the ‘Realist Turn’ in Organization and Management Studies*, “Journal of Management Studies” 42 (2005), pp. 1621–44; B. Danermark et al. (eds.), *Explaining Society: Critical Realism in the Social Sciences*, London 2002; S. Ackroyd, M. Fleetwood (eds.), *Realism in contemporary organisation and management studies*, [in:] *Realist Perspectives on Management*, pp. 3–25; S. Fleetwood, S. Ackroyd (eds.), *Critical Realist Applications in Organisation and Management Studies*, London 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Ch. Krijnen, *Realism and the Validity Problem of Knowledge*, [in:] *Philosophy of Economics and Management & Organization Studies: A Critical Introduction*, Ch. Krijnen, B. Kee (eds.), Deventer 2009, pp. 237–264.

ontology within genuine philosophical debates, as they are presently going on in terms of 'collective intentionality' and 'recognition'<sup>6</sup>.

Although organization (in the sense of organization studies) is not a core topic in German idealist philosophy, this philosophy offers substantial, but insufficiently explored and underestimated possibilities for developing a present-day social ontology. Indeed, it seems that the current debate within organization studies has reached an impasse. A way out is not in sight, because all three dominant meta-perspectives of theory formation operate with a too narrow concept of objectivity and subjectivity.

An ontology, that is a theory of an object, a matter, as such, and more precisely, a social ontology, that is an ontology of the social sphere, is a core issue of the 'meta-theoretical' debate within organizational research. This meta-theoretical debate is often called the 'ontology – epistemology' debate. It concerns the constitution of the social world and the consequences this constitution has for our knowledge of the social world, in the context described of course, especially for organizational research.

The sketched background and the resulting quest for an idealist social ontology is the reason for analyzing the approach of South-West neo-Kantianism, concentrating on its leading thinker in systematical respect: Heinrich Rickert. This analysis, of course, can only be a part of a larger project on the idealist foundations of social ontology and thus of the social sciences. Although, as in the contemporary debate, ontology is closely related to and arises from problems concerning knowledge of reality, an idealist solution to the ontological problem leads to a radically different framework for determining the ontological determinations of the reality that the social sciences explore. In first instance, this concerns the most fundamental concept of that reality: the social. What is social reality?

First, I will go into the task and the possibility of a philosophy of reality, its logical foundation and the type of philosophy of reality relevant for determining the concept of the social (II). Then, the concept of the social will be determined as far as its beginnings are concerned (III). Finally, I will point to some problems connected to this approach (IV).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. M. Gilbert, *On Social Facts*, London/New York 1989; R. Tuomela, K. Miller, *We-Intentions*, "Philosophical Studies" 53 (1988), pp. 367–389; R. Tuomela, *The Importance of Us: A Philosophical Study of Basic Social Notions*, Stanford 1995; *idem*, *Joint Intention and Commitment*, [in:] *Social Facts and Collective Intentionality*, G. Meggle (ed.), Frankfurt/M. 2002, pp. 385–418; H. Ikäheimo, A. Laitinen (eds.), *Recognition and social ontology*, Leiden/Boston 2011; H.-C. Schmidt am Busch, C. Zurn (eds.), *The Philosophy of Recognition. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, Lanham et al. 2010; Ch. Krijnen (ed.), *Recognition – German Idealism as an Ongoing Challenge*, Leiden/Boston 2014.

## II. Social Ontology

Concerning the task and the possibility of a social ontology, it is important to note that the term ‘social reality’ (‘sociality’, ‘the social’) is not a major term in Rickert’s philosophy, let alone a title for one of his published works, as it is for instance ‘nature’ or ‘culture’. The matter at stake, however, is present throughout his work<sup>7</sup>. As Rickert himself did not offer an explicit philosophical foundation for social reality, a conceptual scheme for such a foundation has to be developed, a scheme derived from the philosophical foundations Rickert did offer. It is Rickert’s concept of philosophy of history that contains the key for a formal determination of what is nowadays called a social ontology, i.e. by studying Rickert’s construction of history, we can learn how to determine social reality philosophically.

For Rickert, philosophy is as such a science of totality. As for Rickert a science of totality is only possible as a philosophy of values<sup>8</sup>, social ontology is only possible as a philosophy of values too. Social ontology, of course, is not a general theory of being but a regional ontology: the ontology of a specific realm of being or reality. Reality, however, is the subject matter of the non-philosophical sciences too. In contrast with these sciences, philosophy as a science thematizes reality as determined by values. Furthermore, in Rickert’s framework the ontological questions which arise should be transformed into problems of ‘theoretical’ values (*theoretische Wertprobleme*), of epistemic values, as they are called today. Hence, an ontology of reality becomes a theory of ‘theoretical values’<sup>9</sup>.

Rickert’s system provides two modes of approach to understand what a regional ontology of reality is and how it should be developed: a philosophy of nature and a philosophy of history<sup>10</sup>. Both philosophical disciplines belong to Rickert’s theoretical philosophy<sup>11</sup>. Hence, his

<sup>7</sup> In his later years, he even gave lectures on ‘social philosophy’.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Ch. Krijnen, *Nachmetaphysischer Sinn: Eine problemgeschichtliche und systematische Studie zu den Prinzipien der Wertphilosophie Heinrich Rickerts*, Würzburg 2001.

<sup>9</sup> H. Rickert, *System der Philosophie: Erster Teil: Allgemeine Grundlegung der Philosophie*, Tübingen 1921, pp. 176, 180f., 191; *idem*, *Der Gegenstand der Erkenntnis. Einführung in die Transzendentalphilosophie*, 6. verb. Aufl., Tübingen 1928, pp. 438f.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. H. Rickert, *System*, pp. 211ff.; cf. too *idem*, *Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie*, Heidelberg 1924; *idem*, *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung: Eine logische Einleitung in die historischen Wissenschaften*, Tübingen 1929, esp. pp. 624ff.

<sup>11</sup> Because Rickert concentrates on scientific knowledge, he also calls theoretical philosophy *Wissenschaftslehre* (which includes, to use the terms current in the Anglo-Saxon world, both epistemology and philosophy of science). Cf. H. Rickert, *System*, pp. 344 with 347, 210f. Sometimes Rickert uses the term *Wissenschaftslehre* in a narrow sense, meaning a theory about the methodological forms of scientific knowledge (cf. *idem*, *Gegenstand*,

theoretical philosophy contains an intra-foundational dimension (concerning the foundations of philosophy itself) and an extra-foundational dimension (concerning the foundations of reality). But this does not only apply to theoretical philosophy, the foundations of reality also have a complex structure. Against persistent prejudices regarding neo-Kantianism, the foundations of reality are in no way restricted to 'logic' or 'epistemology' – they also contain ontology and a particular relationship between logic<sup>12</sup> and ontology. Hence, the neo-Kantians do not reduce philosophy to 'epistemology'.

In relation to the philosophy of nature, Rickert introduces a distinction between the principles of knowledge of nature, i.e. a 'logic' of natural knowledge ('generalizing'), and the 'principles' of nature, i.e. of nature as an object of knowledge<sup>13</sup>. The theory of principles of nature is a philosophical theory of objects, of subject matter, a theory concerning the objects of knowledge – in short: an ontology of nature. This ontology of nature determines the general object of natural knowledge: nature as a whole of principles, nature in its objectivity. Within Rickert's concept of philosophy, an ontology of nature comprehends nature as a completed totality (*voll-endete Totalität*). As the natural sciences are considered to be engaged in comprehending nature, they are subjected to a task of knowledge (*Erkenntnisaufgabe*). The philosophy of nature, then, turns out to be a 'theory of theoretical values', i.e. of the values guiding the natural sciences in realizing their task of knowledge<sup>14</sup>.

The case of the philosophy of history is a different one. This is due to the specificity of the 'historical material and the historical sciences'<sup>15</sup> – namely the importance of 'values'<sup>16</sup>. Still, at a formal level we can identify an identical structure of both philosophical modes. As in the philosophy of nature, in the philosophy of history too Rickert distinguishes between a theory of 'historical knowledge' ('individualizing'), i.e. the principles of knowledge

p. 404; *idem*, *Die Logik des Prädikats und das Problem der Ontologie*, Heidelberg 1930, p. 4.). Ontology is part of *Wissenschaftslehre* in the wide sense (cf. for instance *idem*, *Logik*, pp. 3f.).

<sup>12</sup> Following Kant's concept, the neo-Kantians take logic in its function for our knowledge of objects and their determination, hence, they develop an understanding of logic that is knowledge functional and in this sense an objective: logic is an 'epistemological', hence, an 'objective' logic. Cf. Ch. Krijnen, *Sinn*, regarding Windelband cf. *ibidem*, chap. 2.4.2, esp. note 81, regarding Rickert cf. chap. 4, regarding the Marburg school, Husserl and later transcendental philosophy cf. p. 292, note 78.

<sup>13</sup> H. Rickert, *System*, pp. 214f.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 216; cf. pp. 180f., 184, 191, 199f., 210.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 216.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 217.

of history as part of ‘logic’, and a theory of the ‘historical principles’<sup>17</sup>. And as in the philosophy of nature, in the philosophy of history too the general component of the subject matter, i.e., history, is in question in the sense of an entirety of principles: the philosophy of history concerns the objectivity of history, it determines what history as history is.

However, in contrast to those of nature, the principles of historical life are ‘values’. These constitute the historical universe<sup>18</sup>. Hence, the theory of principles of history is – like the logic of history – a science of values. Therefore, the theory of the principles of history – unlike that of nature – extends beyond theoretical philosophy: it requires the system of values in order to determine its object. Consequently, the science of the principles of history relies on a theoretical values too (for example values like morality, justice, beauty, etcetera)<sup>19</sup>. As a result, the foundations of the philosophy of history, as the science of historical life, coincide with ‘philosophy as a science of values’ (*Wertwissenschaft*)<sup>20</sup>.

Hence, in Rickert’s philosophy, social ontology is only possible in connection with a system of (theoretical and atheoretical) values. Sociality itself must be a value in the system of values – social ontology is the philosophical theory of this value, of the social *as* social. Social ontology, then, renders the content of the value or idea of the social explicit.

For understanding social ontology within a Rickertian setting, it is essential to understand how the explication of the social depends upon a relationship between the knowledge of reality and the principles of reality. In regard to this question too, the different approaches of Rickert’s philosophy of nature and his philosophy of history offer an initial basis for that understanding. From the broader vantage point of neo-Kantian philosophy, logic (*Logik, Erkenntnistheorie*) is held to possess the primacy in the relationship between knowledge and its objects. For Rickert, logic is an objective logic, a logic of the object: a theory which is concerned with thought as thought of objects, hence, with the objectivity of thought. The primacy of logic, however, extends beyond this function. Logic is the *philosophia prima* in at least two respects<sup>21</sup>.

Logic has a primacy in a logical-methodological perspective insofar as all later disciplines, containing and generating philosophical

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 216; *idem*, *Geschichtsphilosophie*, p. 6

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 227; *idem*, *Geschichtsphilosophie*, p. 109.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. H. Rickert, *System*, p. 227.

<sup>20</sup> H. Rickert, *Geschichtsphilosophie*, pp. 118, 155.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Ch. Krijnen, *Sinn*, chap. 3.4 with 7.2.1; *idem*, *Philosophie als System: Prinzipientheoretische Untersuchungen zum Systemgedanken bei Hegel, im Neukantianismus und in der Gegenwartsphilosophie*, Würzburg 2008, pp. 205f.

hence, conceptual knowledge, presuppose logical determinations. These determinations finally lead to the science of logic as the first and most foundational discipline of philosophy. All other philosophical disciplines, being scientific knowledge, derive their origin of development from the science of logic. Among other things, logic formulates methodological guidelines for the other philosophical disciplines. This logical-methodological primacy is accompanied by a primacy from a paradigmatic perspective. That is to say: The science of logic uncovers and justifies principles which in the further development of philosophy obtain an axiological function, i.e. a universal function, a function determining the whole system of philosophy. The foundational relationships that were demonstrated to be fundamental in logic reappear in all parts of the system of philosophy.

Both dimensions of the primacy of logic are relevant for social ontology. At an initial level, this relevance concerns the relationship between a theory of principles of knowledge of reality and a theory of the principles of reality. Here, the decisive point is that, although logic and ontology belong together systematically, for Rickert 'formal' ('logical', 'methodological') determinations precede for foundational reasons 'material' ('ontological') determinations regarding their validity. Ontology can only be conceptualized on a logical foundation. This primacy of logic returns in any regional ontology. It therefore also returns in the case of an ontology of nature and an ontology of history. Rickert continuously shows that the intention of knowledge, the logical or formal purpose of 'generalizing' and 'individualizing' concept formation, leads to a material qualification, a qualification of the objects of knowledge. Natural objects are value-free (*wertfrei, sinnfrei*), cultural objects are value-laden (*wertbehaftet, sinnvoll*). Hence, between nature and culture there is a logical opposition. All this follows from a philosophical *logic* of empirical knowledge. This logic not only determines the method of empirical knowledge but also the object regarding its original determinacy. Form and material, method and object are intrinsically related to each other. On the basis of logical insights, it proves to be the case that historical principles emerge as 'values', hence, that the theory of the principles of history must be a science of values.

The task, then, of a theory of the principles of history is to determine the concept of history as an object of historical knowledge. The theory of the principles of history determines what history is<sup>22</sup>. However, in order to fulfil this task, a theory of the principles of history presupposes the concept of history (whose principles it seeks to determine) as an already

<sup>22</sup> Cf. H. Rickert, *Geschichtsphilosophie*, pp. 83, 87f.

determined concept. This concept of history, presupposed by a theory of the principles of history, is itself the result of a philosophical process of determination. The philosophical science of logic (methodology) of empirical knowledge provides this initiation of the determination of the concept of history presupposed by a theory of the principles of history. History as an object is correlative to the purpose (*Erkenntniszweck*) of historical knowledge. As the correlative counterpart of historical knowledge, history is a value-laden reality (*wertbehaftete Wirklichkeit*). The theory of the principles of history has to determine the principles of this value-laden reality, i.e. culture. Hence, the theory of the principles of history determines the concept of history regarding its form.

The logical goal of individualizing concept formation, however, does not indicate which objects are historically important. It only establishes what a historical object as such is: it is a value-laden reality. Because of this, the logic of empirical knowledge directs the theory of the principles of history towards values: values are the constitutive factors of historical reality. The logic of empirical knowledge finally directs the theory of the principles of history even towards the system of values (whereas, on the contrary, nature, as the object of a generalizing concept formation, is philosophically determined as value-free reality). The principles of historical or cultural reality are values. They make up the meaning (*Sinn*) of history. The science of logic itself cannot determine these values. Their determination results from historical knowledge and its philosophical appropriation, from a philosophical reflection on the validity of the values: from philosophy as a science of values<sup>23</sup>. The system of values, which from the point of view of philosophy of history is the system of historical principles, is a philosophical system of values. The theory of the principles of history therefore cannot be conceptualized as being 'theoretical' philosophy, i.e. as a philosophy solely of 'theoretical values': it broadens itself to a philosophical discipline that encompasses and integrates the system of (theoretical and atheoretical) values.

Beyond questions about the existence, viability and consequences of such a position<sup>24</sup>, the question regarding the possibility of a theory of the principles of the social (social reality, sociality) – a social ontology – requires a broader perspective than the one leading so far. Until now, the deliberations were part of what could be called the philosophy of science. In order to characterize the social in its objectivity, at least concerning its beginnings, however, it is necessary to turn towards the system of philosophy.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *idem*, *Grenzen*, p. 281.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Ch. Krijnen, *System*.



Before proceeding to this outline, it must be emphasized that the *material* of the philosophical knowledge of culture not only consists of empirical knowledge of culture provided by the cultural sciences, but moreover of culture itself. For the famous neo-Kantian *Faktumtheorem*, philosophy departs from the factual yet mostly implicit claim of humans that their behaviour is oriented towards or determined by objective values<sup>25</sup>. The factum (also that of science) therefore is a p r o b l e m a t i c starting point; its validity cannot be presupposed. Philosophy, through its method of reflecting the validity of the objective values referred to, hence, through validity reflection, reveals several sets of principles or 'forms of values'. The foundation of the meaning and validity of human action is composed of these values. Philosophy also determines the conceptual relationships between these values, leading to the formulation of a system of values: the system of philosophy.

The social, as a methodologically legitimate theme of philosophy, must be part of the system of philosophy. The philosophical determination of the social in the system of philosophy initially results in a social ontology *sui generis*. Social ontology determines a specific dimension of the way humans shape themselves and the world they live in. The following section will determine the social in terms of the system of philosophy. The social is the material presupposition of any social ontology. Logically, social ontology should commence from the determination of the concept of the social as a concept that should be determined by social ontology: social ontology commences with characterizing the sphere of the social itself.

### III. The Social

The concept of the s o c i a l is not accorded a prominent position in Rickert's philosophical project. This lack of prominence is a consequence of the fact that the concept of the social traditionally belongs to the domain of 'practical philosophy', particularly political philosophy, including philosophy of law and the state and moral (ethical) philosophy<sup>26</sup>. The social as a specific realm of meaning only became a concept for theoretical determination during the course of the nineteenth century. In Rickert's time, there was a huge discussion on the social taking place. For example Stammeler, Lehmann, Dilthey, Spranger, Scheler, Durkheim, and Weber came up with important theoretical determinations of the social. These were highly contested and

<sup>25</sup> For the neo-Kantian *Faktumtheorem*, cf. *ibidem*, chap. 1.3 and *idem*, *Sinn*, chap. 7.3.1.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. for instance K. Röttgers, *Kategorien der Sozialphilosophie*, Magdeburg 2002, pp. 25ff. for a history of 'social' and 'social philosophy'.

marked by a significant degree of heterogeneity. This extended to the more general notion of a social philosophy.

Rickert is a classic neither for the one nor for the other. Indeed, he does not really establish a developed and promising concept of social philosophy<sup>27</sup>. However, Rickert offers an interesting basic sketch or outline for such a philosophy, as I will show in what follows.

Rickert's concept of the social is internally differentiated into a wide concept and a narrow concept of the social. The wide concept is one in which the social functions as a concept *sui generis*. The social is effectively synonymous with culture<sup>28</sup>. The narrow concept, which is also more strongly present, is one in which the concept of the social is a concept composed of specific cultural constellations: social constellations.

This narrow concept of the social is significant for what Rickert calls social values and social goods (*Güter*) in contrast to asocial ones (for example, science and art). In this way, the social is not only a specific realm of culture, constituted by a specific fundamental value, but emerges as one of the two main groups of the whole system of philosophy<sup>29</sup>. This group of the social, then, contains several more specific realms of culture: the ethical (*sittliche*), erotic, and social-religious realms. For social ontology it is both important and challenging, to clarify the relationship and thus the demarcation between the social and the ethical as well as between the social and the practical.

Within Rickert's philosophical system, the sphere of the social does not coincide with the sphere of the ethical: social philosophy is not ethics. Ethics, to be more precise, the object of ethical investigations, makes up one of the several dimensions of social philosophy, to be more precise, of the social. For Rickert, ethics as a science is always a 'social ethics', and the 'person' always is a social person<sup>30</sup>. Within this social ethics, Rickert differentiates

<sup>27</sup> It is not superfluous to underline that Max Weber's concept of the social is not Rickert's. In order to develop his social theory, Weber uses elements of Rickert's philosophy. For Rickert, who dedicated his *Grenzen* (since the third edition) to Weber, Weber is not even a philosopher proper and also not a neo-Kantian (cf. H. Rickert, *Grenzen*, p. XXV, cf. too *idem*, *Max Weber und seine Stellung zur Wissenschaft*, "Logos" 15 (1926), pp. 222–237, here pp. 226 with 228 and 236f.). On the Rickertian background of Weber's sociology cf. P.-U. Merz-Benz, *Max Weber und Heinrich Rickert: Die erkenntniskritischen Grundlagen der verstehenden Soziologie*, Würzburg 1990.

<sup>28</sup> H. Rickert, *System*, 1921, p. 222; *idem*, *Geschichtsphilosophie*, pp. 78f., 91f.

<sup>29</sup> For Rickert's conception of the system of philosophy, cf. Ch. Krijnen, *Sinn*, chap. 7, esp. 7.3.2.2.3 with 7.3.2.2.5, and *idem*, *System*, chap. 4.2.2, esp. nr. 5.1ff.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *idem*, *System*, pp. 328ff. and *idem*, *Grundprobleme der Philosophie: Methodologie, Ontologie, Anthropologie*, Tübingen 1934.

an individual ethics from a social ethics in the narrow sense, concerned with social relations in the various areas of social life. Among other things, the philosophy of law and political philosophy are part of social ethics in this narrow sense<sup>31</sup>. Yet, they are also part of social ethics in the wide sense – hence, of ‘practical philosophy’, as Rickert sometimes designates the sphere of the social: practical philosophy explores man as an ‘active’ man<sup>32</sup>. As an active human being, humans are always social persons, individuals always present together with other individuals<sup>33</sup>.

The ethical forms only part of the sphere of the practical, the meaning of social phenomena extends beyond this to encompass the whole: social phenomena make up the whole sphere of the practical. Whereas in Rickert’s system the social sphere of ethics is constituted by the concept of duty, social relations also exist which are constituted by an ‘inclination’ that Rickert calls love (the theme of the philosophical science called *erotics*)<sup>34</sup>. Within the social group of the system of philosophy, Rickert also distinguishes a religious dimension<sup>35</sup>.

The validity of values is essential for the determination of the outlines of the social. The social is nothing but the realm of culture constituted by ‘social’ values, that is, by values whose validity is only determinable by reference to a certain collectivity of subjects (whereas ‘asocial’ values have their validity determined independently of any social relationship). However, if we move from this determination of the social to the social sciences for which social ontology is required to provide the foundations, it immediately becomes clear that the field of the social sciences is not restricted to cultural realms constituted by social values. It also includes asocial realms like for instance art and science. Moreover, these realms are not studied only from the perspective of ‘ethics’, ‘erotics’, or ‘personal holiness’. Thus, social ontology requires a broader concept of sociality in order to comprehend adequately the full range of objects within the domain of the social sciences. This, in turn, necessitates a justification of this broader concept at the level of a philosophical system.

Rickert’s philosophical system includes such a broader and more fundamental concept of the social, preventing its reduction to the ‘practical’. Within his framework, this is formulated through the notion of the ‘social

<sup>31</sup> *Idem, System*, p. 330, *idem, Grenzen*, pp. 721ff., *idem, Grundprobleme*, pp. 188ff.

<sup>32</sup> *Idem, System*, pp. 358 with 373, cf. 329; *idem, Grenzen*, pp. 706ff.; *idem, Grundprobleme*, pp. 188ff.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *idem, System*, pp. 329ff., 370ff., *idem, Grenzen*, p. 706, *idem, Grundprobleme*, pp. 154ff.

<sup>34</sup> *Idem, System*, pp. 394f., 398; cf. *idem, Grundprobleme*, pp. 190ff.

<sup>35</sup> *Idem, System*, pp. 399ff.

meaning' of cultural phenomena, which are part of the asocial group of values<sup>36</sup>. Consequentially, relationships at a higher level of generality contribute to the determination of the social, problematizing the initial division of the system in two main groups. More specifically, these overarching relationships primarily concern two aspects through which a meaning of the social emerges which exceeds the practical; a meaning that integrates the sphere of 'contemplation', that is, the other main domain of Rickert's system of philosophy. The social proves to be a determination *sui generis*.

According to Rickert, in the realm of the social the real, concrete person is to be conceived as entailing a necessary connectedness to a plurality of persons. Rickert sometimes emphasizes their connection as 'social in the broadest sense of the word'<sup>37</sup>. Obviously scientists and artists are also persons, hence we are dealing with a general determination of the cultural concept of man. The social is the relationship between persons, a collective of persons. In addition, the social as the asocial validity of values constitutes the corresponding sphere of the system of philosophy. However, there is a dimension of both of these spheres of values which is necessarily determined as social: the dimension of realizing values (that is of shaping reality according to values). Realizing values produces goods (*Güter*). The dimension of producing goods, of realizing values, always has a social character. The production of goods is a result of a real subject that realizes values. A subject realizing validity and, in turn, producing goods is a person in the broad sense of the word. Rickert is, on occasion, inclined to describe the social exactly as such a condition for the realization of values<sup>38</sup>. As a condition of reality, the person is a necessary presupposition for the cultural production of goods, a reality condition of culture, regardless the values which constitute these cultural goods. Hence, as the social is the relationship between persons, the social is determined as a condition of realization of values. The social sciences explore such constellations: constellations of realizing values, of theoretical and non-theoretical values. They try to discern and explain the truth of about them.

The determination of the social, as a condition of the realization of values, itself reflects a relationship that could be considered to be the most fundamental of Rickert's whole system of philosophy: the fundamental axiomatic relationship<sup>39</sup>. Rickert qualified this fundamental axiomatic relationship as

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 371, 403; *idem*, *Geschichtsphilosophie*, pp. 79 f.; *idem*, *Grundprobleme*, p. 187.

<sup>37</sup> *Idem*, *System*, p. 370.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 332, 403; *idem*, *Geschichtsphilosophie*, p. 79; *idem*, *Grundprobleme*, pp. 185ff.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. in detail Ch. Krijnen, *Sinn*, esp. chap. 2.3, 6.3, 7.2 f.; *idem*, *System*, chap. 4.2.2, 5.4.; regarding its relevance for social philosophy cf. too *idem*, *Das Soziale bei Hegel: Eine*

the 'starting point' and 'communal root' of all philosophy: 'the correlation between valid values and the valuing subject'<sup>40</sup>. It is a relationship between values in which validity is absolute, although related to subjects, and subjects who, as subjects, are related to absolute values guiding their actions.

According to the doctrine of the fundamental axiotic relationship, the realm of knowledge is characterized by a(n) (objective) normative constraint. This normative constraint leads theoretical (epistemic) endeavours (as is nowadays also emphasized in theories of inferential semantics<sup>41</sup> and philosophies of science dealing with 'epistemic values'<sup>42</sup>). Knowing has the structure of taking an alternative position towards values. Values are, from the perspective of the subject, the point of orientation for its theoretical endeavours. A knowing subject is a subject that recognizes values: a subject that makes the value of 'truth' the determining factor of its behaviour. Hence, the knowing subject subjects itself to an 'ought' and therefore amends its criteria for determination from factors of reality to factors of validity. Consequently, normative constraints are in no way constitutive only for the 'practical' realm. On the contrary, they make up the foundation of the whole human world, of both its theoretical and practical dimension. The distinguished realms of culture or validity, whichever, are specifications of the fundamental axiotic relationship. It is this relationship that is thematic in what is called the doctrine of the 'primacy of practical reason'. It is not this doctrine's aim to narrow all foundations to ethics, but to determine the fundamental axiotic relationship. Rickert develops this doctrine by axiotizing the theoretical realm, giving it a paradigmatical meaning for all realms of culture.

From the perspective of the subject, that is the validity noetic point of view, the subject obtains its fundamental determination by the concept of *s e l f - f o r m a t i o n*: the subject knows itself as related to values and with

*Konstruktion in Auseinandersetzung mit der kantianisierenden Transzendentalphilosophie*, [in:] *Gegenstandsbestimmung und Selbstgestaltung: Transzendentalphilosophie im Anschluss an Werner Flach*, Ch. Krijnen, K.W. Zeidler (eds.), Würzburg 2011, pp. 189–226; *idem*, *Anerkennung, Wirklichkeit und praktische Vernunft im Neukantianismus*, [in:] *Das Wirklichkeitsproblem in Metaphysik und Transzendentalphilosophie*, Ch. Graf, H. Schwaetzer (eds.), Basel (2014), pp. 15–51; *idem*, *Metaphysik in der Realphilosophie Hegels? Hegels Lehre vom freien Geist und das axiotische Grundverhältnis kantianisierender Transzendentalphilosophie*, [in:] *Metaphysik und Metaphysikkritik in der Klassischen Deutschen Philosophie*, M. Gerhard et al. (eds.), Hamburg 2012, pp. 167–205.

<sup>40</sup> H. Rickert, *Gegenstand*, p. 438.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. for instance R. Brandom, *Making it explicit: Reasoning, representing, and discursive commitment*, Cambridge, Mass. et al. 1994.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. for instance A. Haddock, A. Millar, D. Pritchard (eds.), *Epistemic value*, Oxford, New York 2009; G. Schönrich (ed.), *Wissen und Werte*, Paderborn 2009; M. Carrier, G. Schurz, Gerhard (eds.), *Werte in den Wissenschaften*, Berlin 2013.

that subjected to a task, finally an infinite task. The fundamental axiomatic relationship is this relationship between absolute values determining the subject concerning the validity of its endeavours and the subject which fulfils this infinite, unconditional task only in a finite, conditional way. As this infinity is a defining part of the validity claims of the validity function called 'subject', value-laden self-formation of the subject is self-formation according to values intrinsically or immanently part of its own subjectivity. Apparently, on the level of the fundamental axiomatic relationship the moment of self-formation, the basic characteristic of the subject, does not lead to a primacy of practical reason in the sense of a primacy of specific ethical, moral moments making up the foundation of all human self-formation. The concept of self-formation concerns the value relatedness, the value ladenness, hence, the value determinacy as such of the subject<sup>43</sup>. The subject is the validity function of self-formation. From a validity noetic perspective, both theory and praxis are conceptualized as 'taking a position towards values' (*Stellungnehmen zu Werten*). For Rickert, the former 'primacy of the practical' turns out to be a 'primacy of values'<sup>44</sup>, a primacy of self-formation, not an embracing primacy of 'practical reason'.

The fundamental axiomatic relationship does not have a specific theoretical content but a universal one. Any formation of meaning (*Sinngebilde*), hence culture, has the structure of a subject that is related to values guiding its endeavors. By recognizing values it shapes culture. All philosophical disciplines, then, treat values and their realization by subjects: that is to say, philosophy has a noematic and a noetic focus. This axiomatization of the sphere of knowledge involves that philosophical concepts having traditionally a 'practical' meaning are being transformed axiotically. Concepts like autonomy, duty, conscience, etcetera concern the validity-noetic side of the axiomatic relationship (the 'immanent meaning'). They reappear in all specifications (cultural realms) of the foundational axiomatic relationship<sup>45</sup>.

Let me elucidate the above by transposing some aspects into more Kantian terms. Transcendental knowledge of human endeavours leads to an entirety of grounds of validity, of values (as a neo-Kantian, Rickertian transcendental philosophy of values would put it). Such grounds cannot be understood by referring to something outside the structure of the

<sup>43</sup> Cf. H. Rickert, *Gegenstand*, pp. 189f., 292f. etc.

<sup>44</sup> H. Rickert, *Zwei Wege der Erkenntnistheorie. Transcendentalpsychologie und Transcendentallogik*, „Kant-Studien“ 14 (1909), pp. 169–228, here p. 216.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *Idem*, *System*, pp. 309f.; *idem*, *Gegenstand*, pp. 435ff.; *idem*, *Grenzen*, pp. 691ff.; *idem*, *Grundprobleme*, pp. 179 ff., etc.

endeavours, namely by reference to some kind of a being, as in metaphysics or in empiricism. They can only be understood by reference to the validity claim and validity structure of human endeavours themselves. From this reference to the validity claim and validity structure of human endeavours, transcendental knowledge concerns humanity. It concerns that which qualifies us as human, the *humanum*: the normative dimension of human thinking and acting. Therefore, the fundamental factors guiding subjects are no longer metaphysical entities but values that are defining aspects of humanity itself. Hence, they are valid categorically, 'transcendent' in the sense that their validity does not depend on their factual recognition by subjects. On the contrary, they should be recognized because they contain what it means to be human, hence the very capacity to think and act at all. They immediately determine the validity of human thought and actions, and thus of the thinking and acting subject. As the categorical validity of these values is part of the validity claims of the subject itself, their validity is 'immanent' too. The subject forms itself by being determined by values that belong to its own integral status as a subject, to its subjectivity.

#### IV. Some question marks

Rickert determines the social as the dimension of realizing values. The social sciences thematize constellations of realizing values in the mode of the direct intentional relationship to objects, characteristic for any specific science (*Einzelwissenschaft*). They are interested in knowledge about constellations of realizing values as constellations of collectivities of subjects, regardless of which values they realize.

Determining the social as the dimension of realizing validity raises truly many intriguing issues<sup>46</sup>:

- How does the fundamental axiotic relationship, the relationship of value, subject and good, relate to the social, as the social apparently contains a plurality of subjects?
- And how does the social as the dimension of realizing values hang together with Rickert's distinction of levels of validity, which reach from subjective to objective validity, containing among other things, the distinction between extrinsic values (*Bedingungswerte*) and intrinsic values (*Eigenwerte*), the first being realization conditions of the latter?

<sup>46</sup> Cf. more in detail Ch. Krijnen, *Wirklichkeitsproblem*; *idem*, *Das Dasein der Freiheit: Geltungsrealisierung bei Hegel und in der kantianisierenden Transzendentalphilosophie*, Ch. Krijnen, Krijnen, M. Ferrari, P. Fioratio (eds.), [in:] *Kulturphilosophie. Probleme und Perspektiven des Neukantianismus*, Würzburg 2014, pp. 35–84.

- Is the influential famous-infamous distinction between culture (*Kultur*) and civilization (*Zivilisation*), connected to the distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic values, at all sufficient to determine what realizing values means?


- Is Rickert's concept of the subject e q u i v o c a l, because in the fundamental axiomatic relationship the subject functions both as a logical, that is as an intentional, factor of validity and as a factor of realizing values, hence, as a real subject, a person?

- And if the primacy of practical reason is to be transformed into a fundamental axiomatic relationship, how, then, is what used to be practical philosophy still possible?

- Moreover, in Rickert's philosophy, the old and, also for Kant, leading distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy, which in the first instance had to be surpassed by the fundamental axiomatic relationship as the unity of that distinction, returns in the second instance in a sublimated way. Eventually, the practical is conceptualized as a dimension of realizing validity. In the further development of South-West neo-Kantianism, Rickert's impulse to take the practical as a dimension of realizing values becomes effective. It leads not only, as in Rickert's, to a division of the whole system of philosophy in validity of values and realizing values, but also to a decisive primacy of practical reason, especially in Bruno Bauch's philosophy.

- But what is the worth of this remodelling of the distinction between the theoretical and the practical in the light of *Hegel's* arguments against it and in favour of a more fundamental structure, called the absolute idea?

- And what, if we take into account contemporary transcendental philosophy, showing that what in neo-Kantianism used to be extrinsic values, hence, realization conditions of intrinsic values, has to be understood as intrinsic values too?

All these questions concern the philosophical concept of realizing validity. If we really want to know what our social world is about, we are in need of such a concept. A transcendental idealist philosophy of the social sciences should determine the social sciences and their knowledge in terms of it. 

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